



Dressing for Success

Dressing for the interview is important because it gives the interviewer a first impression of how you present yourself. Some interviews have specific expectations as to what you should wear. For example, interviews for academic positions expect candidates to wear formal attire.

What is the function of interview clothing? One function is to show that you have reasonable social skills and can be dressed properly for any outside formal occasions. If you are needed to help liaise with outside parties you would be presentable if need be.

Forbes magazine mentioned in one of its articles the importance of appropriate dressing. It emphasizes on this saying: "When in doubt, go traditional and conservative." This section will hopefully direct you towards having a better sense of dress code in the workplace.

Tips

1. General Tips

- Dress conservatively. Do not expose cleavage, chest or undergarments.
- Do not wear clothing that displays inappropriate language and messages.
- Pick suitable shoes for the job or occasion. For example, sandals are not considered professional in some fields.
- Some interviewers may look to see whether your shoes are polished or scruffy and tattered. If the later, they may assume that you do not pay attention to details or do not take work seriously.
- Most interviewers wear dark clothes since this shows respect and formality. A benefit of dark clothes is that it will help cover up any accidental spills. It would be good advice for you to wear darker colors for the same reason.
- Some people can tell if you have not worn a tie recently or in years. If planning to dress formally, practice getting ready beforehand.
- Did you know that after your face, your hands are the second thing people notice about you? Nails should be kept neat and clean. Getting a manicure will ensure that your hands look professional. It is a good idea to set aside time for hand maintenance once a week. Check if it is acceptable to wear nail polish at the place where you work. Aim to chose an acceptable nail polish color, avoid glitter and nail art. If you have artificial nails make sure that they are not too long and that they are filled in.
- If you wear make-up ensure that you are not wearing too much.
- If wearing sandals at work, feet need to also be kept professional. It is imperative they are kept well-groomed at all times.
- Take note of your workplace culture- Notice how your colleagues are dressing. If you are not sure, you can ask your supervisor or choose to dress traditionally. It is not advisable to under-dress. Some workplaces offer 'Free Attire' Fridays whereby employees are encouraged to wear casual outfits, again remember to check what the standard is. If you are traveling overseas for a conference, do research on the country's dress-culture before you leave.

- If you are starting a new job, visit the jobsite beforehand if possible and see how people dress at that organization.
- Chose clothing that fits your body size and silhouette to avoid looking awkward and out-of-place.
- If you are on a budget, invest in clothing that can be used in multiple occasions - for example, a simple black pants can be matched with a neutral shirt or a different sweater on another day.
- Dress to the occasion - if for example you are an engineer going to the field for a day's work, then do not go in your office suit, rather choose more suitable attire such as comfortable pants (maybe jeans) and a long-sleeved shirt.
- Always do your research - if you are unsure about what to wear or buy, ask. Nowadays, you can even get help from store clerks to help you with your purchase needs.
- Be aware of your colours and patterning - people's perceptions are affected by the colours they see and what you choose to wear will severely affect the image that you want to portray. A bright pink polka dot suit might be fashionable, but certainly a distraction during important meetings.
- Dress according to your age - if you want to be taken seriously.
- Some other items that you may want to consider depending on the position are the display of jewelry, tattoos and body piercings.
- Keep your hair neat, clean and tidy - ladies, if you have long hair, tie it back neatly. Gentlemen, if you keep facial hair (beard or moustache), make sure it's tidy. If you don't keep facial hair, remember to shave carefully and frequently. Do not overuse hair products.

2. Suggestions for Men

- A button-down dress shirt
- Polished black shoes
- A blue, black or gray jacket
- Trousers that complement the jacket
- Simple tie, nothing flamboyant
- Do not use strong-smelling cologne or aftershave

3. Suggestions for Women

- A skirt that hits just above the knee and/or pantsuit
- Jacket or sweater to complement the skirt or pants
- Button-down shirt
- Simple jewelry
- Just a hint of makeup. Skip the perfume, especially during a job interview or the first few days at a new job
- Polished flats or moderate heels

Activities to Do On Your Own

- Learn now how to tie a necktie: <http://www.tieanecktie.com/WindsorKnot.php>
- Make a list of clothing items in your closet and try to mix-match different outfits together.
- Take a note of what people are wearing and what styles appeal to you. Would they also be appropriate for a work environment? Keep these ideas in mind the next time you go shopping for clothes.

Other Resources

- http://www.forbes.com/business/2006/04/11/office-dress-codes-cx_sr_0411officedress.html
- “The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research”, Gordon Rugg and Marian Petre, (2004) Open University Press.
- “Groomed for Advancement.” JobPostings.ca magazine. Kristen Kaleal. October 2007.