

# Interview Attire

There is an old adage that is applicable to interviewing: “You only get one chance to make a first impression.” In an interview, the initial impression that an interviewer has of a candidate isn’t based on credentials. Whether you consider it fair or unfair, the interviewer is judging you the minute that he or she sees you.

Appearance has nothing to do with a person’s knowledge, experience, or ability to do the job. However, it impacts other people’s perceptions of you which can affect your chances for success. Don’t let your appearance undermine your chances for a job. Always be well dressed and groomed for an interview.

## Dress for Success

Dressing for success does not mean buying the most expensive, designer clothes. However, quality shows! Invest in the best suits, shirts, shoes, and accessories that you can afford. Be a smart shopper and buy during sales.

Dressing for success is not just about your clothes. The initial impression you make also includes your poise, warmth, ability to communicate, social skills, and attitude. You can have on a \$1,000 suit, but if you’re frowning, you will not make a good impression.

So how do you know what to wear for an interview? Research the organization’s culture. Look at employer brochures, check the website for pictures, or visit the work site to observe the way co-workers and supervisors dress. However, keep in mind that there is a difference between having a job and trying to get a job. A professional, tailored look tells interviewers that you are paying attention to yourself in the same way that you will pay attention to your job responsibilities.

## Tips for Women

- **Suits.** Wear a dark, navy blue or charcoal gray suit. Though skirts are generally preferred, pants are acceptable. Save money by buying a jacket with matching pants and skirt. Pay attention to fabric; wool gabardine can be worn year round and is easy to care for. Knee-length is best; avoid skirts that are shorter than two inches above your knee.
- **Dresses.** Suit dresses (a jacket and dress) are acceptable; party and beach dresses are not!
- **Shirts/Blouses.** Cotton stretch, sweater knit, or silk tank tops are appropriate, but t-shirts are not. Avoid tops that are transparent, tightly fitting, and have low necklines or revealing waistlines. White is always acceptable.
- **Skirts.** Skirts are generally preferred for first meetings and for interviews. The safest length is one inch above or below the knee.
- **Shoes.** Shoes should always be polished, never open-toed, and medium to low heel. Match your leather to your suit color (e.g., black leather pumps for a black or charcoal gray suit; navy pumps for a navy suit).
- **Stockings.** Stockings should be nude to the color of your skin, but never white.
- **Purse.** Purses should match shoes, be well maintained and not too large. Carry only one item to the interview: a purse or a briefcase. The interview is stressful; don’t add to your anxiety by having to worry about carrying two items.

- **Jewelry.** If you wear jewelry, limit it to a watch, small earrings, one ring on each hand at most, and no jingling bracelets. People should not hear your jewelry when you move.
- **Makeup.** Though makeup can help you look pulled together, avoid using it excessively. A little lip color and eye shadow is plenty.
- **Hair.** Wear a simple hair style that is neatly combed/brushed. If you have long hair, consider wearing it up or pulling it off your face.
- **Nails.** Nails should be manicured and should not be longer than 1/4-inch past the fingertip. Use clear polish or a color that complements your skin tone. Avoid bright colors or unusual shades.
- **Perfume or scented lotion.** Scent can become overwhelming during an interview in a small room. Some people are allergic to scents, so avoid them.
- **Deodorant and fresh breath.** Always! Don't eat food that will leave an odor on your breath. If you must, use a breath mint.
- **Tattoos.** Cover them up for interviews and first meetings or work for an organization that embraces them!
- **Body piercing.** Wear very small studs in your ears only; remove all other visible piercings.
- **Coats.** Stick to a good classic raincoat or trenchcoat for inclement weather. Choose one with a zip-out lining for all-season use.
- **Shirts.** White is the safest color. As you become acclimated to a new job, you can experiment with other colors. Shirts should be 100% cotton with classic collars. Save your button-down collared shirts for after office hours.
- **Ties.** Always make sure it is clean! Men often make ties too long or too short — ideally it should touch the top of your belt. Stay away from gaudy ties for the interview or first meeting unless you are absolutely sure that the interviewer will appreciate your individuality.
- **Socks.** Socks should either match the shoes or the pants. They should be calf-length. Don't let your hairy legs show!
- **Shoes.** Black is the safest color. Make sure your shoes are well polished. If an interviewer looks down and sees dirty shoes, it doesn't matter what your suit looks like.
- **Belts.** The color of your leather should match your shoes (e.g., a black belt with black shoes; a brown belt with brown shoes).
- **Coats.** Stick to a good classic raincoat or trench coat for inclement weather. Choose one with a zip-out lining for all-season use.

### Tips for Men

- **Suit.** Single breasted, fitted, 100% light weight wool suits in navy blue or charcoal gray are classic. Coats should have two or three buttons; only button the top two buttons or the middle button — never all three.



- **Jewelry.** Anything other than a watch and a ring is probably too much. Leave the earrings, ID bracelet, and rope chains at home.
- **Hair.** Get a good haircut one week before an interview. Don't overstyle with too much gel.
- **Nails.** Nails should be short and well groomed. Get rid of any grease or dirt.
- **Colognes or scented lotions.** Scents can become overwhelming during an interview in a small room. Some people are allergic to scents, so avoid them.
- **Deodorant and fresh breath.** Always! Don't eat food that will leave an odor on your breath. If you must, use a breath mint.
- **Tattoos.** Cover them up for interviews and first meetings or work for an organization that embraces them!
- **Body piercing.** If cultural, wear very small studs. Otherwise, remove them.

### Additional Tips

- Present yourself as a professional. Clothes should be fitted — not too short and not too tight.
- Dress for the interview or dress for the job — but don't dress for a party.
- Your attire should not be distracting or become the focus of attention in the interview or on the job. You want the focus to be on you and what you have to say.
- There is a distinction between business casual and "at-home" casual. Business casual does not include tennis shoes, jeans, shorts, sandals, or t-shirts.
- Leave your backpack at home. A professional-looking portfolio or briefcase makes it easier to organize your application materials and provides a place for maintaining any literature or business cards that you acquire throughout

the day.

- A smile, a firm handshake, and a positive attitude make a good first impression.
- Arrive early for your interview and head for the restroom. Check out your appearance in a mirror.
- Don't drink alcohol before an interview.
- When in doubt about what to wear to an interview, visit Career Services and talk with a professional staff member.

### Dress for Success

- Invest in the best clothes that you can afford.
- Be a smart shopper and buy during sales.
- Research how people at your prospective organization dress.
- Seek the assistance of a retailer specializing in professional clothes.

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