

Dress For Interview Success

During an interview you have just a few minutes to convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job. Whether you like it or not, inappropriate attire can cost you that job, as appearance may cause your accomplishments and abilities to be overlooked. These guidelines are recommendations as to what to wear. There is no guarantee that wearing the right suit will get you a job, but inappropriate attire has caused more than a few students to lose a job offer.

You've got the skills, right? So, who cares if your tongue is pierced and you've got tattoos down both arms? Will an employer be turned off by the tattoos? One nationally known employer insists on clean-shaven employees, but is that the rule for most employers? Check out our two interviewees and guess which one most employers would pick.



While 'civies' day may be the perfect forum in which to exhibit your flair for the latest in fashion style, the interview is not the place to do so. With very few unusual exceptions, sandals and sweatshirts are out. Oxfords and business suits are still in. Many don't like a necktie (noose?) any better than the next person, but it is still a fact of life in interviewing. Even though many companies have relaxed the internal company dress code, remember what Barrymore Richardson said, interviews still follow the conservative standard. Don't buck the trend.

Unfortunately, most high school students are woefully under prepared with proper interview dress. They feel they can "get by" with what is already in their wardrobe. Usually not. Dress for the world outside of high school is quite different. Remember that stylish is not conservative. You should be doing the talking, not your clothes.

This is not to say that you need to go out and buy a whole new wardrobe. Go for quality over quantity. One or two well-chosen business suits will serve you all the way to the first day on the job and beyond. For now, no one will fault you for wearing the same sharp outfit each time you interview. If you desire some variety within a limited budget, you might consider varying your shirt/blouse/tie/accessories as a simple way to change your look without breaking your wallet.

The purpose of your clothing is to project an image of professionalism.

Men's Wear

Best Choice

Suit - Choose a dark colored, good quality fabric. Solid colors, subtle stripes, or a pattern such as herring-bone are best. Be sure that it fits well.

Shirt - Be sure that it is nicely ironed. Plain white is probably best, but light blue or very subtle stripes are probably acceptable.

Tie - The best choices are: stripes and geometric patterns.

Shoes - Wear dark socks and clean, polished dress shoes.

Second Choice (Not as good, but acceptable)

A dark jacket and nice pants is acceptable. Be sure to choose dark colors and nice fabrics.

Not Acceptable

Jackets made from light colors and fabrics such as tweed or seersucker are not recommended. Khaki or blue cotton pants won't do (If it doesn't have to be dry cleaned, do not wear it to an interview). A plaid, brightly colored, or brightly striped shirt is NOT a good choice. Do not wear a tie with bright florals, wild patterns, or figures. Do not wear every day shoes (If they can not be polished, they are not acceptable).

Facial Hair

Interviewees should be warned that a beard or mustache, while tolerated in many companies, may inadvertently count against you during the interview process.

Hair

Hair should be neatly cut, clean, combed and worn in a conservative style well above the collar.

Women's Wear

Best Choice

Suit - Choose a dark color such as navy, gray, and black. Solid colors are best, but subtle stripes may be acceptable. Do not choose linen and it is probably best to avoid bright colors.

Blouse - The best colors are white, creme, light pink or blue. Prints with subtle geometric patterns are also acceptable. Choose a simple style with a high neck line. The best choice is probably a cotton blouse with a collar that buttons up the front, similar in style to a man's dress shirt.

Shoes - Wear low-heeled or flat pumps and be sure they are clean and polished.

Second Choice

A skirt and coordinating jacket may be acceptable. Choose dark colors and nice fabrics (Here again, if it does not have to be dry cleaned, it probably is not acceptable for an interview).

Not Acceptable

Few dresses are appropriate for interviews. Avoid floral prints and bright or overly feminine colors such as: purple, lavender, hot pink. Do not wear a skirt that is more than two inches above or three inches below the knee. Be sure your skirt is not too full, too tight, or made from a fabric that clings. Do not wear lacy, low-cut, or tight-fitting blouses. Never wear a knit top or sweater of any kind. High heels (>1.5 in) are not acceptable. Avoid bow ties.

Makeup

Little or no makeup is the best choice for most women interviewees. If you wear makeup everyday and are comfortable with it, then a little bit is acceptable (e.g. a small amount of lipstick or mascara). If you are not accustomed to wearing makeup, then do not wear it to an interview. In any case the "natural" look is best.

Avoid perfume, colored nail polish, excessive or unusual colors of eye makeup or rouge.

Hair

A short, simple hair cut is probably the best choice. If you have long hair, be sure to pull it back neatly. Avoid elaborate hairstyles, excessive hair spray, bobby pins, or bows.

If you are still unsure about the specifics, check out a copy of John Molloy's [*New Dress for Success*](#) or [*New Women's Dress for Success*](#). While these books may seem to have a rather conservative slant, it is the norm in most of the professional marketplace. It is almost always better to be higher than the standard than lower.

If you are still not sure how to dress for the interview, call them and ask! That's right--call the employer. But this is one time when you do not want to call the Hiring Manager--instead, ask to be put through to Human Resources and say:

"I have an interview with _____ in the _____ department for a position as an _____. Could you please tell me what would be appropriate dress for this interview?"

Sure, you run the risk of someone in HR thinking you are a social imbecile, but that's a lot better than having the Hiring Manager distracted by inappropriate interview dress.

When it doubt, it is almost always better to err on the side of conservatism.

One final note on interview dress: while it goes without saying that your interview clothes should be neat and clean, very few interviewees give the same time and attention to their shoes. Shoes? Yes, shoes. Many Corporate Recruiters form first impressions based solely (pardon the pun) on shoes. These people do not have a shoe fetish--they subjectively believes that those

who pay attention to details like their shoes are also likely to be diligent in their work life. Many have said that you can judge a person by their shoes. You will find that many ex-military officers (many of whom have found their way into management positions) are especially aware of a person's shoes. It is not enough to be clean, pressed, and ironed. Make sure your shoes are conservative, clean, and polished.

For those of you who need a quick review of the basics, follow these guidelines for successful interview dress:

The Fine Points

- A winter coat must be cleaned and pressed, particularly since a coat may be the main item your interviewer first sees.
- Your umbrella should be in conservative colors (black, tan, navy, gray) and in working order. Do not leave it to drip on the company carpet.
- Bring a pen and paper; check that the pen works and doesn't leak. Store them in the inside jacket pocket, where you can easily find them.
- Allow time to dress with care and deal with emergencies. Examine the results, front and back, in a mirror.
- Research the prospective employer - companies and even industries have definable corporate cultures. Find out what the corporate uniform is - and wear it.
- Select an outfit you have worn before and are comfortable wearing.
- Try on the outfit a few days before - enough time to have drying-cleaning and repairs completed.
- Check the ensemble for missing buttons, frayed cuffs and other needed repairs.
- Everything must be clean, neat and ironed.
- No bulging pockets or sagging coat lining.
- Hair and nails must be clean and groomed.
- Scent should be low-key or absent.
- The favorite color of most perspective employers is blue - it conveys trust, calm and confidence. Blue is a very good interview color.