Dress for Success

Why does professional/business attire matter?

- In job-hunting, first impressions are critical. Remember, you are marketing a product -- yourself -- to a potential employer. The first thing the employer sees when greeting you is your attire. Make every effort to have the proper dress for the type of job you are seeking.
- Will dressing properly get you the job? Not necessarily, but it will give you a competitive edge and a positive first impression. According to Kim Zoller at Image Dynamics, 55% of another person’s perception of you is based on how you look.
- When interviewing, your goal should be to project the aspects of your personality that would be most desirable for an employer. A conscientious, well-trimmed, neat exterior will tell your prospective employer that you are a conscientious, neat person. A professional appearance is completed by professional clothes.
- Remember: Campus fashions and work fashions usually are 2 different worlds.

How should you dress?

- Dressing conservatively is always the safest route. It makes sense to dress your best for the interview, regardless of the dress code at the organization.
- If you are in doubt about how to dress for an interview, it is best to err on the side of conservatism. It is much better to be overdressed than underdressed (or undressed).
- Whatever your personal style may be, a job interview is not the place to show it off. The working world has its own set of standards that most professional environments support or respect. One of these standards is a conservative dress code.
- Avoid cologne/perfume or body lotions with a fragrance since your interviewer may be allergic.
- Select apparel jewelry, hairstyle, etc. that do not detract from your professional image. The interviewer’s attention should be focused on what you say and your qualifications.
- Be well groomed! No dandruff on your shoulders, no chipped or dirty fingernails.
- Remove facial and body piercings. Women can wear single earrings and/or a watch are acceptable.
- Keep your jewelry choices simple and leaning toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style and color. Small earrings and/or a watch are acceptable.
- Keep makeup conservative and to a minimum. A little is usually a safe choice.
- Stockings are a must and should be flesh-toned or a similar color. Avoid color or patterns that would be distracting.
- Keep your suit fits your properly, have it tailored if needed.
- Less is more. Keep your look simple and successful until you become accustomed to the environment and learn about the company’s dress code.
- Invest in a leather briefcase or portfolio in black or brown.

For more information:

- Set up an appointment with a Magner Center counselor
- Visit the Balance Careers for more detailed advice on buying the proper suit.

What are some do’s and don’ts?

- Beards, goatees and mustaches should be neatly trimmed and not too long.
- Hair should be short and neat
- Business suit in navy or gray, pinstripe or solid. Suits may be double-breasted, two and three button.
- Generally, the shirt should be white or pale blue, with Oxford or spread collar.
- Ties should contrast with the color of the suit and contain understated patterns.
- Men should wear black or brown shoes in a plain toe or wing tipped style, either loafers or tie shoes for a more formal look.
- Dressing in a business suit is the best way to present a professional image, preferably a black, dark navy, dark brown or gray solid print wool blend. Job experts and employers seem split on the notion of pants suits, so a skirted suit is a safer choice.
- Skirt length should be a little below the knee and never shorter than above the knee.
- If you wear pants, they should be creased and tailored, not tight or flowing. Avoid wearing a dress.
- Your blouse should complement the suit in a conservative fashion. Blouses should be cotton or silk and should be white, off-white, cream or some other light color. It should not be too revealing, high around the neck, nor have too many ruffles or frills.
- Avoid color or patterns that would be distracting.
- Shoes should be plain dark pumps (can be black or matching the suit color) with closed heels and toes. The heels should be only 1.5 inches high at most.
- Keep your jewelry choices simple and leaning toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style and color. Small earrings and/or a watch are acceptable.
- Keep makeup conservative and to a minimum. A little is usually better than none for a polished look.
- Avoid extremes of nail length and polish color, especially in conservative industries.
- Hair can be short or shoulder length and well styled. If hair is long it should be pulled back neatly from the face.

Helpful Hints

- Buy the best quality your money allows, it is an investment.
- If you feel well dressed, you will feel and appear more confident!
- If you are on a tight budget, buy versatile suits that are medium weight and that can be worn virtually year round. Remember you can wear the same suit to multiple interviews.
- Do not put off shopping until a week before your first interview. This will add to your nervousness and may result in an expensive mistake.
- Strive for a wardrobe that has individual pieces that work well together (color, style, accessories).
- Make sure you are well put together. Watch your outfit for lint, loose threads, underclothing peeking through and wrinkles.
- Make sure your suit fits your properly, have it tailored if necessary.
- Remember, a kempt appearance reflects organizational strength, positive work habits and the care you will demonstrate in the workplace.
- Get advice from people that can help you at the store and/or the Magner Center.