Dress for Success

Your physical presentation significantly impacts the overall impression you leave a networking contact or interviewer, and your dress and grooming are key aspects of that image. Following are guidelines for formal business attire and business casual wear. Your clothing does not need to be expensive or new, but it must be clean, wrinkle-free, and fit properly, neither tight nor baggy.

If you are not sure what wardrobe an event requires, check with Career Services or your network, or, if in doubt, dress one step up. One caution: do not use the media, or even an employer’s website as a guide (keep in mind that the individuals in the photos are employees, not interviewees).

As with most things in career development and internship/job searches, details count. Make sure to carefully inspect your clothes for lost buttons and dangling threads; for new clothes, check for tags and tacking stitches. Good judgment counts too: if you are just coming from a class which required a more hands-on wardrobe or there are several inches of snow on the ground, make a quick apology to the presenter for your lack of attire; chances are he/she would rather you be there, as you are, than not at all. What employers seldom excuse is ripped jeans, t-shirts, and flip-flops, no matter what the occasion or reason.

**FORMAL BUSINESS ATTIRE:** Formal business dress is generally required for employment interviews, employer information sessions in a formal setting, some career fairs (check event website for details), informational interviews with hiring authorities, and Portfolio or Mock Interview day.

**FOR MEN:**

**Suit:** Standard is a well-fitted suit (matching jacket and slacks) in a dark color. For select industries or positions, a sports coat and dress slacks may be acceptable; check with your network to decide.

**Shirt:** A white or light-colored long-sleeved dress shirt, with limited or no pattern, even in summer.

**Tie:** A simple, subtle pattern and color that coordinates well with your suit. Make sure your tie is neatly knotted.

**Belt:** Should match your shoes and be well-polished.

**Shoes and socks:** Clean, well-polished dark dress shoes. Dark, mid-calf length socks (so no skin is visible when you sit down). When possible, socks should match color of slacks.

**Accessories:** Accessories should be limited. Watches are acceptable if modest in size.

**Grooming:** You should be clean-shaven or, if you wear a beard or mustache, it should be neatly trimmed. If used, cologne should have minimal scent. Nails should be neatly groomed. Tattoos and other body art should be covered, if possible. Make sure neither your clothes nor breath smell like smoke.

**FOR WOMEN:**

**Suit:** Standard is a well-fitted skirt suit (matching jacket and skirt) in a dark color. Skirts should be no shorter than 1" above the knee. In less conservative industries, a pant suit (matching jacket and tailored slacks) or lighter colors may be acceptable.

**Shirt:** A solid or subtle-patterned blouse with a tailored collar or modest neckline. Low-cut styles are not considered professional.
Shoes and stockings: Well-polished, closed-toed pumps, with heels no more than 2” (make sure you can walk comfortably in your choice). Stockings should be neutral or blend with the suit color. If wearing a pant suit, hosiery should match the slacks.

Accessories: Accessories should be kept to a minimum. Small watches, earrings, and necklaces are acceptable. Scarves and belts are allowable if they are modest enough not to be distracting.

Purse / bag: A small purse, small briefcase, or business-like tote bag is acceptable, but not required. Purse/bag color should be simple and coordinate with your shoes.

Grooming: Hair should be clean, combed, and pulled away from the face. Make up and perfume should be minimal. Nails should be neatly groomed. Tattoos and other body art should be covered, if possible. Make sure neither your clothes nor breath smell like smoke.

BUSINESS CASUAL WEAR: Business casual clothing should be worn at employer information sessions (if you are hoping to secure an interview, go with formal business attire), on-campus networking receptions, some informational interviews, and career fairs, unless you are actively seeking a job or internship, in which case formal business attire may be more appropriate. Guidelines for accessories and grooming are the same as for formal business attire.

FOR MEN:

Pants: Dress slacks, dark pants or Khakis or Dockers-like slacks are best.

Shirt: Pressed long-sleeved, buttoned shirt in light or modest colors with are safe bets. Pressed polo or golf shirts may be appropriate if you know the environment is quite casual or outdoors.

Jacket: Jackets are generally not necessary for business casual, but you are welcome to wear one if you want to stand out, or be safe if you are not sure if an event is formal business or business casual.

Ties: Ties are typically optional for business casual, but if you are in doubt, wear one. You can always remove your tie if you arrive at an event and no one else is wearing one.

Shoes and socks: Leather shoes with dark, mid-calf length socks. Clean work boots may be acceptable for on-campus events; ditto with athletic shoes if you are an athlete coming directly from practice.

FOR WOMEN:

Pants/skirt: A skirt, dress slacks, or dark pant - all of which should be well-fitting (not too tight or flowing) and neatly pressed, are all options. Skirts should be knee length and have no revealing slits.

Blouse/sweater/dress jacket: Tailored shirts or blouses, knit sweaters, sweater sets, and dress jackets are appropriate choices. Again, necklines should be modest and colors and patterns more muted.

Shoes and stockings: Shoes should be modest in heel size and appropriate to the weather and event. Sandals may be acceptable if not too chunky or too dressy. Stockings may be optional, depending on the length of your skirt, season (bare legs in winter is generally a no-go), event, and field you are targeting (for conservative industries, it is always prudent to wear stockings).