Dressing for Success

Depending upon your fashion style, a job interview may be cause for some drastic wardrobe augmentation. For your interviews, some of your individualism might have to be shelved or kept in the closet. In most business and technical job interviews, when it comes to your appearance, being conservative and conforming to the conservative norm is essential.

While many companies have adopted the “office casual” dress code, don’t try to set new standards in the interview. When in doubt, it is better to be too conservative than to be too flashy. For men and women, a suit is the best bet.

Here are some guidelines:

**WOMEN**
- A suit with a knee-length skirt or pants and a tailored blouse is most appropriate.
- Accessories should be kept simple. Basic pumps and modest jewelry and makeup help to present a professional look.
- Pants are acceptable for interviews

**MEN**
- A two-piece suit will suffice in most instances.
- Solid colors and tighter-woven fabrics are safer than bold prints or patterns.
- Bright ties bring focus to the face, but a simple pattern is best for an interview.
- Wear polished shoes with socks high enough so no skin is visible when you sit down and cross your legs.

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**Grooming**
- Strong influence

**Handshake**
- Sight influence

**Nontraditional Interview Attire**
- Sight influence

**Nontraditional Hair Color**
- Sight influence

**Earring (male)**
- No influence

**Body Piercing**
- Sight influence

**Beard**
- No influence

**Obvious Tattoos**
- Sight influence

**Mustache**
- No influence

**Unusual Hair Style**
- Sight influence
Staying Within a Budget
For some new job seekers, additions to wardrobes, or complete overhauls, are likely needed. Limited funds, however, can be an obstacle. Before investing any money, consider your budget and how you can make it stretch. Image consultant Christine Lazzarini suggests “capsule wardrobing”; a system that allows you to mix-and-match. According to Lazzarini, an eight-piece capsule wardrobe can generate up to 28 ensembles. Additionally, 50% of your clothing budget should be targeted for accessories.

The most important piece in any wardrobe is a jacket that is versatile and can work with a number of other pieces. This applies to men and women. “If you focus on a suit, buy one with a jacket which may be used with other skirts or trousers,” says a women’s fashion director for a major national retailer. “Then add a black turtleneck or a white shirt. These are the fashion basics that you can build on.” A navy or black blazer for men can work well with a few different gabardine pants. Although this kind of ensemble would be just as expensive as a single suit, it offers more versatility. One accessory recommended by company representatives is a briefcase. “When I see one,” says one recruiter, “it definitely adds to the candidate’s stature. It is a symbol to me that the individual has done some research and that he or she is prepared.”

A Final Check
Your appearance is only as good as your grooming. Create a final checklist to review before you go on an interview:

- Neatly trimmed hair
- Conservative makeup
- No runs in stockings
- Shoes polished (some suggest wearing your sneakers on the way to an interview and changing before you enter the interview site)
- No excessive jewelry; men should refrain from wearing earrings
- No missing buttons, crooked ties or lint

You want your experience and qualifications to shine. Your appearance should enhance your presentation, not overwhelm it.

Taking a Casual Approach
“Office Casual” is becoming the accepted mode of dress at more and more companies. The rules, however, for casual attire are subject to tremendous company-to-company variance. At some, “casual day” is a Friday-only observance, where the dress code is slightly relaxed—a sports coat and slacks for men and slacks and a sweater for women. At others, especially entrepreneurial computer companies, it’s shorts and sandals every day. The safest fashion rule for new employees to follow is dress about the same as your most conservatively attired co-worker. As a new hire, don’t try to “push the boundaries” of casual attire.

Fashion Arreets:

1) Never wear blue denim jeans or shorts unless the vast majority of others do
2) Don’t dress too provocatively—you’re at work, not at a dance club
3) “Casual” doesn’t mean “sloppy”—your clothes should always be free of stains or holes
4) Workout wear belongs at the gym

Play It Safe:

1) Chinos or corduroy slacks are usually a safe bet for both sexes
2) As for formal business attire, buy the best that your budget will allow
3) If you will be seeing clients, dress appropriately for their workplace, not yours
4) Go to the mall—most department and specialty stores have sections devoted to this style of office attire.