Career Central™ Advice

Dress for Success: Men

When interviewing, dress for the position you want, not for the job you have.

First impressions count.

Few things have as much impact as the first impression you make for that anticipated face-to-face interview. Research shows it only takes a few seconds to make a lasting impression. That means no matter how solid your credentials, you still want to look professional.

Dressing appropriately not only gives you more confidence and credibility, it surrounds you with a sense of belonging that can help deflect the minor slips or stumbles we all can make during that critical interview or, once hired, in daily routines.

Understand the company culture.

The bottom line is about striking a balance between what is expected and still being yourself. After all, you want to be seen as a good fit in the company and for the potential job position. Avoid questionable factors that may undermine that effort. Research the company: You are the product, so package yourself appropriately. If you find the company dress code too restrictive, apply for a job elsewhere. Don't try to break the code. If you choose to fight the system, be prepared to lose.

Remember, clothing is non-verbal communication.

Don't dress to un-impress.

For the interview, avoid frayed, wrinkled, or soiled clothing. Avoid clothes that are too short, tight, baggy, boldly colored, or trendy. Even if it's "casual Friday," you should still look professional; it is better to be overdressed than underdressed. Limit the jewelry. No backpacks; it's briefcases or portfolios now. Generally, companies frown on visible tattoos, body piercings, and unusual hair coloring and styles. Some firms do not encourage facial hair, so keep it neat and trim if you have it.

Unless you're a character actor or in an environment that allows more casual and less "power suit" attire, quirky, over-the-top fashion statements can be distracting and even put you at a disadvantage when it comes to being taken seriously.

So, what's a job seeker to do?

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Guys: Do what suits you best.

Start with business basics when interviewing:

-- a solid navy, dark gray, or black suit that FITS. Get it tailored, if necessary; add a dark blue pinstriped or conservatively patterned navy or gray suit later; select a good wool that breathes;

-- bright white dress shirt; business blue is also acceptable;

-- tasteful solid, or simple striped or patterned ties;

-- straight, spread, or button-down collars; for wide collars, tie a full Windsor knot, which should finish with a dimple;

-- leather shoes that complement your suit; choose a simple black, classic cap-toe; match with black, calf-length socks; expand by adding a good black slip-on that pairs with casual or dressy attire;

-- match your belts to your shoes; silver buckles are more reserved.

Clothes should fit the man.

A two-button jacket should be down to where your closed knuckles fall. The jacket shoulders should be the same width as yours. Trousers should touch the tops of the shoes and break slightly. Shirts should fit close to the neck with enough room to fit one or two fingers. The tip of your tie should fall to your waist about where your belt is.

Remember, 1) dress for the job you want, not for the job you may already have; and 2) dress comfortably. You want to focus on the interview or the job without either you or the interviewer being distracted by what you're wearing.

Look around. If it's a conservative environment, dress conservatively. Remember the saying: "When in Rome...."

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in a nutshell:

Remember, for most interviews it is better to follow this standard dress code and create a good first impression:

- **Clean ironed shirt**
- **Neatly tied tie; no stains**
- **Pressed suit or jacket that fits**
- **Polished dark shoes**
- **Deodorant / anti-perspirant**
- **Minimal or no cologne**
- **Groomed head and facial hair**
- **Trimmed and clean nails**
- **Clean breath and teeth**

Clothes say a lot about you. And while they may not make the man, they certainly make an impression. Make sure it's the right one.