

FIRST STEPS

- ✓ Determine what the appropriate dress code is for your Career Fair, Interview, Business Tour, or new job. If it is not specified in the information provided, call the contact person and ask.
- ✓ Get an idea of your wardrobe a few days prior to the event in order to purchase new appropriate items, if necessary.

BUSINESS CASUAL

What is it?

Business casual dress can also be seen as **middle ground** between business formal wear and street wear. You may need to wear business casual attires to **interviews, at work, or other special occasions**. It is a crisp, neat look that should be appropriate for meeting with a CEO. What people consider appropriate attire for business casual may vary on the occasion of business. What you wear to work may be more casual than what you might wear to an interview.

Basic rules

No jeans or tee shirts. Denim is not considered business casual, even if they are really nice jeans. Never wear jeans to a business casual interview. It may be a safe bet to invest in a pair or two of high quality black pants. Tee shirts are not okay, but knit sweaters, turtlenecks, polos, or neatly ironed woven button downs are usually fine.

No open-toed shoes. No flip flops, sandals, or slippers. No athletic sneakers or hiking boots either. A nice pair of leather shoes will always be a safe bet. **Anything with a back or closed toe.**

Make sure no skin is showing. Don't wear anything too short or revealing. For example, don't wear tank tops with bare shoulders. Dresses are generally too dressy for business casual attire.

General tips

- Remember that business casual is based on classics, not trends. Avoid clothing that is too tight or too baggy. Less is more—keep your look simple and safe. You are not trying to stand out for your amazing sense of fashion, but for your professionalism.
- While you are not expected to spend the same amount of money on your attire as a CEO, try to invest in high quality clothing that will last you a long time. You want to keep your clothes from showing wear.
- Pockets are a great place to keep business cards!

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Clothing

- Be clean and well pressed. Keep an eye out for details like dangling threads or tags, missing buttons or lint.
- Other than blouses, sweaters are okay.
- Solid colors or conservative stripes are the safest patterns. If you wear a polo, tuck it in.
- Wear dark socks and make sure they are long enough so no skin is visible when you sit down.
- The best colors are navy, black, gray, and brown.
- Observe well-dressed people in your industry for ideas on what is okay (or not okay) to wear.
- Try to purchase fabrics that don't wrinkle. Avoid linens and 100% cotton garments.
- You don't have to wear a tie, but if in doubt, wear one.
- Long-sleeved shirts are considered dressier no matter the season
- Dress simple; make sure that underwear is not visible.

Hair and Shoes

- Especially for interviews, try to keep hair away from your face. People want to see you!
- If you have facial hair, keep it well groomed.
- Either pants or skirts made from crisp, solid fabric are okay. Pants should be creased or tailored.
- Skirts should rest or fall at the knees or over when standing.
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Accessories

- If you choose to wear jewelry, think simple. A simple watch may be best
- Make sure if you wear a belt, it is leather and matches your shoes.
- No white or pastel shoes. Avoid chunky heels or platforms. Be sure you can walk comfortably.
- Wear stockings if your skirt is knee length. You don't have to in the summertime.
- For purses, what is best is a business-like tote with structure. No canvas or straw material.
- Cover up any visible tattoos.
- As far as piercings go, only earrings (one in each ear) are okay.

Frequently Asked Questions About Business Casual

Q: Are khakis okay?

A: It depends. This is very much an employer's personal preference; some think khakis are appropriate, but some do not. Generally, khakis are okay once you have started your job. However, for interviews, as a general rule of thumb, it is better to be overdressed than underdressed. If you do decide to wear khakis, make sure that they are neatly pressed and don't show wear.

Q: How much make-up and cologne/perfume is okay?

A: If you wear make-up, use only a conservative amount and make sure it looks natural. To look more polished, a little is usually better than none. Do not wear any kind of make-up that sparkles or glitters. For nails, keep them clean and well groomed. If you want to use polish neutral colors are best. As for cologne/perfume, it is best to go without, as some people could be allergic to chemicals. To keep yourself smelling fresh, you could use a light body spray or anything with natural ingredients. A fabric freshener also works well. An interview day is a shower-on day.

Q: How do I dress on a budget?

A: Select a couple of key pieces in neutral colors, such as black, white, brown, etc. Also, choose "season-less" fabrics such as cotton or rayon. Look for sales on pieces to mix and match. Find slacks and blazers instead of a full-piece suit, and go cheaper on blouses, ties, and accent pieces or anything you would wear under a suit or blazer. There are many discount clothes stores in the area.

Q: How do I create attire for the first year on the job?

A: It's all about quality versus quantity. You want to pick classic pieces that will last, and get accessories such as scarves and ties to match these pieces. Also, you may want to ask your Human Resources department about the dress code policy as well as do some research on your own. Look at what your co-workers wear, and look at what your employer or employers wear as well.

GENERAL BUSINESS ATTIRE

What is it?

The General Business attire category is **one step below Business Formal**. Where Business Formal, or Business Professional, is typically reserved for special events, General Business is more likely to be seen in the workplace and is the most common form of business attire requested on the job.

Basic Rules

Ties are necessary. Ties should be worn with a long-sleeved button down shirt.

Conservative is best. Solid colors and basic patterns are always a safe bet. Choose a “timeless” look rather than something that is popular for the season. You can always personalize with accessories.

Jackets are ok. Suit jackets are appropriate, but unlike Business Formal, sport coats and structured jackets are also able to be worn.

What to Wear

- Dress shirt with a tie.
- A suit can be worn, but is not necessary. This category includes a tailored sport coat worn with dress trousers.
- Tailored pantsuits, business-like dresses, and coordinated dressy separates are all permitted.
- When wearing separates or dresses, a tailored jacket is required.
- Shoes should be conservative. Short heels or flats are both fine.

BUSINESS FORMAL OR BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL

What is it?

Business formal, also known as business professional, is **one step down from black-tie** (tuxedos) such as dark tailored suits. Companies will tell you if they have a business formal dress code. Typically, companies with a business formal dress code include financial institutions such as investment banks or consulting firms and other large corporations. Interviews are another time to consider wearing business formal attire. Wearing business formal attire shows recruiters that you take the interview, event, and company seriously. Other events that often request this level of dress are **award dinners, political events, and a variety of dressy evening business occasions** that are not black-tie.

Basic Rules

If you wear a suit, make sure it matches. It is more formal than a jacket with contrasting pants or a skirt. Also, darker colors help project a higher level of authority than lighter colors. The most formal colors are navy, charcoal, or black suits.

Keep your look simple. Have fewer details and colors in your outfit, and keep prints or patterns on shirts and ties to a minimum. If you want add color to your ensemble, contrast dark and light colors. For example, wear a white or cream-colored shirt with a dark suit. Also, find solid-colored fabrics that are smooth and plain. Bulky and textured patterns make your look more formal.

Find quality accessories. Carrying a high quality accessory, such as a nice briefcase or handbag, or even a high-quality watch, will add an extra touch of professionalism to your look. Also, shoes can either make or break your look. Find a pair of shoes that are classy, yet simple, and make sure that they are polished and in good condition (i.e. no scuffmarks or worn heels).

If it's not requested, don't wear it. Employers or invitations will specify if they want you to wear Business Formal attire. If you are attending a standard interview, career fair, tour, or day of work, wear business casual or general business attire depending on how traditional of a place you are going. If you question what level of dress is appropriate, contact the business and ask!

What to Wear for Business Formal

- A dark business suit, simple dress shirt worn with or without a tie, and shined dress shoes.
- Traditional business formal includes a white shirt (French cuff styles), cuff links, silk ties, and pocket squares (silk or linen).
- Dark skirted or pants suit with a simple dress shirt is the standard dress.
- Closed-toed shoes.

GENERAL GROOMING TIPS

Hair should be clean and neat. The simpler the better.

Shoes should be polished and heels should not be worn down.

Details matter. Make sure you don't have missing buttons or external tags sticking out. Bring a lint roller with you to guarantee a clean look after arriving at the location.

Hands. Keep fingernails clean and neat. If wearing nail polish, it's best to keep to neutral colors.

Fit. Clothes should be tailored, clean, neatly pressed, and fit properly.

Smell. Perfume and cologne should be used sparingly. Don't smell like smoke.

Padfolios are neat and preferred to a bulky briefcase.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Dress for Success Infographic (<http://career.missouri.edu/dress-for-success>): Learn all about the do's and don'ts about business casual and interview attire.

MU Career Center Pinterest Board (<https://www.pinterest.com/mucareercenter1/>): View pictures of women's, men's and gender neutral clothing for business casual and business professional settings.

SYMS Dress (<http://www.symsdress.com>): A site specifically for college students that features interview dress basics and occupational wardrobes. The site includes some interviewing tips and FAQs. For more information, read the *Guide to Interviewing* and *Guide to Career Fairs*.

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ When attending your interview, career fair, tour, or first day on the job, observe what other employees are wearing to provide you with guidelines for the future.
- ✓ Visit our Handouts link on <http://career.missouri.edu/resources> to download other handouts in our Job Search Preparation series.