



Career Center  
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## **PROFESSIONALISM: DRESSING AND ACTING THE PART**

The not-so-good news: multiple studies show that employers think that many recent college graduates lack professionalism in their first year on the job.

The good news: This gives you an opportunity to shine.

### **WHAT IS PROFESSIONALISM?**

1. **Be prepared** – Before you show up for an interview, research the company and have intelligent, informed questions to ask.
2. **Exhibit courtesy and respect** – Be polite to everyone, from the receptionist to the director. Maintain good eye contact and never interrupt the person interviewing you. Turn OFF your cell phone before the interview. Thank your interviewer for his or her time in person and in follow-up communications.
3. **Be on time** – Confirm the appointment ahead of time and arrive a few minutes early, but not 20 or 30 minutes early – being too early inconveniences the office staff.
4. **Use good listening skills** – Pay more attention to what the other person is saying than worrying about what you are planning to say next.
5. **Demonstrate effective communication skills** – This starts with your written cover letter and resume, and continues through the interview and into the workplace. Weed out speech that is littered with “like,” “you know,” and “um.” Practice with a trusted adult and ask for feedback on your speech and inflection. Written communications should be free of casual syntax, texting abbreviations (lol, etc.), emoticons, and the like.
6. **Articulate your skills and accomplishments** – Know your resume backward and forward. Have concrete examples of your experience that demonstrate the skills the employer is seeking.
7. **Pay attention to details** – After an interview, follow up with a thank you note and check the status of the job. After you’re hired, complete your assigned tasks thoroughly and on time.
8. **Sustain a positive attitude** – Showing yourself as a professional asset is important in the interview and after you’re hired. If you come across as negative or bored, you make it easy for the employer to find someone else. Be proactive and receptive to feedback – remember, there is always more to learn.
9. **Maintain a professional appearance** – This is one of the most common areas that employers and hiring managers cite for people not getting or keeping jobs. It’s also one of the trickiest for job applicants to navigate. So what does “professional appearance” really mean?

# Dress for Success!

A GUIDE ON HOW TO DRESS FOR YOUR NEXT JOB INTERVIEW

## Business Professional

**JOB INTERVIEWING ATTIRE**



**CLOTHES SHOULD BE:**

- SOLID, DARK OR NEUTRAL COLORS
- LIGHT COLORS CAN BE WORN UNDERNEATH
- NO STRIPES OR BRIGHT PRINTS/COLORS

**SHOES SHOULD BE:**

- CLOSED-TOE HEEL OR DRESS SHOES

**SUIT JACKET & PANTS/SKIRT** SHOULD BE MATCHING COLORS

**PERSONAL ITEMS & CELL PHONES**  
Keep cellphones turned off and out of sight with personal items

Carry a portfolio, professional bag or simple purse

**BRING ESSENTIALS ONLY!**

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## Business Casual

**DAILY WORK ATTIRE**

**BUSINESS CASUAL COLORS & STYLES**

- NICE PANTS/SLACKS
- DRESSES
- NO JEANS, SHORTS, SUNDRESSES OR ATHLETIC WEAR



**SKIRTS & DRESSES** should be knee length when standing and thighs covered while seated

**TIES** OPTIONAL



**JACKETS & SHOES**  
Blazers & cardigans with flats, boots, closed-toe shoes, or comfortable shoes for walking in




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## General Recommendations

**IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FIRST IMPRESSION**

**CLOTHES SHOULD BE:**

- TAILORED
- IN GOOD CONDITION
- WRINKLE & LINT FREE

**HAIR**  
Well groomed hairstyle

**NAILS & MAKEUP**  
Natural in style

**JEWELRY & FRAGRANCE**  
Wear moderate jewelry with mild fragrance

**PIERCINGS & TATTOOS**  
Align to company culture or standards

**NEAT & CLEAN DRESS SHOES**

Belts should match the color of your shoes and attire.

## DRESSING TO GET HIRED

- Be well groomed. Take a shower that day or the day before. Make sure your hands, nails and hair are neat and clean, and your clothes are clean, in good condition, and wrinkle-free. Shoes should be polished. Avoid heavy makeup, strong cologne, aftershave, or perfume.
- Dress for the industry. Different industries have different standards.
  - For conservative industries like banking or financial services, wear a black or navy blue suit to your interview. For more ideas, search “Business Formal.”
  - For a less formal environment like a nonprofit, a blazer with khakis, dress pants, or a skirt is appropriate. For more ideas, search “Business Casual.”
  - For creative industries like the arts or advertising, you can show more personal style within reason – funkier jewelry, brighter colors and cooler accessories.
  - For on-campus jobs, do make an effort to step up your attire! This first impression of showing you care enough to appear professional may have an impact on the hiring decision.

- For off campus food service and retail, the same rules apply; however, you should consider going a step further than what the typical food service worker wears at the restaurant. In retail, if you are able, wear what you see employees in the store wearing.
- Jeans and t-shirts are not recommended.
- Avoid making political, religious, or social statements. These may end up offending your interviewer. Once you are hired, you certainly may have conversations with your supervisor about dress.
- Dress for the job you want, but slightly better. Dressing slightly better than the job you're applying for says that this interview is important to you but keeps you from going over the top.
  - Do your research. Find out how the people who work there dress.
  - Go to the organization's website – do they have photos of people on the job?
  - Ask friends if they know people who work there.
- Don't spend a fortune on a new outfit. You can buy nice clothes for interviewing at discount stores like Ross, Marshalls, or T.J. Maxx.
  - You may even find options at second hand stores – but avoid stained, faded or pilled clothes.
  - Check with friends who wear the same size and ask if you may borrow an outfit for the interview.

## **WARDROBE CHOICES TO AVOID AT THE INTERVIEW**

**Too much skin** – If your outfit is short, tight or low-cut and showing cleavage, it's not right for a professional interview.

**Exposed tattoos and body piercings** – Body art is highly personal and, for many, part of their identity. Just be aware that there are some jobs in the professional world that will be off the table if your body art is on display.

**Dirty, wrinkled or disheveled clothing, hair, or body** – You want to give a first impression that you are prepared and professional. This means clean and wrinkle-free clothes and good posture.

**Jeans, sweats or pajama pants** – Unless you are applying for a job at a construction site, warehouse or landscaping company, do not wear jeans. Try dress pants or a knee-length skirt instead.

**Flip-flops, casual shoes/sandals or sky-high heels** – Instead, go for a sensible heel or flats. Dress shoes are always a good option.

**Gum, sunglasses or a pen you keep nervously twirling or clicking** – All of these will drive your interviewers crazy and distract them from your strengths.

**Cell phones** – Your phone may lose you the job if it rings or vibrates during the interview. Remember to turn it off and keep it out of sight. Even when you're waiting to meet with the interviewer, stay off it!

## **BUT I STILL WANT TO BE ME!**

The point of dressing for an interview is not to stomp out your personal creativity and style. It's to translate your uniqueness into a framework of professionalism that makes employers want you to be part of their team. You want the interviewer to focus on you and not be distracted by your outfit. So put on your best professional self – and go out and show the world why you're a great choice for the job.

## **THE HANDSHAKE**

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While handshakes are the traditional professional greeting, and they still work in some settings, there are alternatives to the handshake that get the job done if one party is not comfortable with a handshake. The point is to make a good first impression and to greet another person with professionalism and authenticity. A simple head nod and a genuine smile, or a small wave can work as substitutes for the handshake. Another approach is to follow whatever the other person does, as this is a sign of their comfort level. And if they signal a handshake, and you are not comfortable, a simple and polite statement expressing your thoughts will most likely be accepted.