What to Wear: Unlocking Dress Codes

When deciding what to wear for an interview, career fair, business meeting, or professional event it is always best to research the organization, industry, and event to determine which dress code is expected or most appropriate. Here are some general guidelines about common dress codes for business and professional occasions.

**BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL** is appropriate for most interviews—particularly in corporate, legal, and business settings, as well as education and health professions—career fairs, formal networking events, and some work environments.

- Attire should be professional, conservative, and timeless. Stay consistent with both your brand and the company’s image.
- Suits should be neat, clean, ironed/pressed, stain-free, in good condition, tailored to fit you properly, and a current cut and style.
- Choose a dark neutral suit color such as black, navy or charcoal gray.
- For skirt suits, skirts should be knee-length and skin-toned pantyhose are encouraged (especially during colder weather).
- White or light colored long sleeved button down shirt, as well as a blouse or shell, should be worn under your suit jacket.
- Wear either low-heeled, closed-toe pumps/flats or classic leather lace up with dark colored socks that match your pants.
- All shoes should be polished and in good condition.
- Belts should match your shoe color and choose a tie with a conservative pattern.
- Hair should be neatly trimmed or pulled away from your face. Nails should be clean and wear natural make-up and simple accessories. Avoid overpowering perfume and cologne.

**BUSINESS CASUAL** is the most common office dress code and is appropriate for most business functions, meetings and other events when indicated. The emphasis is still on business, not casual, and should be a more relaxed version of business professional. It may be appropriate for some interviews.

- Business professional should imitate the look of a suit using separate pieces.
- Ties, blazers, jackets and cardigans may be worn. Sweaters, blouses, button down shirts and polos are also appropriate.
- Neatly pressed dark colored or khaki pants, skirts and dresses may be worn.
- Heels, flats, booties/boots and loafers are appropriate. Open toed shoes are also considered acceptable.

SMART CASUAL (sometimes referred to as “dressy casual”) is appropriate when explicitly mentioned and found in many office environments.

- Think business appropriate, but with a few casual cues. You should look polished, stylish, and neatly put together. Gauge what others in the office are wearing.
- Mix up shades. This attire allows you to get a bit more expressive.
- Dress shoes may be exchanged for loafers, booties, or flats.
- Dark jeans are often acceptable.

CASUAL is appropriate when explicitly mentioned.

In a business environment, be sure to keep your casual look polished and office appropriate. Some companies encourage casual attire on Fridays. Sweats, yoga pants, and shorts are not appropriate in a business environment. Tennis shoes (if worn) should be clean and in good condition.