DRESSING FOR THE WORKPLACE

Depending upon your current fashion statement, venturing into the world of work may be cause for a drastic shift in your wardrobe. Some of your individualism, at least from 9 to 5, might have to be shelved, or kept in the closet. In most workplace settings, when it comes to your appearance, moderation and conformity for the industry are the order.

Each company will have its own guidelines, so it is important to know your potential employer before you meet them. How liberal or conservative is the dress code? Do not try to set any new standards, especially 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.

SOME GUIDELINES

MEN

- A two-piece suit will suffice in most instances. Nice pants and a jacket will work if you do not have a suit.
- Shirts should be light colors, preferably white.
- 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. Socks should match pants not shoes.

WOMEN

- A suit with a knee-length skirt and a tailored blouse is most appropriate. Do not forget to wear hose.
- Pants are more acceptable now but are not recommended for interviews unless you are positive that they would be appropriate.
- Accessories should be kept simple. Basic pumps and modest jewelry and makeup help to present a professional look.

Staying Within a Budget
For recent graduates just entering professional life, additions to wardrobes, or complete overhauls, are likely needed. However, limited funds can be an obstacle. One image consultant suggests "capsule wardrobing." For example, by mixing and matching, she says an eight-piece capsule wardrobe can generate up to 28 ensembles.
Before shopping, establishing a budget, 50 percent of which 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. 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 does offer more versatility.

One accessory recommended by company representatives is a briefcase or at minimum a nice portfolio. It definitely adds to your professionalism.

A Final Check
Of course, your appearance is only as good as your grooming. For interviews especially, create a final checklist for yourself:

- Make sure your hair is neatly trimmed and dyed (if appropriate)
- Use makeup conservatively; fresh nail polish
- 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)
- Women should avoid excessive jewelry; men should refrain from wearing earrings
- No missing buttons, crooked ties or lint, stains

*Helpful hint:* Lay out your outfit the night before an interview. You want your experience and qualifications to shine. Your appearance should enhance your presentation, not overwhelm it.

Taking a Casual Approach
Office Casual is an accepted mode of dress many companies; however recently, there has been a swing back to suits in certain industries. You need to check because the rules 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. At others, 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 Arrests

- never wear blue denim jeans or shorts unless the vast majority of others do;
- do not dress too provocatively—you are at work, not at a dance club;
• “casual” does not mean “sloppy”—your clothes should always be free of stains or holes;
• workout wear belongs at the gym.

Play It Safe

• chinos or corduroy slacks are usually a safe bet for both sexes;
• as with formal business attire, buy the best that your budget will allow;
• if you will be seeing clients, dress appropriately for their workplace, not yours;
• go to the mall—most department and specialty stores have sections devoted to this newer style of office attire.