

Professional Attire

On average, it takes seven seconds for a hiring manager to form an impression of you, so be sure to plan what you will wear for an upcoming interview or professional event.

Understanding Culture

Some organizations—like banks, federal agencies, and consulting firms—tend to have a more conservative style. Others—like nonprofits, advertising or marketing agencies, arts organizations, entertainment companies, or environmental organizations—may have a less traditional, relaxed style.

Look on the organization’s website or on social media to see if you can find pictures of employees in the office. If you are unaware of the culture of the organization or not sure how to dress, it’s best to err on the form side and dress professionally for any interview. It is also perfectly acceptable to ask the recruiter what the dress code is.

Choose an outfit that makes you feel confident and comfortable and represents your personality. When you feel confident, you’ll project confidence in all that you say and do in the interview.

Dressing for Success

Business Professional

For interviews and most formal business events, it’s recommended to wear clothing that typically matches in style, fabric, and color.

Jackets, Pants, Skirts, and Suits

- Fabrics: wool, wool blends, and polyester blends
- Colors: black, navy blue, charcoal grey, and dark brown
- Guidelines: color and fabric should match; two and three-button suits are acceptable; button color should match fabric; avoid jackets with vents; should fit well (alter if needed)

Shirts & Blouses

- Fabrics: silk blends, cotton blends, and polyester blends
- Colors: white and light blue
- Guidelines: shirts should have long sleeves; cuffs on sleeves are best; well-defined or high collars are best

Footwear

- Fabrics: leather and leather imitation
- Colors: black, dark brown, and dark grey
- Guidelines: match color/color family of suit; should be comfortable; should be cleaned and polished; 2.5-inch heels or shorter acceptable

Business Casual

For information sessions and less formal networking events, you would wear “business casual” clothing. At these types of events, jackets are optional, and skirts are acceptable.

Jackets, Pants, Skirts, & Suits

- Fabrics: linen, silk/silk blends, cotton blends, and polyester blends
- Colors: black, grey, tan, Earth tones, and solid colors.
- Guidelines: top-bottom colors may differ; soft collars acceptable; buttons may be light colors

Shirts, Sweaters, Polos, and Blouses

- Fabrics: cotton, silk/silk blends, and knits
- Colors: black, dark shades, ivory and pastels (spring and summer)
- Guidelines: shirts and polos should be collared; shirts should be button-down; shirts should have long sleeves; short sleeves are acceptable for sweaters and polo shirts

Footwear

- Fabrics: leather or leather imitation
- Colors: black, brown, grey, and tan
- Guidelines: should be comfortable; should be cleaned and polished; 2.5-inch heels or shorter acceptable

Grooming & Accessories

To make the best impression with recruiters and networking contacts, follow these tips for personal grooming:

- Hair: keep it neat and styled simply
- Makeup: stick to neutral colors
- Fingernails: keep trimmed and clean
- Jewelry: stick to simple earrings, gold/silver or leather-banded watch, limited rings
- Cologne/perfume: use none or a very small amount
- Ties: avoid animated or garish designs (patterns are okay)
- Socks: wear light-weight socks that match pants
- Briefcase/portfolio: stick to dark colors or leather/imitation leather; avoid statement pieces
- Belt: match to shoes, limit to one-inch width with a simple buckle

Try to avoid the following:

- Casual wear (jeans, t-shirts, tank tops)
- Open-toed footwear and athletic shoes
- Loud colors (clothes/shoes, jewelry, make-up, hair) or “busy” designs
- Shorts, short skirts, or capri pants
- Mismatched, wrinkled, dirty, or tattered clothing
- Revealing fabrics
- Too much jewelry, or plastic/craft jewelry
- Showing cleavage or chest hair
- Strong odors (perfumes, colognes, smoke, garlic)
- Visible body art (tattoos or piercings)