

**DRESS FOR SUCCESS:  
INTERVIEW ATTIRE vs. BUSINESS CASUAL**

Dressing for success during your job search means being aware of the distinction between business dress and business casual. Most companies still expect candidates to dress in professional business attire in the recruitment phase and interview process. In a recent survey of recruiters, 81% adhere to formal standards and indicated that a traditional business look was the most appropriate attire for the interview process. The interview process typically includes the screening interview and on-site second interviews. In fact, unless they advise otherwise, most recruiters (76%) expect candidates to come dressed in traditional business attire to office visits even if the office environment is casual. This generalization also holds true for Career Fairs and Forums when employers interact with students in more informal settings than interviews. While the trends at Career Fairs and Forums is for company representatives to arrive dressed in business casual, their expectation is to see candidates in business dress. You may even see recruiters arrive on campus to conduct interviews dressed in business casual. Do not interpret that to mean that business casual will be acceptable for your interview. In general, recruiters expect to see you dressed professionally. Recruiters whose expectations may be different usually inform candidates of their business casual corporate culture.

If you are interviewing for an internship, employers' expectations regarding your appearance are generally the same as if you were interviewing for permanent employment-professional business attire is usually expected.

In general, for men, business professional means a dark suit with a dress shirt, coordinating tie, dark socks and dress shoes. Avoid wearing bright colored shirts and loud ties. For women, business professional means a suit with coordinating blouse, hosiery and low-medium heeled pumps. Make-up and accessories such as scarves, jewelry and belts should blend with but not overpower your overall appearance. According to the survey of recruiters, candidates should enhance the overall effect of their attire with classic accents instead of trendy pieces. In addition, recruiters indicated that while short skirts may be the fashion trend, moderate to mid calf hemlines are still the preferred business look for women.

While business dress is the rule of thumb for the interview process, business casual is becoming more prevalent once you have the job. Throughout the United States, 70% of companies reported having a "dress down Friday" where business casual is allowed. The underlying principle is that business casual does not mean relaxed dress or grooming standards. While business casual is varied there are some basic guidelines to follow:

- Go for a neat look. Avoid frayed, wrinkled or worn-out clothing.
- Do not wear jeans, shorts, T-shirts, sandals or sneakers.
- Acceptable clothes for men include khakis, or dress slacks with any type of collared shirt. Collared shirts include polo, long or short sleeve "dress" shirts, such as oxford button-downs without the tie.
- Women may wear the same clothes outlined above for men, along with skirts or nice pantsuits. Sundresses or shorts are not acceptable.
- Blazers or sport coats always add a nice finishing touch for men or women.
- Acceptable casual shoes for men include loafers, clean deck shoes and several styles of oxfords. For women, the same types of shoes are fine along with neat flats and low pumps.

Whether the situation calls for business dress or business casual, neatness in appearance and grooming standards are still the most important factors in dressing for success. So schedule that haircut, pick up your clothes from the dry-cleaner and make sure your appearance reflects as positively as your qualifications!

*Adapted from – Johansen, K., and Steel, M. (Summer 1999) Keeping Up Appearances. Journal of Career Planning and Employment, pp 45-53.*

*shared drive: handouts; interviewing; updated fall 2008*