



SKIDMORE COLLEGE

CAREER SERVICES www.skidmore.edu/administration/career

815 North Broadway

P 518.580.5790

Saratoga Springs, NY 12866-1632

F 518.580.5799

Dress to Impress

The Importance of Dressing Appropriately

Dressing to impress employers should be a crucial part of your job search strategy. Although we may believe that no one should be judged by what they wear, the reality is that employers are looking for reasons to remove you from their selection process. They are not only concerned about your resume and interview, they are also aware of the image you project and often make a judgement on appearance within the first five minutes of meeting the candidate. They are looking to see if the candidate respects them enough to conform to their perceived expectations. Whether we like it or not, how you dress is taken into consideration in hiring decisions. You want to have a competitive edge, especially when it comes to making initial impressions.

Research the employer before the interview. Explore the dress requirements typical of that career field. For example, Silicon Valley will call for a different image than Wall Street. One way to gauge this is to dress in the manner of the organization's representatives. You can also find this out by visiting the office and picking up an annual report or employer brochure.

The clothing you wear should make you look like you fit in with the prospective employer and should really communicate the message, "I am already one of you." If you overdress or underdress, the potential employer may feel that your research has been limited and you really don't understand their corporate culture. Some may see you as a non-conformist, others may appreciate your independent thinking, but all will make a judgement on you based on attire. Research employers who will most appropriately embrace your values.

Men: Suggested Dress Code

Suits

Men should wear traditional business attire. This means a conservative dark navy or gray suit and a white long-sleeved pressed dress shirt (even in summer). If you don't own a suit, borrow one from a friend or consider investing in a high quality one. A tailored suit will last many years into your professional career. If you are unable to obtain a suit, conservative sports coat and dress slacks are second best.

Shirts

White shirts are always your first choice. Solid blue is an acceptable alternative. If you don't own either a white or blue shirt, go out and buy some. There is no short cut here, and if you get the job you will probably need more than one anyway. The material must be plain or button down cotton, polyesters or nylon are out.

Shoes

Polished leather-lace up black or dark brown shoes are best. Stay away from outlandish styles with buckles or chains. Never wear white or tan shoes. Avoid run down heels or holes in the soles.

Socks

Wear comfortable dark socks. Depending on the outfit use black, dark gray, dark blue, but never white.

Ties

Ties can make a statement about who you are. Conservative silk ties are best. Be sure that ties coordinate well with the suit and avoid flashy patterns; the interview is not a time to prove what an individualist you are. Make sure the knot is neat and the tie comes to the top of your belt or slacks. The interviewer need not see your stomach. Be sure the tie is wrinkle free.

Belts

Wear a dark belt preferably black or conservative in style. It should have a clean functional buckle.

Women: Suggested Dress Code

Suits

Lean toward the conservative side with skirted suits and use the same colors as men. A power suit is a skirts suit, not a pant suit. Colors like brown, camel or beige are feasible. We encourage you to dress for the position and know the employer. Fashion, advertising and the arts often allow more creativity than more traditional careers such as finance, law and accounting which favor conformity. The hierarchy of conservative dress goes: dark suit, dress with dark jacket, and mixed color skirt and blazer. Project a professional image; even during “dress down” days you should still look professional.

Shoes

Shoes should be conservative; low to medium heels are best. Keep shoes cleaned and polished.

Accessories

Make-up should enhance your appearance. Avoid wearing any clothing, accessories or jewelry which might distract or draw attention to yourself rather than reinforcing your look as a professional. If you wear nail polish, make sure it’s a subtle color and neatly done. Hair should be freshly cleaned and neatly styled. Long hair should be worn as conservatively as possible. Earrings should look conservative.

Dress For Success For Both Men & Women

If you dress more formally you may feel more comfortable and prepared for an important interview. Rumpled and wrinkled clothing is out. Shoes should be polished, not scuffed, and coordinated with your outfit. Fly-away hair or bizarre haircuts are out; make sure it is neat and well groomed. Avoid wearing cologne or perfume. Also, for men if you wear an earring; remove it before the meeting. Your hands and nails should be clean and trimmed. After you secure the job, you can dress less conservatively. For example, if you are applying for a teaching position, few will expect you will wear a formal suit each day on the job. If you have doubts about what you are considering wearing, then don’t wear it; err on the side of conservatism. Feel free to touch base with a Career Consultant from Career Services to discuss your doubts.

Dress not for where you are but for where you want to be. An interview isn’t a beauty contest, but how you dress and your overall appearance almost always get noticed by the interviewer. Don’t give the interviewer a chance to rule you out because you didn’t feel like ironing your shirt or polishing your shoes. Dress in a business-like professional manner, and you will be sure to fit in wherever you interview.

Business Casual

At last count, over 70% of American firms allowed some form of casual attire at least once a week, including GE and IBM. Many students will have a chance to work in situations where the dress code is more relaxed. The words “business casual” are subject to multiple interpretations depending on the environment. “Business or workplace casual” means charcoal pants and a white oxford button down shirt and a quality pair of casual shoes for men. A banded-collar shirt is another good staple that goes well with blazers and vests. Another option is a denim shirt with a sporty tie. Choose your casual attire carefully, and use your common sense when dressing for work; looking neat should be a priority. Avoid t-shirts, baseball caps, sunglasses and don’t wear sneakers unless it’s the norm. Sneakers no matter how clean and new are considered inappropriate for most employers. Don’t take “casual dress” too literally. You’re better off dressing a bit on the conservative side than on taking a gamble only to find out that your idea of casual does not match that of your employer.

-Thanks to Union College