



**BUSINESS CAREER CENTER**  
University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Business



# Dress for Success

*Including:*

Types of Business Attire

Choices for Business Professional Dress

Choices for Business Casual Dress

Items to Avoid

Shop Smart



# Types of Business Attire

**Business Professional:** When attending professional events such as career fairs or interviews, making a first impression is vital. For these events, wearing *business professional* dress is the most appropriate form of attire. Professional dress, for men, simply means a dark business suit, conservative dress shirt worn with a tie, and shined dress shoes. For women, professional dress means a dark skirted or pants suit, conservative dress shirt, hosiery and pumps (closed toe with a heel).

**Note:** No matter what the recruiter wears for your interview or what the attire is in the work environment for the job you are interviewing for, the appropriate attire for you as a student and interviewee (unless otherwise indicated) is business professional. Remember, the recruiter already works for the company --YOU are the one being evaluated. Wearing business professional attire shows that you take the interview or event seriously.

**Business Casual:** For less formal events, like employer information sessions, students may choose to wear *business casual* dress. Business casual means neat and appropriate dress that is classic rather than trendy. For men, business casual means suit pants or khaki type pants, typically a button-down collared or polo shirt (tie is optional and a jacket can also be appropriate), and traditional black or brown shoes. Business casual for women means classic dress pants, a well-pressed dress shirt or blouse (traditional button-down, collared is often appropriate), and a coordinating dress shoe. Also acceptable is a skirt and blouse or dress.

**Student Attire:** For events such as our Business Basics Seminar Series, students may wear their normal everyday attire (unless otherwise indicated). However, this still means looking neat and put-together. Wearing jeans is acceptable, but leave your sweatpants at home.

**Note:** Asking the recruiter on appropriate attire for an event is always a good safeguard against dressing too formally or too casually.

**Important at Any Level:** Your clothes must always be clean, pressed and in good condition. Proper fit is the key to any look you choose.

## Examples of Common Business Attire for Specific Situations (unless otherwise stated)

Business Professional	Business Casual	Student Attire
Interviews	Employer Information Session	Business Basics Seminar Series (except "Bite This")
Site Visits	Etiquette Dinners ("Bite This")	BCC Orientation Sessions
Career Fairs	"Mocks by Majors" (mock interview program)	

# Choices in Women's Attire

Item	Business <i>Professional</i>	Item	Business <i>Casual</i>
<b>Suit</b>	Conservative well-pressed – black, navy, gray, brown – suit is best. Choose either a skirted or pants suit, whichever you are more comfortable in.*	<b>Pants</b>	Conservative pressed dress pants in a dark color.
<b>Blouse</b>	Neat, pressed, and clean traditional button-down, collared or simple round neckline shirt in conservative and basic colors such as white or light pastel.	<b>Blouse</b>	Well-pressed button-down, collared dress shirt or blouse. Avoid anything revealing and stick to conservative colors.
<b>Shoes</b>	Clean and presentable dress shoe in an appropriate color matching your suit. Heels are not required but a classic pump is recommended for a professional look. Avoid flashy shoes such as stilettos or platforms.	<b>Shoes</b>	Clean and presentable dress shoe in an appropriate color matching your pants.
<b>Hosiery</b>	Hosiery must be worn with skirted suits and is highly encouraged with pants suits as well. Choose a basic color in a sheer style (no patterns) that is appropriate with your suit color. Keep an extra pair handy as they snag easily.	<b>Hosiery</b>	Wearing hosiery is not required with pants; however, wearing a color coordinating sock is appropriate with your dress shoe.
<b>Accessories &amp; Grooming</b>	If carrying a purse, keep it small and in a color that matches your attire. Avoid distracting jewelry and keep it simple. Stay away from flashy make-up and fingernail polish. Make sure to be well-groomed and have your clothes freshly pressed. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes. Fresh breath is always appreciated; however, choose a mint versus gum.	<b>Accessories &amp; Grooming</b>	Keep things simple and tasteful. No flashy jewelry, makeup, strong perfume, etc. Avoid wearing facial/body piercings, which can be distracting. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes. Fresh breath is always appreciated; however, choose a mint versus gum.

\* **NOTE:** Make sure that the skirt length is to the knee when standing. Also, make sure the suit is not too tight and you can sit and move comfortably. Many popular trends feature fashionable suits that are tightly fitted, short in length, low cut tops, and stiletto heels. However, keep in mind that what is fashionable isn't always appropriate for business. Being conservative is the best way to dress.

## *Business Professional*



## *Business Casual*



# Choices in Men's Attire

Item	Business <i>Professional</i>	Item	Business <i>Casual</i>
<b>Suit</b>	Conservative well-pressed - black, navy, gray- suit is best. Sleeves of the jacket should extend to the hand. Suit pants should typically match the jacket. Make sure to remove all exterior tags.	<b>Pants</b>	Conservative pressed suit pants, Dockers, or khakis are typical.
<b>Shirt</b>	Neat, pressed, and clean traditional long-sleeved button-down collared shirt in conservative and solid colors; avoid bright colors and patterns.	<b>Shirt</b>	Well-pressed button-down collared dress shirt or polo shirt; stick to conservative colors. A sports coat is optional.
<b>Tie</b>	Choose a good quality (often silk) tie in a conservative color and/or pattern that is properly tied*. Avoid wearing flashy and bold patterns or character prints that are distracting.	<b>Sports Coat</b>	Wearing a sports coat (suit jacket) is sometimes appropriate for business casual; if wearing a jacket, no tie is needed.
		<b>Tie</b>	A tie is typically not necessary.
<b>Shoes</b>	Clean and shined dress shoe, in a traditional black or brown, coordinating with your suit. Wear dress socks in a coordinated color with your suit.	<b>Shoes</b>	Traditional black or brown leather, clean and shined dress shoe that coordinates with your shirt and pants. Wear dress socks in a coordinated color with your pants and shoes.
<b>Accessories &amp; Grooming</b>	Belts should always be worn and also match your suit and shoes. If wearing a watch, make sure it is conservative. Avoid wearing facial/body piercings, which can be distracting. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes. Wear minimal cologne and have a neat and polished appearance. The focus should be on your answers, not your appearance. Fresh breath is always appreciated; however, choose a mint versus gum.	<b>Accessories &amp; Grooming</b>	Keep things simple and tasteful. Have hair controlled and wear minimal cologne. Avoid wearing facial/body piercings, which can be distracting. Belts should always be worn and match your shoes. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes, etc. The focus should be on your answers, not your appearance. Fresh breath is always appreciated; however, choose a mint versus gum.

**\*NOTE:** Don't know how to tie a tie? Please visit <http://www.tie-a-tie.net/> or <http://www.totieatie.com/> which provides easy-to-follow diagrams as well as simple step-by-step instructions to make sure your tie looks great.

**The Button Rule** - When wearing a two or three button suit jacket or sports coat, remember the *Button Rule*. When standing, depending on the number of buttons, button either the top or top two buttons - leaving the bottom button undone. When seated, all buttons can be undone.

## Business Professional



## Business Casual



# Items to Avoid

## Women

TOPS	PANTS	COLOR	SHOES	Accessories/ Grooming
Tank Tops	Jeans	Bright colors	Sandals/Flip-Flops	Strong, Over-Powering Perfume
Cropped tops	Leggings	Loud Prints	Sneakers	Bright Colored Make-up/Nail Polish
T-shirts w/ slogans	Shorts/Short Skirts	Gimmicky styles, outdated fads	Hiking boots/Uggs	Holes in Hosiery
Low-cut necklines	Jogging pants/Workout Clothes	Faded colors	Stiletto heels	Body/Facial Piercings; Visible Tattoos



## Men

TOPS	PANTS	COLOR	SHOES	Accessories/ Grooming
Tank tops/Muscle Shirts	Jeans	Bright colors	Sandals/Flip-Flops	Strong, Over-Powering Cologne
Untucked shirts	Sweatpants/Workout Clothes	Loud prints	Athletic tennis shoes	Messy, Uncontrolled Hair
T-shirts w/ logos and slogans	Shorts	Faded colors	Hiking boots	Dirty Hands and Fingernails
Unpressed shirts	Sloppy and oversized pants	Outdated trends	Work boots	Body/Facial Piercings; Visible Tattoos



# Shop Smart



- **Buy clothing that can be used in multiple settings;** classic and well made items can be used for business professional and business casual situations.
- **Choose neutral and classic items,** such as a pair of black pants which can be worn with a variety of shirts, ties, and jackets.
- **Select clothing items that are made of quality and easy to maintain fabrics,** which can also travel well; avoid items made of linen, for example.
- For **women,** choosing to **purchase a three-piece suit** is always a good option because you can alternate between a skirt or pants look.
- For **men,** having only one or two suits is fine; you can **vary your look by wearing different shirts and ties.**
- **Avoid purchasing trendy items** that will go out of style easily and quickly; choose classic styles that are professional and timeless.
- **You don't need to shop for your business attire at name brand, expensive stores;** quality and professional items can easily be found at Target, JC Penney, Kohl's, Sears, Macy's, Men's Warehouse, and other common retail locations, discount stores, and department stores.
- **Plan ahead;** don't wait until the last minute to purchase your professional business attire. Stores have great sales on attire throughout the year.



*You only have one chance to make  
a great first impression.*

*A first impression can make or break an interview;  
therefore, don't treat these professional opportunities  
like fashion shows but rather a place to  
"dress to impress."*