

# Dress for Success!



*career*tech

**RCCTA** Resource Center for  
CareerTech Advancement

<https://www.okcareertech.org/educators/resource-center>



# Dress for Success



You may know someone who dressed inappropriately for an event, such as a party. Much of the time, a mismatch between the event and your clothing is not a big deal. For job interview, it really matters. As they say, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. The way you look when you enter an interview is the employer's first clue about who you are. Here are some guidelines to follow.

## Clothing

The style of clothing you wear, the color, and even the way it fits can all create a positive or negative impact when you walk through the interviewer's door. If your resume creates a first impression in 30 seconds or less, you have even less time to make a good impression in a

face-to-face encounter. Once that impression is made, it can be permanent. A good rule of thumb is to dress a little more nicely than you would on the job for which you are applying. Be slightly more conservative with styles and colors. If you interview with an employer where all of the employees wear dresses and pumps or suits and ties, then you should do the same. Simply try to dress like the employees do and you should fit in nicely.

For jobs where the normal dress is jeans and casual shoes, men may interview in dark-colored casual slacks and a button-down or sport shirt (not a T-shirt). Women may wear a skirt and blouse or even nice slacks. These clothes are a bit dressier and more conservative than what the employees wear and they show your respect for the employer.



*It is acceptable to ask the person who schedules your interview about the appropriate dress code for the interview.*



## What Men Should Wear

Men should wear dark slacks, staying with navy blue, black, or dark gray. Avoid dark green, burgundy, and light or pastel colors. A white or light-color dress shirt, either solid or with small stripes, should be worn with a tie that matches or that coordinates with the slacks (stay away from out-of-style tie widths). A suit jacket or coordinating sport coat is a good idea for many situations, but might appear "overdressed" for some jobs outside of an office environment. If jeans are appropriate for your interview, make certain they are in good shape and are not faded or have holes or frayed edges.

Men should wear dress shoes that are clean and well-polished (including the heels). The color of your shoes and belt should coordinate with the rest of your clothes. Black is always appropriate. Socks are not optional and should be a dark color that matches your slacks. Stay away from white socks and athletic shoes (even black ones). Avoid wearing patterned or plaid jackets or slacks. Be sure your slacks are long enough to brush the top





of your shoes and that sleeves, if long, cover your wrists but not your knuckles. If your pants or the sleeves of your jacket are too long, have them altered or hemmed. If you have doubts about your wardrobe, check with a job placement office, an instructor, or someone you trust for fashion advice.



### *What Women Should Wear*

*For women, the rules are similar. You should wear a suit or a skirt, blouse, and jacket or sweater combination. A tailored, simple dress is also acceptable, but stay away from lightweight or clingy fabrics. Choose a fabric that will not wrinkle easily. Conservative colors are best. Pastel blouses can accent a dark suit, but pastel dresses aren't the best choice. If the clothing you select has a pattern, it should be very subtle. Colors to avoid include red, bright green, purple, bright yellow or orange, and turquoise blue. Leave anything with ruffles, lace, and frills at home; they may be appropriate for social occasions, but they appear less than business-like during an interview. For the same reason, avoid low-cut blouses or sheer fabrics.*



*Women should stay away from patterned hose or anything in a shade that is not close to their skin tone. You should wear hose if you are wearing a dress or skirt, and they should match your own skin tone as closely as possible. Your best bet in shoes is a pump in a basic color with a low to medium heel. Open-toed shoes may appear too casual. Also, heels that are too high can make it harder to walk and the last thing you want is to stumble or fall. A portfolio or briefcase is better than a purse, if you have one, and can hold a few essential items. Pay attention to details such as whether a portfolio is scuffed or frayed around the edges. Make sure your shoes are clean and polished.*

### *Tips for Both*

You should wear clothing that is comfortable, not too tight or too baggy, and not too long nor too short. Wear something that will make you feel good about yourself, not self-conscious or uncomfortable, during the interview. If you are uncomfortable, it shows—whether you realize it or not.

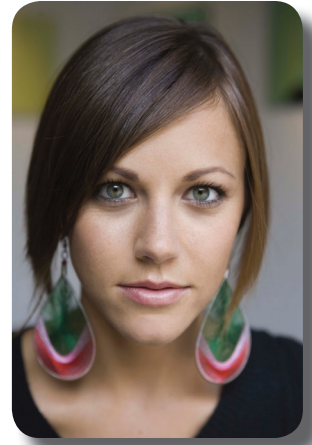
Learn about the employer before the interview. Find out how the employees dress for the position you are interested in. Once you know this, you can decide what to wear for the interview. Even if the employer's dress code is casual or trendy, your interview clothing should not be. Always avoid bright colors, trendy fashions, logos, cartoon/comic ties, loud or wild patterns, or visible brand names.

### *Accessories*

Jewelry can accentuate an outfit or become a distraction. Again, the thing to remember is to dress conservatively. Some employers are also more conservative than others when it comes to their dress code. It might be better to avoid most jewelry or body metal until you are more aware of the employer's culture and policies.



For women, earrings are a good option for accessorizing, as long as they are simple and small. Avoid large or noisy earrings. In fact, make sure any jewelry is quiet; if it jingles or makes noise, it can distract the interviewer from what you are saying. A single necklace is fine if it is simple and doesn't distract or detract from your appearance. For example, a simple choker, black beaded necklace, or silver/gold drop should be fine. Don't wear more than 1-2 rings; more than that can be distracting. Bracelets and facial jewelry are not recommended for women or men. A nice watch is fine, though. One ring per hand is okay for guys.



### *Grooming*

Cleanliness is essential for interviewing. That not only means a shower or bath, but that your hair is clean, your nails are clean and trimmed or filed, your teeth are brushed, and your breath is fresh. Men should have a clean-shaven face or a neatly trimmed beard or mustache. Men should also get regular haircuts while job hunting. Women should style their hair neatly and conservatively (there's that word again). Where hairstyle is concerned, try to look the part for the job you want to get. Your after-shave, cologne,

or perfume should never announce your arrival before you enter the room. In fact, with so many people having allergies, it is probably wise to skip your favorite scent for the interview. Clean is the best scent, and a good deodorant is your best insurance.

Use makeup only to enhance your features, not to call attention to any particular feature. If it is properly applied, makeup should not be easily noticed. Of course, you may choose not to use cosmetics at all. Your goal during an interview is to enhance and accentuate, not to overwhelm. Keep your eye shadow subtle, not neon; keep eyeliner narrow and don't extend it past the corner of your eye; blend your blush so there is never a noticeable "edge" and it looks like a natural glow; and choose a shade of lipstick that is more subtle than bold and pulls your look together.



For fingernails, clear polish or a natural look on neatly manicured nails of reasonable length is always a good choice. If clear polish gets chipped on the way to the interview, it will likely go unnoticed, but a chip on colored polish can make you self-conscious. Clear also goes with everything, so a last-minute wardrobe change will not cause a problem. Stay away from bright or bold colors, patterns, nail painting, and accessories; they draw attention to your nails and away from what you have to offer as a future employee.



## *Top Mistakes People Make*

Avoid repeating these mistakes other people have made when showing up for a job interview:

- Noisy jewelry, such as jingly earrings, bracelets, or necklaces
- Facial jewelry
- Out-of-date styles
- Shoes with open toes or no backs (too casual for an interview)
- Bare legs (wear hose or socks, no matter the season)
- Unusual nails, such as very long nails, poorly trimmed nails, and bold nail polish
- Clothes that are too short—skirts, capris, leggings, or pants (pants should reach the top of your shoes)
- Leather jackets (including a leather blazer)
- Turtlenecks (a shirt and tie are probably the best choices, or a shirt with a collar for a more casual environment)
- Trendy or printed purses or portfolios (a conservative portfolio, briefcase, or purse is better)



It is not really necessary to go out and buy a new wardrobe or turn yourself into a different person than you are right now. You may already have the “right” clothes in your closet, and might need to invest in only one shirt or one pair of slacks. You can wear the same suit for multiple interviews with the same employer by changing things up a bit with a different shirt or blouse, tie, jewelry, or scarf. Always make sure your outfit is clean and pressed for each wearing and that it fits well.

When you look good, you tend to feel better about yourself and it shows from the inside out. Follow the guidelines above, be confident in your abilities, and make a great first impression!

