Career Central™ Advice

Dress for Success: Women

When interviewing, dress for the position you want, not for the job you have.

Clothing is non-verbal communication.

Clothes say a lot about you: Your values, economic status, savviness, and more. So when interviewing, how do you keep your own individual style and personality while still being seen as a good fit for the company?

Keep it professional. Avoid frayed, wrinkled, or soiled clothing. Avoid clothes that are too short, tight, baggy, boldly colored, revealing, or trendy. No flashy jewelry. Also, most companies frown on visible tattoos, body piercings, and unusual hair coloring and styles.

Back to basics.

Begin with the basics: well-styled, understated outfits. Nothing provocative or sexy. Start with a canvas of grays and blacks that look good and fit well. Classic, conservative skirt suits are always the safest route. Even if business casual is the company code, it's better to be over- rather than underdressed for the interview. Skirts should be about knee-length. Wear neutral toned hose for a well-groomed look even if it's warm outside.

Research the company: Some places are sexist when it comes to pantsuits at interviews. Otherwise, these outfits make good wardrobe foundations and alternatives to the formal suit. Coordinate the above with a simple white, ivory, or business blue blouse. Don't accessorize to excess, only for a finished look. Keep the focus on your abilities, not your attire. And whenever possible, buy quality, versatile fabric like wool. It lasts longer, looks better, and breathes for comfort.

You can put together a good interview ensemble without breaking the bank by setting and sticking to a realistic budget. Observe and analyze others. Enlist the input of a sales associate, family member, or friend to guide and help you work within your budget. Consider consignment shops that offer professional and quality attire.

The color of success.

Where corporate palettes are not necessary, choose garment colors that flatter your features and complement your skin tones. If it's rainy or dark outside, consider a silk accent scarf or broach to highlight your face and brighten the day for a more memorable effect.

Let's makeup.

Use understated makeup to gently enhance your look, not devour it. Save the raccoon eyes mascara for after-hours fun. Regarding perfume, don't set your atomizer on "stun." Some people are allergic to perfume, so try a lightly scented bath soap instead.

Nails hammered.

Killer-length, brightly decorated fingernails may make for great conversation at parties, but can draw negative attention during an interview or in the corporate workplace. Modest manicures work best.

Baubles, bangles, and beads.

Think conservative and subtle: Jewelry should complement and enhance for a polished look. Nor should jewelry be audible, so avoid bangles that jangle and distract.

When interviewing, keep it simple; showcase your sense of style by reducing clutter. When in doubt, remember that less is more.

Scarves, handbags, and shoes.

Scarves can customize your basic wardrobe with a quick dash of color and texture. Shoes and handbags should match up and be stylish but simple. Wear closed toe shoes with flat or moderate 1 1/2" heels. Choose a briefcase or portfolio in place of a purse.

Know the company's culture. After all, you are joining a group.

Remember the saying, "When in Rome...."

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in a nutshell:

Remember, for an interview it is better to follow this standard dress code and create a good first impression:

- **Clean, pressed suit or dress that fits; tailor if needed.**
- **Classic or conservative styles and colors**
- **Don't accessorize to excess**
- **Polished dark shoes**
- **Minimal perfume and make-up**
- **Deodorant / anti-perspirant**
- **Manicured nails**
- **Avoid trends & underwear lines**
- **Neat, tidy, comfortable hairdo**

Your appearance makes a statement. Be sure it's the right one.

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