DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Professional dress is not just about wearing nice clothes; your clothing, accessories, and even scent all work together to help you make a first impression on a potential employer or contact. In any setting where you may be adding to your professional network or talking to someone who may want to hire you, you need to be aware of your appearance. You cannot underestimate the power of a good (or bad) first impression.

Use the below information as a guide for dressing in professional settings. If you have any questions about a particular outfit or professional dress in general, feel free to stop by the Career Services office and ask – we want to make sure you make the best first impression you can.

WHEN TO DRESS PROFESSIONALLY

Professional dress is a necessity for interviews, information sessions, job fairs, the annual Etiquette Dinner, and any event where you will be networking with potential employers. Some employers will be clear about dress for their events, but many will expect professional dress without stating it. When in doubt, dress up. Dressing up even when others are dressed casually will make you stand out positively. Even if your chosen field normally does not require professional dress day-to-day, it is best to dress up for all job-seeking activities.

DRESSING WELL ON A BUDGET

A nice suit and pair of shoes are generally a good investment for job seekers. However, not everyone can afford these things. Consignment stores and thrift stores (think Goodwill or Salvation Army) can offer clothing and shoes in good condition at low prices. Your clothing does not have to be from a designer brand, either. Quality, wrinkle-resistant shirts and pants can be purchased at Target at a lower price than department stores, for example.

PROFESSIONAL DRESS GUIDELINES FOR ALL

- **Laundry:** You may be attending many professional events in a matter of days – this does not mean you can wear the same clothes over and over again if they are dirty! Wash and iron your clothes. Make sure everything you wear in professional settings is clean and wrinkle-free.
- **Cleanliness:** This might be obvious, but make sure you are freshly bathed, have fresh breath, and use deodorant. Avoid fragrances of any kind (cologne, perfume, etc.). If you are a smoker, make sure your clothes do not smell of cigarette smoke.
- **Fit:** Make sure your clothes fit! Clothing should not be too loose or too tight.
- **Tattoos:** Visible tattoos should be covered.
- **Inclement weather:** The Oklahoma weather can be unpredictable at times. Check the weather before your interview or event and make sure to carry an umbrella if rain is predicted. Wear a conservative coat and carry a professional-looking tote bag with your dress shoes and portfolio. Once at your destination, change your shoes in the restroom and ask the person at the front desk for the best place to leave your bag and coat.
- **Smart Watches/Fitness Trackers:** Smart wearable devices are becoming more common. It is best to keep these at home while in professional settings. You do not want them to go off in the middle of an interview or be a distraction while you are trying to speak to an employer.
• **Bags:** Purses or backpacks should be kept at home or left in a designated area at job fairs and in our office. Carry a portfolio instead. A TU portfolio from the bookstore is great, but any solid black portfolio works well.

**GUIDELINES FOR MEN**

• **Suit:** A traditional dark-colored (black, navy, grey) suit in either a solid or subtle pin-stripe. A sport coat or blazer with slacks can be appropriate in some situations, including our Etiquette Dinner.

• **Shirt:** White or solid blue long sleeved cotton dress shirt with a collar. A bit more casual look includes patterned/colored shirts and a button down collar. Cotton or cotton-blend shirts are best.

• **Socks:** Socks are a must. Stick with dark colors and make sure they are long enough to cover your legs while sitting, standing, crossing your legs, etc. Colored and patterned socks are becoming more and more common, but these are best kept at home until you know the employer’s dress code.

• **Shoes:** Leather lace-up or slip-on shoes (standard styles are oxfords or penny/tassel loafers). Black and brown are standard colors. Shoes should be clean and polished.

• **Belt:** A black or brown dress belt without a large buckle. The belt should match your shoes.

• **Necktie:** A tie is a must. Your tie should be conservative, either a solid color or one with small patterns or stripes. Colorful, patterned ties, ties with logos or large illustrations, and bow ties should be avoided. Just like socks, keep these at home until you know your employer’s dress code. A NOTE ON TYING A TIE: Your knot should be a standard one – the half Windsor knot is great. If you don’t know how to tie one, watch this video. The tie should be centered on your neck and the bottom of the tie should just reach your belt.

• **Hair/Nails:** Clean and professionally cut or trimmed. It is normally best to shave facial hair for professional interactions – you will not know if facial hair is OK with an employer unless they directly tell you or you begin working there. Nails should be clean and trimmed as well.

• **Accessories:** Be conservative with accessories. If watches and/or cufflinks are worn, keep them simple, not flashy. Wedding bands and class rings should be fine.

**GUIDELINES FOR WOMEN**

• **Suits:** A traditional dark-colored (black, navy, grey) suit in either a solid or subtle pin-stripe is recommended for most situations. Skirts should hit the middle of or below the knee. Pants can be worn, capris cannot. In more casual settings, such as our Etiquette Dinner, jackets and pants/skirts do not have to be the same color, but should still coordinate well. More casual settings also allow for a light sweater to be worn in lieu of a jacket or no jacket at all.

• **Shirts:** A solid light colored blouse or light sweater are ideal for conservative professional settings, like interviews. Sleeveless blouses should only be worn underneath a jacket. More casual settings, such as our Etiquette Dinner, allow for more colors and patterns to be worn.

• **Hosiery:** Light, natural color, plain style without patterns work best in most, if not all, situations.

• **Shoes:** Conservative, low to medium heels are ideal – closed toes and no straps. Color-wise, shoes should complement the color & style of the interview suit. Shoes should be clean and polished. Flats are acceptable in more casual settings such as the Etiquette Dinner.

• **Hair:** Clean and neatly styled. Long hair should be worn as conservatively as possible.
- **Makeup:** Natural looking and conservative. Neutral or clear nail polish on clean and manicured nails.
- **Accessories:** Be conservative with accessories. One conservative, non-dangling earring per ear, one ring per hand. A small necklace and simple watch are fine as well. More casual settings allow for brighter and bigger pieces of jewelry, but these are best kept at home until you know the employer’s dress code.

**BUSINESS CASUAL**

Business casual is often thrown around loosely with the user of the term not being clear about what they actually expect. Generally, business casual means that a suit is not required. It could still mean that a jacket and slacks/skirt are requested, or it could mean khakis and a polo shirt. If you’re in doubt or not familiar with the environment or culture yet, dressing up is still the best option.