

Your Appearance & Behavior Matter:

PROFESSIONAL IMAGE



Professional Image and Dress



Identify the Clothing You Need for Work The first step in determining how to dress for work is finding out if your company (or the company you would like to work for) has a dress code. A dress code is a policy that addresses the standard of acceptable attire in a specific workplace. A dress code typically addresses issues such as required attire, uniforms, shoes, undergarments, body art, and in some workplaces hairstyles.

An organization's leaders often put these policies into place to ensure the safety of employees and customers alike, particularly in industries where manufacturing equipment or health is a factor (such as in the food service or healthcare industries).

After you've determined what your organization considers proper attire, assess your current wardrobe and identify any essential articles of clothing (staples) that you still need (such as blouses, ties, shoes, or a suit coat). Then identify your own budget. You may or may not have money to spend on missing pieces in your wardrobe.

Professional Image and Dress (cont.)

You don't need to invest a lot of money in a workplace wardrobe.

Start with basic pieces and keep them conservative. For women, a nice pair of dress slacks, a skirt, a dress, and a blazer all in solid dark colors are best. (You will rarely go wrong with black; it hides most dirt and looks good with every complexion.) You can add your own style to these items by including a print blouse, scarf, or jewelry. For men, a dark suit with matching pants and blazer is best.



You can purchase these items inexpensively at department or discount stores. You can also find many of these wardrobe essentials on the racks of second-hand clothing stores! If you purchase "gently used" items, you should wash or dry-clean the items before wearing them to remove any unwanted dirt or lingering odors.

Casual Work Environments

Some organizations allow more relaxed dress codes where items such as khakis, jeans, or casual shirts are acceptable. If you work in a casual environment, adjust your wardrobe while still maintaining a neat and professional appearance. On your first day, it is usually better to dress slightly more formally until you understand the company's expectations. As you become familiar with the culture, you can adapt your style while still following workplace guidelines.

Choose clothing that is comfortable, well fitting, and durable. Fabrics such as polyester blends or rayon often hold their shape better and require less maintenance than cotton. Regardless of the dress code, keep your clothing clean, wrinkle free, and free of strong odors.



Things to Keep in Mind

1 Personal Hygiene

Good hygiene is essential in every workplace. Shower regularly, brush your teeth, and use deodorant. Keep your hair neat, maintain clean and trimmed nails, and limit strong fragrances since some workplaces are scent sensitive. If you smoke, use breath mints or gum afterward to maintain fresh breath.

2 Interview Appearance

When preparing for an interview, it is best to dress conservatively and professionally regardless of the organization's normal dress code. Shoes should be clean and in good condition, and accessories should be simple and minimal. Clothing should fit properly, remain modest, and avoid anything overly tight, revealing, or distracting. Tattoos and body piercings should be covered if possible, and makeup or grooming should appear natural and professional.

3 Casual Workplace Guidelines

Even in relaxed workplaces, some clothing is generally considered inappropriate. Avoid items such as athletic wear, clothing with holes or offensive graphics, pajamas, or revealing outfits. Casual does not mean careless. Maintaining a clean and polished appearance helps demonstrate professionalism.

Workplace Events

Employees are sometimes invited to company functions such as holiday gatherings, award ceremonies, conferences, or networking events. Even though these occasions may feel more relaxed than a normal workday, it is important to remember that you are still representing yourself and your organization. Dressing appropriately and maintaining professional behavior helps create a positive impression.

When selecting attire for these events, it is best to choose conservative and polished clothing. Event invitations will often include a dress code that provides guidance on what is expected. Three common dress categories include:

- **Black-Tie:** This is the most formal dress standard. Women typically wear long evening gowns, while men wear tuxedos or very formal suits. These events are usually formal dinners, galas, or award ceremonies.
- **Semi-Formal:** This level of attire is professional but slightly less formal than black-tie. During daytime events, women may wear a business dress or professional outfit, while evening events may call for a dress suitable for a formal dinner. Men typically wear a dark suit and tie.
- **Casual:** Casual dress still requires a neat and professional appearance. Women may wear dress pants with a blouse or a casual dress, while men may wear khakis with a polo shirt or a long-sleeve dress shirt without a tie.

Regardless of the dress code, it is always wise to choose clothing that is clean, well fitting, and appropriate for the setting. If you are unsure about the expectations, dressing slightly more formally is usually the safest option. Additionally, remember that professional conduct still applies at workplace events. Enjoy the occasion, but maintain respect, good judgment, and professionalism throughout the event.



YOUR APPEARANCE & BEHAVIOR MATTER: PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

CONNECT WITH US
ON SOCIAL MEDIA



<https://linktr.ee/wkuacdc>



careerhelp@wku.edu