



# Dressing for Success

“Dressing for success may sound intimidating, expensive, and a bit vain; however, keep in mind that your presentation creates credibility.”

Michelle Moore, *Selling Simplified*



All drawings in this guide by **Emma Kerr '19**.



## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing your audience will help you be successful whether you're interviewing with a laid-back startup or attending a formal networking cocktail hour. Always *do your research beforehand*—if the company or event has a designated dress code, stick to it.

- What industry or industries are you interested in?
- What kinds of companies are you interviewing with?
- What is the office culture like at organizations where you want to work?

Even if the office environment is casual, you should always dress professionally for an interview, no matter your industries of interest. You haven't earned the right to wear shorts and sandals yet. But what does "dress professionally" really mean? How is interview dress different from business casual or casual? **Read on!**

## DRESS GUIDELINES

We didn't include **black tie**, **white tie**, or **semiformal attire** in this guide, because we typically don't receive questions about those types of dress. If you find yourself in a situation where any of these dress codes is required, come into the Career Center or consult the internet for help.

**Note:** You'll notice that some of the pieces of clothing appear in multiple sections, and of course there are more options than what's shown here. You can always mix nicer items with your business casual or casual pieces to adjust for the environment that you're in—if you have a few quality business basics, you can use them to create business casual looks with other pieces in your wardrobe. Get creative!

*\*Look up any of the terms in this guide for images and shopping ideas.*

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Keep in mind that this guide was never intended to cover every clothing option or every situation—it is only meant to give you ideas about what to wear and when to wear it. Take good care of your professional clothing, and it will last long and serve you well. If you have questions about an outfit, dress code, or other situation, come see us at the Career Center.

*Whatever you wear, remember to wear it with confidence!*



Beyoncé / Instagram

**Thanks for reading this guide. If you want feedback on an interview outfit, put it on and come in and see us!**

## Business Professional (Interview)

Below are suggestions for clothing that would be appropriate in a job interview. Keep in mind that these are not the *only* appropriate pieces out there. Think suits, closed-toe shoes, no shorts, standard ties, subdued jewelry, and skirts or dresses at least knee-length. Keep your color palette neutral; black, brown, and navy suits are easy to pair with interesting accessories and tops. A belt is a good idea if you're wearing pants.





## Business Professional (Interview)



In addition to mainstream options, there are numerous online shops that produce androgynous clothing and style blogs where you can find ideas.

**Androgyny:** Menswear-inspired button-down shirts that better fit female bodies.

**HauteButch:** A fashion and footwear brand that specializes in masculine apparel for women and trans men.

**Qwear:** Style advice for queer, androgynous, trans, and gender-non-conforming individuals.

**Topman:** A UK men's fashion retailer that is known to provide fits and sizes that also cater to women.

**Wildfang:** "Clothing for tomboys," here to "liberate menswear one bowtie at a time."

Unfortunately, these kinds of retailers typically don't run cheap. A more affordable option is **Uniqlo** (online and store in Denver), a Japanese brand that makes good-quality basics in often unisex styles. If we find more affordable options, we'll let you know. In the meantime, if you have ideas, please send them our way!

## Where to Shop

Consider investing in a high-quality suit to serve as your go-to interview outfit. You'll have something that you know looks great on you, and you can focus on preparing for the interview instead of stressing about what you're going to wear.



The **Arc** or **Goodwill** thrift stores are good places to start if you don't want to break the bank.



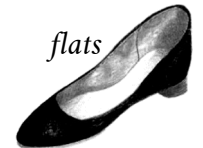
Big department stores like **Kohl's** and **Macy's** have a wide variety of options from moderately priced to more expensive. Keep an eye out for sales, too!



If you're looking for quality items at a discounted price, check out somewhere like **T.J. Maxx** or **Marshalls**. You can also go to a designer or department store to try things on for size, then see if you can find what you liked for cheaper prices online.

## Business Casual

Khaki pants, knit tops and sweaters, sport coats, blazers, and polo shirts are fine for business casual. Tie and coat are optional. You have more leeway here as far as color and pattern, but still keep the fit of your clothing professional. You can always "dress down" your professional pieces for a business casual look; for example, pairing a cream-colored blouse like that shown below with black suit pants.





## Dressy or “Smart” Casual

Dressy casual might be the dress code at a happy hour event. It’s a great look to go with if you want to look nice, but not overdone. Our go-to smart casual outfit is darker jeans (no holes or rips) or pants with a button-up shirt or blouse underneath a blazer. If you arrive somewhere and realize you’re overdressed, you can always take off your blazer or jacket.



*pumps*



*blazer*



*loafers*



*short-sleeve  
button up*



*dark  
jeans*



*polo  
shirt*



*flats*



*kitten  
heels*



*suit jacket*



*cap  
sleeve  
blouse*

## Resources to learn more about where and how your workplace rights are protected:

American Civil Liberties Union

[aclu.org](http://aclu.org)

Equal Employment  
Opportunity Commission

[eoc.gov](http://eoc.gov)

FindLaw

[employment.findlaw.com](http://employment.findlaw.com)

Gender Identity Center  
of Colorado

[gic-colorado.org](http://gic-colorado.org)

Human Rights Campaign  
Corporate Equality Index

[hrc.org/campaigns/  
corporate-equality-index](http://hrc.org/campaigns/corporate-equality-index)

National Center for  
Transgender Equality

[transequality.org](http://transequality.org)

Transgender Law Center

[transgenderlawcenter.org](http://transgenderlawcenter.org)

Transgender Law and  
Policy Institute

[transgenderlaw.org](http://transgenderlaw.org)

US Department of Labor

[dol.gov](http://dol.gov)

Workplace Fairness

[workplacefairness.org](http://workplacefairness.org)

These resources are focused on laws, not on jobs or internships. For job banks, inclusive internship programs, and additional information, visit our online resources web page at [www.coloradocollege.edu/offices/careercenter/jobs/online-resources.html](http://www.coloradocollege.edu/offices/careercenter/jobs/online-resources.html) and call the Career Center to schedule an appointment.

## On Gender Identity and Expression

There is a difference between discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and discrimination on the basis of gender identity, and only some states have laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Even where they exist, these laws are not perfect. Know your rights; **employers should only be asking you questions related to your ability to perform the job function.** For instance, questions about your marital status are illegal.

“Ultimately, you shouldn’t feel pressured to present yourself in a way that doesn’t align with your identity. If you’re worried about being discriminated against, you should consult the Human Rights Campaign website to learn more about discrimination laws in your state, including whether or not you are protected by law and what to do if you feel you have been a victim of discrimination.”

Alison Doyle, “Gender Neutral Interview and Business Clothing.”  
([thebalance.com/gender-neutral-interview-and-business-clothing-2061166](https://thebalance.com/gender-neutral-interview-and-business-clothing-2061166))

In presenting at work or for an interview, **make sure your clothing fits well and is appropriate for the given setting.** If you’re concerned that your gender expression means you risk losing an opportunity, you may have to ask yourself if that’s really an organization you want to work for. We understand, however, that many people aren’t in a financial position to turn a job down. You have to make that choice for yourself, but the Career Center and the Butler Center are here to help you work through those situations.

## Casual

It’s important to know that even if an event calls for casual dress, you shouldn’t show up in ripped, frayed, or stained clothing that you might wear when you’re lounging around your room. So, stay away from things like sweatpants or athletic clothing, and keep the cut of your clothing conservative. Events that might have this dress code include company picnics and other outdoor activities. Sneakers, t-shirts, jeans, sundresses, khaki or Bermuda shorts, and flowy skirts are all great casual options.



## ALWAYS...

- Make sure your clothing **fits you well**.
- **Smile!** Flashing your genuine smile draws people to you and makes you more likable, which in an interview never hurt anybody.
- Look for key pieces for your wardrobe that can do **double duty**, such as a white dress shirt that you can wear under your suit to an interview or with jeans to a dinner or smart casual networking event.
- Practice **good hygiene** – shower before an interview and wear clean clothes, and limit your cologne or perfume.
- Try to avoid buying items that have to be **dry-cleaned**. Dry-cleaning is a huge money suck, so the maintenance of those pieces will be way more expensive.
- Wear clothes that make you feel **confident** and **comfortable**.
- Consider your audience, and again always go with the designated dress code if there is one. They say **it's better to be overdressed than underdressed**—cheesy, we know. But, even if you feel like crawling into a hole because you're wearing a suit and everyone else is in jeans, at least you're standing out at a moment when you look good. **Own it!**

## On Skirt and Dress Length

If you're considering a skirt or dress for work or an interview, put on your whole outfit in advance to see how it looks. **Do some testing, too:**

- Sit down and stand up a few times. Are you comfortable? Does your skirt or dress ride up more than you expected when you sit?
- Walk around with your shoes on. Is it hard to walk or breathe? If you're not comfortable, you'll be focused on that instead of showing the interviewer how great you are for the job.

## On Accessories, Tattoos, and Piercings



Traditional wisdom is that an interview isn't the best time to debut your wacky tie or statement necklace. You can keep it simple without looking boring, though! If traditional ties aren't your style, try a skinny tie. For non-tie alternatives, you can pair a collar necklace or a scarf with a button-up shirt or blouse.

Certain industries are stereotyped as being more open to body modifications than others, but there's no way of knowing for sure based on stereotype alone; every organization is different. That said, we advise that you cover up tattoos and remove visible non-ear piercings when possible for interviews and when you start a job, at least until you have a sense of the organization's culture and have read up on any company policies.

