

Dress for Success!

Dress for Success! Clothing is a way to express yourself in the workplace! The following are general guidelines for professional dress. Always use your best judgement when deciding what to wear to an interview or networking event. Typically, it's best to be cautious – if you are in doubt whether an article of clothing is professional, opt for something you are more certain fits a professional code of dress.

General Tips:

- Wear well-fitting clothing that is stain and wrinkle-free.
- Make sure shoes are clean and avoid sandals.
- If wearing jewelry, avoid very large or bulky items.
- Shorts/skirts/dresses should be at the knee or longer, avoid items that are much shorter.
- Make sure to align with company dress codes for piercings and tattoos.
- Always avoid clothing with profanity, drug, alcohol, political references, or any other potentially offensive imagery or phrases.

Decoding Dress Codes:

Business professional: More formal professional dress, typically worn in more “traditional” industries such as finance, law, and government. May be appropriate for networking events or career fairs.

- Solid, neutral colors. Avoid busy or bright patterns.
- Minimal accessories
- Suits or pantsuits, suits with skirts – typically matching
- Collared, button down shirts or solid color blouses
- Simple ties with basic patterns
- Loafers, oxfords, flats, low heels in neutral colors: black, brown, beige

Business casual: This can be tough to define and can vary based on industry or company culture.

Generally, a business casual outfit includes:

- Slacks or dress pants, khakis, chinos, knee-length skirts or dress
- Blouses, button-down shirts, polo shirts, or sweaters
- Optional: cardigans, blazers, sport coats
- Close toed shoes – loafers, oxfords, dress boots, pumps or flats
- Simple accessories
- Avoid: Flip flops, clothing with holes, very tight or very oversized clothing, shorts, tank tops or strapless shirts (unless paired with a jacket or cardigan), backless or low-cut tops, crop tops

Smart casual: Slightly more casual than business casual! Can also vary by company. Typically not acceptable for an interview, but may be fine for staff once hired. Consider:

- Khakis, linen pants, or jeans free of rips/tears
- Sweaters, button-downs, nice t-shirts free of holes
- Jackets and blazers, especially unstructured or more casual blazers
- Loafers, sneakers, ballet flats, shorter heels – all acceptable.
- As a rule, a mix of casual and professional: if you opt for a more casual shirt, think about wearing dressier shoes. If you're wearing a blazer, a casual sneaker could be a nice contrast.



- **Business formal:** reserved for the most formal settings like ceremonies, benefits, dinners. Similar to “black tie” – suit and tie, formal shoes, full length gowns.

See this guide from Indeed for more details and examples of attire for different levels of professional dress:
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/starting-new-job/guide-to-business-attire>

Legally Speaking:

- In Ohio, and many other states, employers can enforce a dress code or dress-related policies for employees. However, it is illegal for employers to enforce dress policies that unduly affect people based on religion, gender, race, etc.
 - o Legally, Ohio employers can enforce different dress for men and women. However, these codes cannot impose a greater burden on a specific gender. For example, companies cannot have a dress code *only* for women. **Dress policies must apply to all employees and be fair and consistent.**
- According to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, employers must provide reasonable accommodations to employees regarding dress, unless for some reason these accommodations would cause “undue hardship” to the company or raise safety concerns. For example: loose fitting clothing that adheres to religious beliefs may be prohibited in a factory setting where it could pose dangers working with equipment.
- Religious or cultural implications of attire should be discussed with the employer to increase comfort and decrease stigma in the workplace.
- If you feel you have been unfairly targeted in terms of dress code, or your employer is unfairly enforcing a dress code that violates your religious beliefs, review your state’s laws, discuss with Human Resources, and escalate if necessary depending on the situation.
- **More from the Ohio Employment Lawyer’s Association:**
<http://www.employeerights.info/2/oelasmart/dress-codes-grooming>

Career Closet:

- Free, professional clothing is available on the Kent campus for students, staff and faculty! Stop by any of the following locations:
 - o Williamson House – Women’s Center
 - o Career Exploration and Development – Schwartz Center
 - o Business Administration Building – room 211
 - o All pickup sites are open M-F from 9am – 3pm.
- Donations can be made at any location, but large donations should be made at the Schwartz Center.
- More information on the career closet available here: <https://www.kent.edu/careercloset>

A note on virtual professional dress: for virtual interviews, dress as you would for an in-person interview. You may be tempted to only dress professionally from the waist up – do this with caution. You never know if you might need to stand up during a virtual meeting!



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For more information:
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