DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

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Table of Contents
Tips from Emily Post (“Etiquette”) ........................................................................................................... 3
Wardrobe Essentials .................................................................................................................................. 3
Quality Over Quantity ........................................................................................................................... 6
Suits and Separates ................................................................................................................................. 7
Accessories ............................................................................................................................................... 8
Avoid These Common Pitfalls ............................................................................................................... 8
The Art of Business Casual ...................................................................................................................... 9
Overview
Making the transition from college student to professional can be quite a challenge—especially when it comes to wardrobe. But, by starting with the classic basics, you can build a professional wardrobe that will transition between business casual to interview settings.

Tips from Emily Post (“Etiquette”)
The clothing you wear and your overall appearance makes an immediate impression on a potential employer. An investment in one superb ‘interview suit’ is a worthwhile one. In addition:

- Dress conservatively. Suits are appropriate for both men and women. A woman should not wear sheer or tight-fitting clothing.
- Be neat. Make sure your shirt is tucked-in and your shoes polished. No hems or cuffs should be frayed or unraveling. Your hair should be combed and not falling over your face. Women should avoid excessive jewelry and makeup.
- Shoes should be well-heeled, clean, and shined (ladies: no open toes for interviews)
- Jewelry should be at a minimum, tasteful, and not noisy.
- Fingernails should be clean and shaped. Nails should not be too long or polished with bright or strong colors. The best approach is a muted color or a clear, clean look.
- Pantyhose should not have runs. Men’s socks should be long enough to cover their legs if their pant legs ride up when they are sitting down.
- Outerwear (such as a pea coat or trench coat) should be clean and in very good condition.

Wardrobe Essentials
While interviewing attire does not typically vary from field to field, daily work attire might; you will need to consider or research what that will look like in your field. However, here we provide basic wardrobe pieces that will transition well through any position and are appropriate for different scenarios.

Some suggested guidelines for college students when investing in and beginning to build a professional wardrobe include:

- **Men**
  - 2 suits
  - 3-5 dress shirts
  - 1 blazer or sport coat
  - 1 pair dress slacks
  - Appropriate accessories (ties, belts, shoes, socks)

- **Women**
  - 2-3 suits (combination of skirted and pantsuits)
  - 3-4 blouses & dress shirts
  - 2 additional separates (pants typically)
  - Appropriate accessories (shoes, hosiery, limited jewelry)

Dressing For Success Tip:
Choose one color scheme for the various elements of your wardrobe and you’ll be able to mix and match with an unlimited number of possibilities! As you build your wardrobe, you can add more colors for variation.
Here are examples of what men should be on the lookout for when shopping for a professional wardrobe and what items should be avoided.
Here are examples of what women should be on the lookout for when shopping for a professional wardrobe and what items should be avoided.
Quality Over Quantity

Buying quality pieces with a classic style that will last for years is an important aspect of building your professional wardrobe. Therefore, you want to avoid buying cheap fabrics that contain a high amount of spandex or rayon. A wardrobe filled with natural fibers (cotton, wool, linen, etc.) in more likely to last longer and will maintain its quality in the long run. Wearing inexpensive fabrics might also potentially create a negative image of your professionalism in the workplace. Think of suits and business attire as an investment in your career.

Tips for Men

- 100% cotton will give the best thickness and feel; however, ironing and upkeep can be difficult (dry cleaning bills).
- 100% polyester will be too thin, clingy, and revealing.
- 60% cotton/40% polyester (or more cotton) will provide the thickness and feel of cotton while offering the wrinkle resistance of polyester.
- Regular neck sizes range from 14 ½–18” and sleeve lengths from 32–37”. Big and Tall sizes extend to 20” for neck and 38” for sleeve.
- For interview situations, long-sleeved shirts should always be worn. Sleeves should protrude from that jacket approximately ¼”.

Tips for Women

- Blouses should be short- or long-sleeved with appropriate necklines (ones that do not show cleavage or excessive exposed flesh) and fabrics. Silk or rayon will be the most available fabrics.
- Fabric should be ‘flat’, meaning not shiny or glittery in appearance.
- Necklines should coordinate with the style of suit worn (e.g., v-neck, collared).
- Color: when in doubt, wear light or muted shades or designs.

When evaluating quality, look for these key traits:

- Fabric composition: High concentration of natural fibers
- Finish work: Check the seams, hems, buttonholes, pockets for well-made craftsmanship, and for hanging threads. Make sure the product was made to last.
- Lining: Women’s suits and separates should be lined. Men’s jackets should be lined. Men’s pants are often only half-lined or unlined.

Dressing For Success Tip:

Many retailers have quality guarantees. If a product shrinks, falls apart, etc., they will reimburse you even after it is worn!
**Suits and Separates**

Items can be purchased as a full suit or as separates for both men and women.

**Colors:**
Colors in the families of navy, black, gray, brown/tan, and dark green are generally safe and universally flattering choices for suiting.

**Styles:**
- The most classic jacket style for men and women is single-breasted (where the front closure of the jacket joins with one set of buttons without any or much fabric overlapping).
- Men’s jackets come vented and unvented, which refers to the vertical opening (vented) or lack of opening (unvented) along the center back lower seam. Vented is the most classic style and prevents the suit jacket from stretching out of shape.

**Skirt Length:**
For women who choose to wear a skirt, the hemline should be knee length. Although not ideal, skirt length can vary 1 inch below and above the knee, but no more.

**Dress For Success Tip:**
Remember to always consider your own body type when purchasing your professional wardrobe—particularly in regard to a suit. What works for one person won’t necessarily work for another!


**Accessories**

Accessories have the ability to transform basic pieces into multiple outfits for various occasions. An assortment of accessories will multiply the number of looks within the core elements of a classic wardrobe. Neutral colors are more versatile than novelty pieces; however, if the core pieces in the wardrobe are fairly basic, novelty accessories create interest without a big investment.

**Shoes and Belts**

- Leather is a must when looking for quality shoes
- These items should be in the same family in color and texture (i.e. leather, patent, suede).
- Men should wear black shoes (loafers or wing tips) and belts the majority of the time with suits.
- Women should make sure their shoes, belt (if worn), and handbag do not clash, but the old adage that they should match has become less popular.
- Shoe color should never be lighter than clothing.

**Ties**

- Silk, polyester, or blend are ideal material choices
- The design should complement the jacket and pants.
- Tie should end just around the waistline.

**Jewelry**

- Should not be overpowering in any way.
- Long or dangling earrings, bulky necklaces, excessive rings, and multiple bracelets should be avoided.

**Hosiery (socks and stockings)**

- Neutral colors that blend with clothing colors are always best.
- Pantyhose should be worn for more formal occasions (e.g. interviews, dinners with the boss), but may be forgone once you have become established with the company and its atmosphere.
- Women should wear pantyhose close to skin color or a sheer version of the color of the suit.
- Men should match sock color to pants or shoe color. Make sure socks are business appropriate (wool or cotton/nylon blends)—no tube or slouchy socks please!

**Avoid These Common Pitfalls**

**Wrinkles**  Wrinkly clothes show a lack of attention to detail and should be avoided at all costs. Some fabrics are pretreated with chemicals to make them wrinkle-free, which may be a good investment for individuals not inclined to iron their clothing.

**Tattoos**  In a business environment, tattoos are not something to advertise. Make efforts to cover them. For men with chest and arm tattoos, wear an undershirt. For women with ankle or leg tattoos, wear darker stockings.

**Body Piercing**  Pierced ears are about the limit as far as acceptable business attire in most settings. Other pierced areas should be minimized and removed if possible.
The Art of Business Casual

Begin by consulting with your company’s written or unwritten guidelines. Also, observe those in your company who are on a “success track” to see what they are wearing. Additionally, check the clothing of managers and higher-level employees. In general, jeans and denim should be avoided. A rule of thumb is to wear clothing that you would not have to apologize for if you were called in for an unplanned meeting with a client.

Examples of Business Casual Attire

For women:
- Instead of silk or rayon blouses: fine gauge turtleneck or jewel neck sweaters
- Instead of pumps: flats or open-toed heels
- Instead of a blazer: a matching sweater

For men:
- Instead of a suit: sport coat and pressed trousers
- Instead of a blazer: crew neck or cardigan sweater
- A woven or novelty print tie
- Corduroy or tweed fabrics
- Loafers or more casual style shoes (no sneakers)
- Pressed khaki, twill, or canvas trousers

ALWAYS Avoid

For women:
- Wearing stretch pants or leggings
- Athletic attire
- Revealing blouses, spaghetti straps, or halter tops (wear appropriate undergarments at all times)
- Too much jewelry or makeup
- Scuffed or worn shoes
- Excessive amounts of perfume or cologne—your colleagues may be allergic

For men:
- Wearing an open collar shirt with a crew neck T-shirt showing underneath
- Athletic attire
- Scuffed or worn shoes
- Flannel shirts or other “hunting-type” attire
- Unpressed trousers
- Excessive amounts of perfume or cologne—your colleagues may be allergic