

Dressing Professionally on a Budget

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Fact Sheet

First Impressions

First impressions are extremely important, especially in the business world.

In order to make a good first impression, dress professionally to separate your social image from your professional presence.

Social vs. Professional Presence

What you wear at home and in social situations usually should not be what you wear at work.

The little details of dress matter most. No matter what you wear, clothes should be neat and clean. Keep shoes clean and polished. Hair should be neatly styled and makeup should be subtle. Nails should be clean, neat and of reasonable length. Always dress for the job you want.

Avoid wearing perfume or cologne at the office. Your scent (even if you smell good) can be an issue for employers, clients or co-workers. With any type of scent, less – or none – is better. In addition, depending on the workplace, you may want cover any tattoos and remove piercing rings.

Rules for Casual Dress at Work

Business casual does not mean sloppy. Even in a “business casual” work environment, clothing should be pressed and never wrinkled, torn, dirty, or frayed. Any clothing that has words, terms, or pictures that might be offensive to others is unacceptable.



A simple blouse will never seem dated and makes a professional impression.

Not all casual clothing is suitable for the office. Clothing that reveals too much cleavage, or shows your back, chest, feet, stomach or underwear is not appropriate for a place of business.

Sports team, university, and fashion brand names on clothing are generally acceptable. Hats are not appropriate in the office, with the exception of head coverings that are required for religious purposes or cultural tradition.

In a casual workplace, you cannot go wrong with khakis and a sport shirt or a nice sweater. If you are going to a meeting or making a presentation, more professional attire is in order.

What not to wear to work

- Flip-flops or sneakers
- Visible underwear (bras, bra straps, briefs, boxers, etc.) – even if your bra straps match your top. Make sure the top of underwear does not show above the pants waistband.
- Shorts
- Jeans
- Low-rise or very tight pants
- Low-cut, midriff-baring or tight tops

Trendy vs. Classic

Classic styles will not become dated. A classic suit that will last for years is a better investment than trendy attire that will only last a season. Remember that your idea of trendy clothing might not match the boss's perspective on what is fashionable. Dress conservatively.

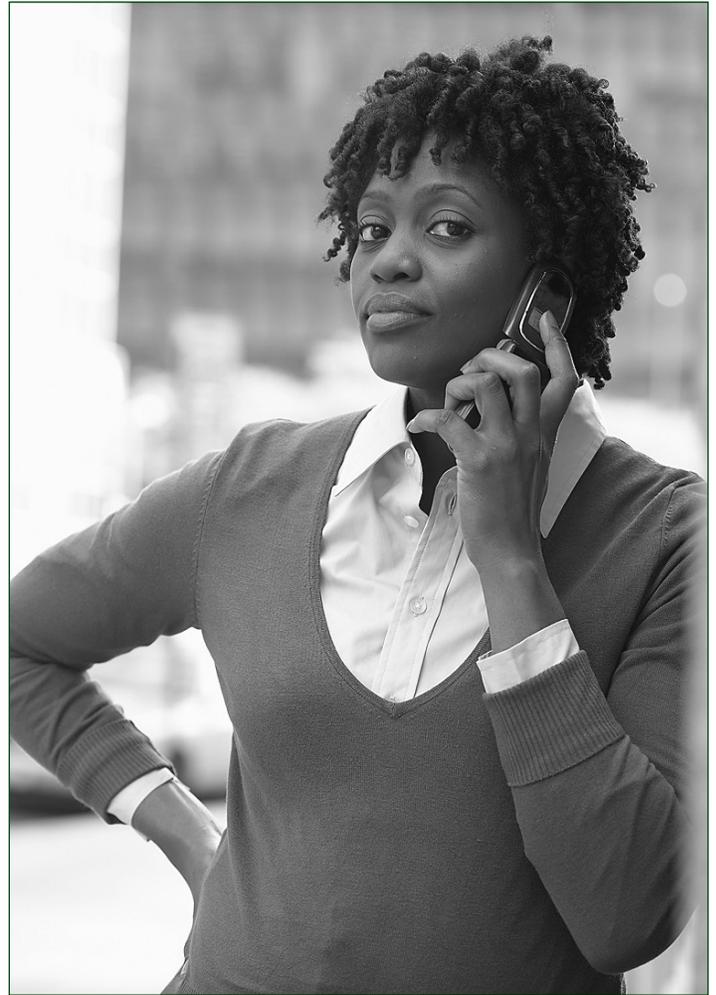
When to buy classic and trendy

Choose classic styles when purchasing big-ticket items, such as suits, dresses or coats.

Trendy, but inexpensive, accessories help you look up-to-date. Choose them in the brightest seasonal colors. (See the wardrobe planning tips on page 3 for more suggestions.)

Where to find affordable clothes

- Clearance racks
- Outlet stores
- Goodwill/Disabled American Veterans shops
- Borrow special occasion items from a friend
- Secondhand, thrift or resale shops
- Yard or garage sales
- A clothes exchange swap meet



A sweater and blouse are always appropriate.

Creating a Seasonless Wardrobe

Mix and match key pieces to create different looks. No two pieces should be the same, but they should coordinate with one another. Use accessories to pull the look together.

Two tools on the next page will help build a wardrobe on a budget:

- Follow the steps for wardrobe planning to clean your closet and choose the best pieces for your work and lifestyle.
- The chart “Make the Most of Your Wardrobe” shows how a few key pieces can be the basis for a variety of outfits.



Regularly evaluate your wardrobe.

Wardrobe Planning

- Get organized. Clean out and re-organize your closet and dresser.
- Decide on a basic color plan. Neutrals are always in style and are a good foundation for your wardrobe.
- Evaluate your wardrobe. Take an inventory of your closet and make a list of things you need. Buying from a list will keep you focused and curb impulse buying.
- Plan your wardrobe for variety and flexibility. Choose a few fun pieces to keep your wardrobe looking fresh and up-to-date.
- Determine your clothing budget. Decide what you can afford to spend on clothes every month, and stick to that budget.
- Buy the best quality clothes that you can afford. They will last longer, wear better and ultimately save you money.
- Buy basic styles because they will last longer.
- Take care of the clothes you have. Learn how to care for your clothes the right way.

Make the Most of Your Wardrobe

Five pieces = 6 looks

1 jacket	1 blouse
1 short skirt	1 long skirt
1 pair of pants	

Seven pieces = 14 looks

2 jackets	1 blouse,
1 short skirt	2 long skirts
1 pair of pants	

Eight pieces = 30 looks

2 jackets	2 blouses,
1 short skirt	2 long skirts
1 pair of pants	

Nine pieces = 42 looks

2 jackets	2 blouses
1 short skirt	2 long skirts
1 shirt	1 pair of pants



This formula could work for a man's wardrobe – substitute slacks or dress pants for the skirts.

K-State Research and Extension Publications

Basic Apparel Management, S134H

Basic Job Ready Skills, S134A

Basic Health and Wellness, S134D (Spanish S134DS)

Sources for More Information

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<http://www.FashionForRealWomen.com>.

Dress Well with a Tight Budget –
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Dress-Well-with-a-Tight-Budget&id=174381>

Clothes Make the Man or Woman –
http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/dressingforwork/a/dress_success.htm

What Not to Wear on a Job Interview –
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewattire/a/interviewnot.htm>

Dress for Work Success –
http://humanresources.about.com/od/workrelationships/a/dress_code.htm

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