



Dress for Success: The Feeling is Neutral

Gender free interview attire for the 21st Century.

Redefining what's in.

As the modern workplace becomes more diverse and inclusive, best practices for professional attire have also evolved, resulting in more gender neutral dress codes. By definition, gender free dress works for every person and body type. For those who do not conform to or identify with the more traditional binary definitions of masculine and feminine, or have medical accommodation needs, gender neutral guidelines offer greater flexibility, comfort, and sense of belonging. While organizations may still set and enforce dress codes, rules may not be enforced arbitrarily to favor or discriminate against individuals based upon sex, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; details for attire and appearance that apply to one must now apply to all.

That said, some industries such as finance, legal, and those with high customer interactions may still adhere to more traditional business attire. Also, job seekers and employees should note that greater freedom of identity and self-expression do not supercede workplace courtesy and cultural fit. When interacting professionally, your appearance must still be neat, polished, and appropriate for the occasion in order to create a good impression.

Interview dress codes that fit

Attire: Before any interview or social event, research the company culture, inquire what the dress code is, and plan accordingly. It's always better to dress up rather than dress down, and being prepared fosters confidence and a sense of company fit. Whether you opt for a traditional suit or pantsuit with matching top and bottom, or perhaps choose a combination of skirt or slacks and button-down shirt and jacket, make sure everything is clean, wrinkle-free, and fits well. Go for solid and neutral colors like navy, dark gray, black, taupe, or brown, to be safe, and pair with white, blue, or light color tops. Also, invest in items made of quality fabrics that last and have them tailored, if needed, for a professional look.

Accessories: Less is more. The interviewer should be focused on your capabilities, not distracted by your appearance. Keep jewelry to a minimum. Ties, if worn, should be solid or with a simple stripe or

pattern. Belt and shoe colors should match and complement your outfit. Shoes should be closed toe, scuff-free, and have low to medium heels. Also, consider bringing a professional portfolio to hold interview essentials and your cellphone.

Grooming: Experts advise against perfumes, but *au naturel* body odor is equally offensive. So, shower with a lightly scented soap, and apply deodorant or antiperspirant the day of your interview. Keep hair and nails clean and well-groomed. Facial hair should be trimmed and neat. Despite the trend in beards and bright hair, be aware that some organizations are conservative and frown on facial hair, bold hair styles and color, piercings, and visible tattoos. Cosmetics, when worn, should be minimal and in natural shades. Also, brush your teeth or have a mint.

Clothing in context

Beyond its utilitarian purposes, clothing is non-verbal communication for finding common ground. Like it or not, employers are visual and your appearance can affect if you're taken seriously. Whether the daily dress code is business casual, professional, or formal, observe and use common sense to find balance between personal comfort and professional fit; you want to respect your own needs as well as those of the company, its co-workers, and clients. Also, different states can have different dress codes and expectations: guidelines for an internship in Vermont can differ from those in D.C. The choice is yours. You want to stack the odds in your favor to land that job offer but also live with your decision if you're hired.

In the end, whether you choose traditional, gender neutral, or to put your own stylish spin on your threads, go for what's appropriate and will allow you and the interviewer to comfortably focus on what's *really* important—the value you bring and the results you can deliver.



i n a nutshell:

Job seekers today may have more freedom when it comes to choosing professional attire, but universal standards still rule:

- **Clean, wrinkle- and lint-free, well-fitting apparel**
- **Neutral colors for clothing, natural colors for make-up, and non-distracting patterns**
- **Minimal use of accessories; should complement the outfit**
- **Good personal hygiene**
- **Understated cologne; deodorant / anti-perspirant**
- **Groomed head and facial hair; clean and trimmed nails**
- **Nothing visually loud, trendy, or provocative**

Whatever message your clothing conveys, it shouldn't speak louder than your credentials.