10. Professional Presentation

For those of you entering the workforce, it’s time to think about building your professional wardrobe. Gone are the days of rolling out of bed and tossing on a cozy sweatshirt, your favorite jeans and flip-flops any day of the week. You know how to dress professionally when the occasion warrants, such as an important job interview, but now that the interviews are over and the job is yours, what are you expected to wear every day? Before you start your new job, it is very important to find out what attire is appropriate in your new workplace. Ask some of the current employees or, better yet, visit before your start date to observe what others are wearing. When in doubt, look to your boss. Unless he/she is a complete fashion nightmare, try to emulate his/her level of formality in dress.

To get you started with this process, we’ve outlined some basic guidelines on business professional and business casual attire along with tips from alumni.

Business Professional

The number one rule of dressing in the workplace is neat and clean. Your clothes should be well kept and ironed. Don’t look like you just rolled out of bed. There is no need to go overboard on expensive purchases, especially when you’re just starting out. Focus on comfortable clothes that are durable, and most importantly, fit well. It’s better to spend money on going to a tailor to get your clothes properly fitted, rather than spending money on a more expensive brand. 99% of the time, people can’t tell the brand of the clothes you are wearing, they do however notice when your clothes fit well.

Shortly after you move to a new city, it helps to read Yelp reviews and find a good tailor close to your workplace or home. Whether you accidentally puncture a hole in a garment or you gain/lose weight, there will likely be times when you need rapid, quality, hassle-free alterations.

-Alumna ’14
Choose a conservative suit color, such as charcoal grey and navy. Suits made of wool or wool blends tend to last longer and wrinkle less. Skirt and pant suits are both appropriate. If you choose a skirt suit, make sure the skirt is long enough to cover your thighs when seated.

Button-up dress shirts and ties or blouses should be worn with your suit. Choose conservative, neutral colors.

Dress shoes and dress socks should be worn with your suit. With pant suits, socks should act as a continuation of your suit and match the shade/color of the fabric as closely as possible. Your belt should match the color of your shoes. Shoes should be clean and shined. Footwear should match or complement the outfit. Choose a heel height that you are comfortable with and shoes that you can easily walk in.

**Business Casual**

While many companies still expect employees to don suits, casual Fridays, dress-down days, and events labeled “business casual” are commonplace. Keep in mind that some companies are simply “casual,” which is even more liberal and allows employees to wear almost anything they want. However, just because a company is “business casual” or “casual” does not mean that young professionals should look unkempt. Neatly pressed clothes and shined shoes will continue to be important when in the office.

When in doubt, dress up. Even a suit can be easily dressed down by removing your tie, jacket, undoing that top button and rolling up your sleeves. It is always better to be overdressed than underdressed, it conveys a sense of professionalism. Be wary that in some major cities, business casual actually means not black tie, and a suit or sport jacket is still expected. Again, the rule is, if in doubt, ask a colleague.

While it is sometimes more difficult to assemble a business casual outfit than to pull on a suit, most professionals welcome the freedom to dress a bit more comfortably in the office. Even though most business casual clothing is less expensive than suits are, it can still cost you a bundle. One way to save money is to buy basic styles and colors that can easily mix and match with each other. Buying a few high-quality classic items is usually better than buying lots of lower-quality or overly trendy pieces that don’t wear well or go out of style. These tips are equally applicable for those who are required to dress professionally in the workplace.
The suggestion “dress to impress” has been around for ages, and for good reason. By dressing neatly and appropriately in the workplace, you will look more professional. Professionalism begets respect, which could in turn mean more responsibility and opportunity for advancement.

Consider not buying all your work wardrobe before you start working. Watch and inquire about the “dress culture” and then slowly increase your wardrobe taking that culture into consideration.