



# REFERENCE GUIDE FOR WOMEN'S INTERVIEW DRESS ETIQUETTE

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## About The Authors

This guidebook was written by the expert staff at [www.execstyle.com](http://www.execstyle.com).

Serving business professionals for over 50 years, ExecStyle has become a valuable source of expertise in professional dress etiquette. While specializing in menswear, the ExecStyle staff pride themselves in their knowledge of the professional standards for both genders.

These guidelines were created after our first eBook on interview dress etiquette for men, in response to overwhelming request for a women's version. It represents a composite of the most widely agreed upon standards, tempered by our sensibilities and experience. It is a conservative, but reliable, guide to creating a professional look for a business interview.

I.	Introduction	3
II.	Rule 1: Research Ahead	4
III.	Rule 2: Err Towards Formality	5
V.	Business versus Business Casual	6
	i. Business Formal	7
	ii. Business Casual	8
	iii. Hair, Makeup & Perfume	9
	iv. Presentation Notes	10
VII.	Final Notes: Attention to Details	11

# Introduction

They say your smile is the first thing the interviewer sees.  
Your clothes are probably a close second.

From the moment you meet your interviewer, your appearance and body language are sending cues about the kind of worker you will be. Are you professional? Do you have good communications skills? Will you fit in well with the culture of the workplace?

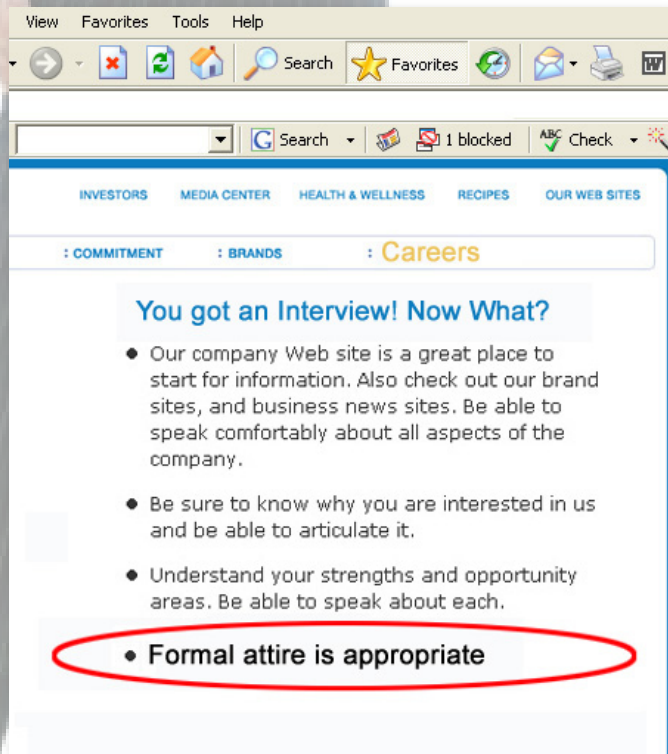
The interviewer has limited time to make these difficult evaluations and must rely on the information available. If your clothes are wrinkled or you are dressed too casually, it may seem that you do not take the position seriously.

Though these impressions may be far from accurate, you will be fighting an uphill battle to prove otherwise. First impressions influence the way the interviewer perceives all subsequent information about a person.

This guidebook will help you make the best impression possible.

# Rule 1: Research Ahead

Choosing the right interview attire is not alchemy.  
It's a matter of knowing the corporate culture and the position's demands.



Corporate Website: Career Section

## Check out the website

Many corporate websites will show images of employees in their work routines. Use this as a clue. Also, review the career section for comments on interview etiquette.

## Go to the source

Visit ahead of time to observe the workers in context. If dress is casual, be sure that it's not a dress down day such as Casual Friday. If you have any doubt call HR to ask what is expected. Many companies expect professional attire for interviews even though the office dress code is quite casual.

## Consider the type of position you are applying for

Creative positions such as advertising and design may allow for a more liberal look. Positions involving high-level consultations, or meetings with important clients may require a classical professional look. If you are unsure of what standards to apply, ask a business dress expert:

## Rule 2: Err Towards Formality

It is harder to overcome being underdressed than being overdressed  
Dress like a professional and you will feel like a professional

### **If you feel overdressed**

- Don't Panic: You're sending a strong message about taking the position seriously
- Politely tell the interviewer that the casual dress code gives the office a warm and familiar atmosphere that you would like to be a part of
- If you can, discretely remove your jacket and drape it over your chair

### **If You feel underdressed**

- Maintain a professional demeanor, to compensate for informal attire
- Maintain an erect posture
- Speak formally (avoiding colloquialisms and words such as "like" and "you know").
- Mention that you were misinformed about the dress code and you look forward to dressing more professionally

## Business Formal vs. Business Casual

Formal business attire requires a suit, blouse, and shoes in a conservative color and style.

A skirt suit is recommended, unless your research indicates that pant suits are very common in the company.

The look should be sharp but not flashy, and elegant but not overly formal.

The idea is to showcase the individual, not the clothes.



Business casual is a more relaxed, yet professional look.

Well tailored, conservatively styled skirts, pants, dresses and sweaters are appropriate.

Creativity and style are encouraged but avoid overly flashy patterns, short skirts, and clingy or revealing outfits.

Business casual does not mean wear whatever you want. Err towards formality.



## Business Formal

### Matched Suit

- Should be grey, blue, or black
- Solid colors are best, but stripes or light plaids are okay
- Should not cling or shine

### Pants Vs. Skirts

- A skirt suit is considered more formal.
- Pant suits are appropriate for interviews with less conservative organizations
- Skirts should fall to the knee or just below
- Pants should be tailored to fit without being overly tight

### Blouse

- Should be pressed, clean, and well-tailored
- White, ivory, or light blue are best
- Solid colors or subtle patterns are best
- Fabric should be cotton or silk
- Avoid lace, ruffles, and shiny fabrics



### Shoes

- Choose basic, conservative pumps
- Low heels are recommended (2 1/2" at most)
- Should have closed toe and heel
- Dark blue, black, brown, or maroon
- Must match conservative tone of suit

### Underwear

- A bra is required
- Use a natural skin color, not black
- With a skirt, panty hose are suggested

### Accessories

- Jewelry should be minimal and subtle
- Use a briefcase rather than a purse

## Business Casual

### Pants/skirts/dresses

- Conservative pants, suits and dresses are all acceptable
- Skirts and dresses should be knee length, though longer is okay
- Pants should be well tailored, though not be overly tight fitting
- A variety of colors and patterns are okay, but solid tones or subtle patterns are safer
- Avoid flashy, shiny or revealing looks

### Jacket

- Creates a more professional look
- Can be removed to create a more casual look
- Solid shade or subtle design (avoid exotic patterns or overly decorative styling).

### Shirts/Blouses/Sweaters

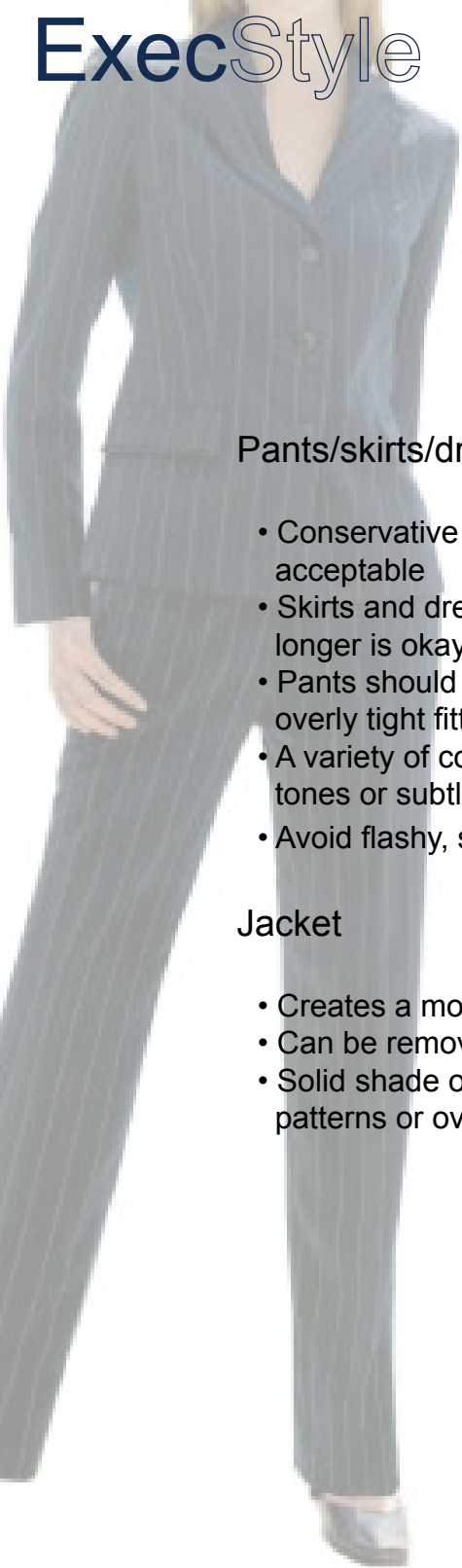
- Many choices are available.
- Be creative, but use discretion
- Should be well-tailored to fit without cling
- Soft pastel colors and subtle patterns are recommended

### Shoes

- Should have closed toe and heel
- Avoid very high heels (2 ½" at most)
- Style and color must match outfit

### Accessories

- Use a briefcase instead of a purse
- Jewelry should be minimal and subtle
- Panty hose are recommended with a skirt or dress





## Hair, Makeup and Perfume

### Hair

- Should be simply styled and not draw attention
- Hair styles with bangs are okay, but bangs should not cover eyebrows.
- Avoid hair styles which excessively cover the face.
- Avoid spiked, gelled or unnaturally colored hairstyles

### Makeup and Perfume

- Be conservative with makeup. Makeup should not be noticeable
- Makeup should be chosen to match complexion
- Consider avoiding perfume, since interviewer may be allergic



## Presentation Notes

### ALWAYS:

- Dress in a simple and clean manner.
- Wear underwear and makeup that will not attract attention
- Wear plain shoes with closed heels and toes.
- Err on the conservative side if you are uncertain
- Select clothing a step more formal than the job you are interviewing for.

### NEVER:

- Wear anything sexy for an interview.
- Wear any kind of knitted garment.
- Dress in men's clothes
- Wear anything with a designer's name or logo showing.
- Wear a fad item or new fashion.
- Wear anything too bold, bright or sharply contrasting

## Final Notes

### Attention to detail is critical:

- 1) Clean and polished dress shoes are imperative.
- 2) Suit, shirt and skirt should be clean and pressed.
- 3) Hair should be well-groomed.
- 4) Make sure fingernails cleaned and trimmed.
- 5) Avoid perfume (some people are allergic).
- 6) Avoid flashy jewelry and watches. Keep it simple.
- 7) Well-brushed teeth and fresh breath are a must.
- 8) Finally, check your attire in the rest room just before your interview.  
Make sure you are ready for the moment.

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