



Business *DRESS CODE*

Tips on Formal Wear



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About the Tutorial

Dress Code has a social significance, with different rules and expectations being laid out to suit different circumstances and occasions. The dress code has built-in rules or signals to understand messages given by a person's clothing. This message may include indications of the person's gender, income, occupation, social class, and attitude towards fashion, tradition, and comfort.

Audience

This tutorial is designed primarily for young professionals who need assistance in proper dress code for both business meetings as well as formal social occasions.

Prerequisites

Dressing is a sensitive topic and trainees are expected to be open to suggestions on different dressing styles. You are expected to be open to asking questions and resolving any further queries on the topic by contacting us.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The most noticeable difference among college-going students who have just stepped out of a school is that they do not need to follow a specific dress code any more. "Bye, bye! Uniforms!" they collectively shout in joy. Colleges usually relax the dress code restrictions, as a result of which, some can practically drag themselves from the bed straight to the college.

When the same college passouts join a company, some of those companies encourage them to carry on with the "brogrammer" attire, complete with the hoodies and slack jeans, while there are some companies that ask their employees to follow a formal dress code.

Why Dress Code?

Most of the organizations expect their employees to feel the distinct difference of studying in college and stepping into the professional life. And the most noticeable difference, you guessed it right, is the dress code.



Companies, by and large, are conscious about how their employees dress up. It is because the way they dress and groom in their work environment forms a perception in the minds of the clients, suppliers, and others about not only them but also the company.

There are two very good reasons why companies are particular about their dress codes:

1. **Dress Code** has a social significance, with different rules and expectations being laid out to suit different circumstances and occasions.
2. **Impression Clues** - The dress code of a person provides significant clues about various attributes such as their gender, income, occupation, social class, and attitude towards fashion, tradition, and comfort.

2. DRESS CODE – COMMON MISTAKES

What to wear to work-place is more often than not is a matter of common sense. However cases of dressing disasters continue to occur – although they occur quite inadvertently. For example, you might find your colleague, especially in Summer, dressed up to work with a "day at the beach" hangover!

The reason these eyebrow-raising conflicts in dress codes occur is that many companies, especially start-ups and small to medium-scale businesses, have pretty relaxed norms to almost no norms on dress code. Even if there are Dress Codes, at times, they are vague and ambiguous.

To relax you from such harrowing misses, we have pointed out some common dress code blunders that you should avoid:

- **Ill-fitting clothes** - Clothes too big give you a bloated look and too tight-fitting clothes accentuate the body in a non-formal way.
- **Wearing short skirts** - Short skirts draw attention to your legs when you sit down.
- **Wearing short socks** - Short socks, or drooping socks expose skin and that distracts attention while crossing legs or sitting down.
- **Low-cut or plunging tops** - Just as with short skirts, this distracts an interviewer.
- **Improper color choices**- Colors, like green, yellow, red, etc., don't go well in corporate circles.
- **Clothes with sayings, pictures, or designs**- This lends a very informal and non-serious look to the interviewees.
- **Poorly-maintained shoes**- Your shoes should be clean and polished.
- **Not dressing formally for business social events**- Even dinners at the boss' house are formal business occasions so dress-up accordingly.
- **Improper grooming**- Unclipped nails, odorous of breath/perspiration, and unkempt hair all are red-checks.

3. DRESS CODE FOR MEN

The phrases "**formal attire**" and "**semi-formal attire**" are two of the most widely misunderstood ones in the world of Dress Code. When someone mentions "formal attire" to us, we generally draw a mental picture of expensive suits, silken ties, and heavy coats. Even if certain occasions demand this kind of dressing, everyone will agree that it's quite strict and excessive.

On the other hand, semi-formal attire might not sound like much ado about dressing. So, semi-formal attire is a loosely defined term, which includes a wide range of dresses starting from everyday wear at work place, business meeting, business party to any other meeting of such kind. So, in other words, it is event/occasion specific dress.

Further, the rules are rather well sketched-out and precise for men, as compared to those for women, where a lot of experimentation is still possible. Let's discuss what the industry Do's and Don'ts in this area:

Shirts

Many working professionals opt for solid colors while buying shirts. A "solid color" means one uniform color throughout the cloth, without any other color on it. The following image gives examples of solid colors:



While choosing shirts, do not opt for different shades of the same color. For example, if you are too fond of blue, then don't go for different shades of blue. Be flexible and choose shirts of different colors. Following are the colors preferred when it comes to choosing shirts for men: Charcoal Grey, Dark Brown, Dark Blue, Fawn, and White.



Solid Pastel Colors are Allowed

The colors mentioned in the color-montage are called pastel colors. Interestingly, some pastel colors won't look formal and may not be recommended as color choices for formal attire, once they get a darker shade.



Vertical Pin-stripes are Allowed

Shirts with vertical pin-stripes (continuous/broken lines with the width of a pin running vertically through the shirt) can be worn to give some variety to the solid, uniform colors.



Full-sleeves Only

Wearing full sleeves not only gives a professional look, but also conceals hairy forearms and stops you from leaving sweat-patches caused due to placing your arms on the interviewer's desk.



Appropriate Fit

Wearing very tight clothes accentuates your contours and gives off an unprofessional look. On the other hand, if you wear clothes that are too loose, then you would end up giving a bloated, uninterested look. Dressing clothes that fit you give a sharp and alert impression.



Trousers

Very light-colored trousers take the attention off than person's shirt. So when someone dressed up in a light-colored trouser, like white or peach, and speak in an interview or in any business meeting/conference, the attention of the interviewers/listeners distracted towards the trousers, which in turn, hinders eye-contact too. The colors that are considered the norm for trousers are: Dark Blue, Dark Brown, Black, and Dark Grey.



Trousers shouldn't Bunch up at the Ankles

Trousers that bunch up at the ankles are not only a nuisance, owing to their tendency to trip the person wearer while walking, but also gather dust and dirt which soil the trouser. In addition to all these, the bunching of trousers at the ankles resembles the Marine Corps uniforms.



What to Avoid?

The definition of "formal clothes" has been redefined considerably. The strict dress code of yesteryears has given way to a much more relaxed and informal business attire. However, still there is a huge importance put on the proper sense of dressing because people judge your attitude towards your work, work-place, co-

workers, clients and others from the way you choose to dress. It sends a message about your level of professionalism about your job.

Of course, the rules regarding dress codes vary greatly from company to company. Most of the start-ups, studios, and software companies have no rules on attire. At the same time, there are many big companies that underline appropriate or inappropriate ways to present yourself at the office.

Let's discuss what one should avoid in an office environment.

Checks, Patterns, or Bold Stripes

Shirts with checks, patterns, and bold stripes are discouraged as they look distracting. Some checks and stripes hold special meaning in certain countries or political parties or national movements, hence it's best to avoid the interviewer from thinking that you lean towards any specific party.

Half-sleeves or Short-sleeves

Half-shirts and short sleeves expose hairy forearms and also accentuate your muscles. If you are someone who perspires easily, you might leave sweat-patches on the interviewers' desk when you place your elbows or arms on the table while solving problems or writing something.

Same Color Trousers as of the Shirt

Wearing trousers of the same color as the shirt gives an impression of being dressed-up in a uniform- more specifically, a military uniform. Try to avoid being dressed up that way; light-colored shorts with dark trousers are fine.

Prints or Stripes on Trousers

Pin-stripes on trousers is a distraction because it gives the visual impression of incomplete lines, especially when worn with a solid-colored shirt without pin-stripes. And, when it is worn with pin-stripe shirts, it gives the impression of continuous lines that run from the collar of the shirt to the ankles. Hence, they are best avoided.

Tapering Trousers

Tapering trousers create the same issues that those trousers that bunch at the ankles do. They restrict movement and prevent crossing of legs. The tapering gives an optical illusion that your body is triangular.

Jeans or Denims

Denims looks unprofessional, mainly because of its non-uniform color, which fades at some places and goes darker at some other places. In addition to that, jeans are heavy and that might cause sweating while waiting.

4. DRESS CODE FOR WOMEN

Business-dressing for females differs significantly from that of males, in that female professionals can add a lot of color, variety, and additional options to her professional wardrobe, which their male co-workers can't. Having said that, there are guidelines to what a female employee should be seen dressed up as:

What to Wear

Indian women have the options to choose between western wear and Indian attire while deciding their formal dress wardrobe. Although many see this choice as something to their advantage, this is the main reason behind their confusion in finalizing what to wear.

Indian Wear

Generally, companies allow their women employees in India to dress up in Kurtis and salwar. These come with their own efficiency and comfort to the working area. Certain agencies, like tourism and travels, encourage their female employees to dress in saris to portray an ethnic look to their clients.

Kurti & Salwar in Gentle Pastel Colors is Preferable

Below is a montage of the pastel colors that ladies can use for their reference while choosing the color of their Kurti and Salwar. Colors on the computer screen might vary when compared to the real cloth, so as a thumb rule — choose a color that is two shades lighter than its corresponding one displayed on the screen.

Use Light Pink or Brown, (matt/gloss) Colors for Lipstick and Nail Paint

Matte' or gloss colors don't distract the interviewers and don't draw attention away from what the candidate is saying, or writing - as in the case of nailpaint. They also merge with the color of lips and nails.



Use Simple Necklace, Small Earrings, and Nose-Rings (preferably studs)

Big dangling earrings and heavy jewelry pieces not only distract the interviewers, but also are extremely uncomfortable to wear over a longer period. It also tends to give a show-off image to the person wearing them. Studs play the job of beautiful accessories perfectly, without appearing as too much attention-seeking.

Use Black Low-heeled Pumps

Companies don't encourage their female employees to wear stilettos and high-heeled shoes for two reasons:

1. They are noisy and accident-prone (twisting of ankles is a common occurrence) and
2. They put enormous stress on the waist, ankles, and feet. Pumps, i.e., shoes with normal-sized heels (**as shown in the given image**) is appreciably acceptable.



Wear Minimum Make-up

Excessive makeup not only changes the look of the person but also draws unwanted attention towards itself. Experts have noticed that women who applied excessive make-up have been considered too self-centered and hence, not team-players. Use only foundations that match your skin tone.



Western Outfit

When it comes to western wear, female working professionals can choose between a combination of formal shirt & trousers, and suit & skirts. Skirts should be knee-length.

What to Avoid?

Glitter

Avoid wearing any glimmering jewelry.

Anything that is too Shiny, Bright, and Distracting

Shiny and garish jewelry not only divert all the attention away from you, but also create doubts in the interviewer's mind as to your priorities in life: anyone who had put so much effort in ornamentation obviously hasn't got the interview process as the first thing in her mind. Go with a simple, thin chain.

Gaudy Sequins or Embroidery

Gaudy colors, other wise called "ripe colors" are normally considered as appropriate colors for interior décor and carry a strong perception as the preferred color for curtains, pillow-covers, bedsheets, among others. Wearing these colors will inadvertently attach that image with the clothes that you wear.

High Heels, Stilettos

In addition to putting tremendous stress on ankles, feet and waist, high-heeled shoes are also accident-prone, causing violent and sudden twisting of ankles. In addition to these, they distract the people with their distinct tapping noise on floor.



5. BUSINESS ATTIRE

Business attire is the term used to describe the clothing employees wear, or are expected to wear to work. Depending on the workplace, profession, even the geographic region where you work, various levels of business attire are the norm.

Dress Code and Attire

Most employees wanting to fit into the workplace, dress up formally in the expected way, and don't need an official dress code to understand what constitutes appropriate business attire. However, there are many people who make mistakes while dressing up for formal occasions. The following guide will help you in understanding the appropriate ways to dress up.

Ties

Ties are used to hide the button-line of the shirt, hence they are usually not worn with shirts that don't have buttons running vertically across through them. In addition to that, they are used to add a bit of color to the solids and pastel colors.

The following Points should be followed to look professional with the tie:

- The tie's color should be of a darker shade of the shirt color to continue the color theme of your shirt.
- A larger tie knot gives a more confident look and a thinner tie gives an elegant look. People attending important meetings generally wear tie thicker knots and people from fashion, hospitality, and art industry tend to use thinner knots.
- Tip of the wider end must be at belt level so that the belt-buckle can be exposed. Remember that the belt is one of the most important accessories for men, in addition to watch and shoes.
- Avoid distracting patterns and colors, as these give an informal look and divert attention.



Belt, Shoes, Bags

Belts and shoes play a major role as male accessories. Belts break the color continuity of the shirt, the same way shoes do with the trousers. That is the reason experts advise against wearing shoes of the same color as trousers and belt of the same color as the shirt. In most cases, wearing a belt the same color as the trousers is also considered odd.



Here is a set of guidelines that you should follow:

- Avoid pointed shoes as they were worn by the royalty and still carry that image.
- Avoid boots and sport shoes, as they refer to the trekking and sports industry, which couldn't be the industry you are applying for a job with.
- Shoes, Belts, folders and watches should be of the same color.
- Black and dark brown colored shoes only as they look formal.
- Shoes should be neat and polished.



6. GROOMING FOR MEN

First impressions are last impressions, and the first thing most people notice is your face. A lack of proper grooming detracts people from what you are saying, and prevents you from making a good initial impression. Proper skin and hair care is as important for men today, as for women in a competitive world where everyone wants to put their best foot forward and appear their best.

Grooming for Men

An important aspect of grooming is to use quality products for men. Another important factor is to know that certain things can fit among your friend-circle, fine enough, but may not be appreciated at work.

Grooming

Here is a list of tips that one should follow while grooming for an interview:

- Avoid low-waist trousers as they tend to accentuate the belly region.
- A clean-shaved look, complemented with short haircut is preferred for men although individual religious sentiments are always taken into consideration.
- Excessive male jewelry distracts; only one gemstone ring is acceptable.
- Use gel to smoothen strands of hair (don't overuse). Don't back-comb as that gives a slightly over-friendly hint.

7. GROOMING FOR WOMEN

Dressing for success involves much more than just choosing the right outfit. Many factors contribute in creating a professional image in the minds of people of which, having a sense of personal grooming is one of the most important.

Grooming for Women

Just having an impressive presentation style is not complete in itself. Presentation not only involves your attire but also your appearance. Your persona must impress your clients, investors, and customers. At the same time, wearing outfits that are too revealing, or carrying a suggestive body language could send wrong signals to the same people whom you are trying to impress with your professional abilities.

Grooming

Here is a set of tips that one should follow while grooming for an interview:

- Avoid dark-colored shirts or tops if your hair has excessive dandruff.
- Brush strands or dandruff off your dresses after combing your hair.
- Avoid open hair, as they tend to distract not only the interviewer but also the applicant while solving problems or writing something. Avoid pigtailed too, as they present an immature look. Wear hair in a bun or a ponytail so as to not draw any unwanted attention to your hair.

8. FINAL TIPS FOR GROOMING

In addition to the tips and standards that we discussed earlier, there are a few points that need to be taken care before you finally enter in the premises and knock on that door (for your interview).

Final Tips for Grooming

Here is a set of tips that one should follow while grooming for an interview:

- Avoid noisy and squeaky shoes, as they will disturb and distract everyone.
- Avoid excessive cologne or deodorant; the interviewer sits inside an AC-operated room that might not have proper ventilation and that will make your perfume stay for hours after you have left. Also, the interviewer might be allergic to the perfume you use.
- Trousers' side-pockets shouldn't bulge with mobile phones, wallets etc., as it gives a bulky look to your legs.
- All noticeable body-piercing, tattoos should be concealed, as tattoos are since long associated with rebellious behavior.
- Don't smoke or eat odorous food before interviews. Use breath fresheners.
- The nails and teeth should be properly cleaned.