

Interview outfits: What to wear and not to wear in today's work environment

With so many interviews occurring over Zoom for the past few years, you might be feeling a bit rusty when it comes to putting together a full job interview outfit. You may be wondering if the old guidelines are still relevant or if business fashion has changed. You don't want your job interview outfit to look too outdated after all.

It becomes even more of a challenge when you start asking people for advice. Older relatives may still recommend formal options like a full suit and tie or a dress and heels for women. However, your friends in tech may recommend more casual options like jeans and a collared shirt that don't seem appropriate for all businesses or industries. That is the crux of dressing for a job interview. There is no perfect job interview outfit. The right look is the one that fits the role, your personality, and the company's culture.

How to choose the right job interview outfit

After a long job search, you've finally got an interview for your dream job, but how do you know what to wear? Here are a couple of tips for narrowing down what look you should be going for at your next interview.

Find out what current employees wear

If you aren't sure what to wear to an interview, a good rule of thumb is to dress up slightly more than you would on a normal workday in the role. If the employees wear a collared shirt and jeans, a collared shirt and slacks would be a good interview outfit.

It can help to ask current employees about job interview attire or go on Glassdoor to read past interviewees' tips and experiences. Many companies also have team photos posted on their website, LinkedIn, or Facebook pages.

This step is particularly important when interviewing for roles that may have non-traditional interview clothing expectations. For example, some clothing stores prefer that you come dressed in their brand or at least their aesthetic rather than traditional workwear.

Wear something that you feel confident in

You want to walk into your job interview with confidence, so don't wear something that makes you feel uncomfortable. For example, women shouldn't feel the need to wear skirts or heels if that is not attire that will make them feel comfortable and confident. Pantsuits and blazers are very trendy for women right now and make great job interview outfits.

Employers also look for candidates that will be a good cultural fit for their company. As such, you shouldn't be afraid to showcase your personality in your clothing. This is particularly true for creative roles such as marketing or design jobs. Stick with professional attire, but feel free to play around with fun colors or accessories if it feels appropriate for the role or company that you are interviewing for.

Job interview outfit ideas

If you need a bit of help, here are some more specific clothing guidelines to explore.

Business casual outfits

Business casual clothing is a common choice for job interviews. It's also a common workplace dress code. If you're not sure what counts as business casual, here are some ideas of appropriate items to wear:

- Dress pants
- Khakis
- Pencil skirts
- Dresses
- Sweaters
- Dress shirts
- Polo shirts
- Cardigans

Business casual is often associated with black, navy, white, and gray. Most people stick to neutral colors for job interview outfits, though you can adjust your color palette a bit to fit the season. Adding a small pop of color with one statement item can make you stand out and be a bit more memorable. However, this approach may not work well in more traditional environments.

There's also smart casual, which mixes business casual with everyday wear. For example, you may choose a professional collared shirt or blouse and pair it with dark-washed jeans.

Footwear for job interviews

Your footwear is also an important part of your job interview outfit (unless it's a virtual interview). Dress shoes, loafers, ballet flats, or professional boots are all generally acceptable shoe options for job interviews. Closed-toed shoes are best. Avoid wearing flip-flops or ugg type boots. Sneakers are also generally not appropriate for job interviews.

It's also a good idea to think about the location of the job interview. If you're going to interview at a business downtown where you're going to have to walk a few blocks from the nearest train station or parking garage, you'll need to wear shoes you can walk in for longer distances.

Job interview outfits for virtual interviews

Many companies are still conducting virtual interviews. For some businesses the virtual interview is an initial screening that may lead to an in-person interview if you make a good impression. If you are applying for remote roles, you may have all of your interviews over a virtual meeting platform like Zoom or Google Meet.

For remote roles, it is generally acceptable to only dress up from the waist-up. Consider a button-down shirt, nice blouse, cardigan, sweater, or a blazer for Zoom interview attire. Though you should wear something somewhat professional on the lower half in case you do need to stand up and grab something. Jeans are generally fine, but it's probably not a great idea to take an interview in your underwear or your favorite holiday pajamas (even if it's a virtual interview).

What not to wear to a job interview

While there is a lot more flexibility on acceptable office and interview clothing, there are still some items that are still considered inappropriate to wear to most job interviews.

Revealing attire

If you will be working in an office setting, avoid wearing crop tops (tops that expose the stomach), shirts or dresses with a low neckline, or other clothing that could be perceived as revealing. Sleeveless tops are generally fine these days. Though if a dress or shirt has super narrow straps, it's a good idea to add a cardigan or blazer.

Casual dresses make great job interview outfits for start-ups or more laid-back offices, but be mindful of the length of your dress. Aim for dresses or skirts that are about knee-length. If you're tall, many dresses that are meant to be knee-length may fall a little above the knee. It can help to add some tights under your dress to achieve a more covered-up look. You'll also want to consider the fit of the dress as job interviews aren't a great time to break out form-fitting dresses.

Clothing that is too casual

For many roles, going a bit more casual is perfectly acceptable. In fact, it may be the smarter choice if you are interviewing somewhere where the old-school suit and tie would be considered stuffy or out-of-place. However, you don't want to look like you just rolled out of bed either.

Many workplaces are fine with T-shirts or sweatshirts. In fact, many even provide branded hoodies or t-shirts for their staff to wear, either optionally or as part of a uniform. However, it's best to try to avoid those items for job interviews. You can swap out a t-shirt for a short-sleeved collared shirt or a sweater shirt for a sweater to maintain a somewhat casual look while keeping it interview-appropriate.

Distracting clothing items

You can wear a statement necklace or a fun colored cardigan to add some personality to your outfit (unless you're interviewing in a more conservative or traditional setting). However, you should try to avoid any clothing that the interviewer may find overly distracting. After all, you want them to focus on you more than your clothes.

Avoid graphic tees or any clothing with large logos, sayings, or designs. Logos on clothing are fine, unless it's the logo of a competitor, but they shouldn't be the centerpiece of your clothing. Try not to pick a sweater with the brand name sprawled across the chest, for example. Similarly, you may want to save the bold prints for another day.

Job interview outfits for interviewers

The candidates aren't the only ones that worry about what to wear to a job interview. If you're participating in a job interview, you may be wondering whether you need to dress up more than usual. The answer here is that it depends.

Interviews are a two-way vetting process. As much as you're evaluating the candidate, they are evaluating you. Therefore, you do want to make a good first impression. It's fine for interviewers to dress up a bit more than usual. Recruiters and HR Managers generally wear business casual or smart casual to interviews depending on the company's normal dress code.

It is becoming more popular to include additional members of the candidate's future team in interviews, particularly as candidates progress to the final rounds. If you're joining an interview, but are not the department manager or a member of the HR team, it's alright to stay fairly close to your normal day-to-day wardrobe. You want to look put together, so feel free to elevate your look slightly if needed. These final team interviews are generally more about the candidate's fit than their qualifications, so giving them an authentic view of your team will be more helpful than wearing a suit and tie when you normally wear jeans.