How to Dress for an Interview

From Alison Doyle

A recent article in *U.S.A. Today* spoke about candidates for jobs wearing jeans, purple sweat suits, and spike heels or sneakers. Other applicants aren't afraid to show pierced body parts and spiked hair. Still others chewed gum or showed up in rumpled clothes or with their pants falling down. One recruiter even told a candidate with his trousers down below his hips, to "Pull your pants up." According to the article, the outlandish dress costs some candidates the job.

Does it really make a difference how you dress and act? In many cases, it does. I'll never forget the gentleman I interviewed for an accounting position. He had been out of work for a few months and wanted to show me why. He took off his jacket, unbuttoned his shirt and started to pull down his pants (this is a true story) to show me the scar from a boat propeller that had injured him.

He didn't get the job. Neither did the young lady in a bright red skirt so short and tight that she could hardly sit down!

In the conservative business climate I worked in at the time, appearances did matter. In other environments it isn't as important. However, it does make sense to dress your best for the interview, regardless of the dress code at the organization. If you're in doubt about how to dress for an interview, it is best to err on the side of conservatism. It is much better to be overdressed than underdressed (or undressed).

According to Kim Zoller at Image Dynamics, 55% of another person's perception of you is based on how you look. Her Dressing for Success information gives some tips on how to look your best, without necessarily spending a lot of money. Here's a quick look at the basics:

Women

- Solid color, conservative suit
- Coordinated blouse
- Moderate shoes
- Limited jewelry
- Neat, professional hairstyle
- Tan or light hosiery
- Sparse make-up & perfume
- Manicured nails
- Portfolio or briefcase

Men

- Solid color, conservative suit
- White long sleeve shirt
- Conservative tie
- Dark socks, professional shoes
- Very limited jewelry
- Neat, professional hairstyle
- Go easy on the aftershave
- Neatly trimmed nails
- Portfolio or briefcase

How to Dress for Success

Difficulty: Average
Time Required: An hour or longer
Here's How:

1. Wear a solid color conservative suit with a coordinated shirt or blouse.
2. Wear moderate shoes.
3. Make sure your hair is well groomed and neat.
4. Don't overdo the perfume, makeup, cologne or after shave.
5. Limit your jewelry.
6. Make sure to try on your outfit BEFORE the day of the interview

Tips:

1. Your clothes are your image, check the mirror and see what others see
2. It is better to be overdressed than underdressed