

Dressing for Interview Success

We all dread them, but interviews are a necessary part of life. The thing that stands between where you are right now and how successfully you make your next move up the career ladder.

Recent research revealed that people's two biggest concerns about an interview are:

- *What to say*
- *What to wear*

Preparation in both these areas is critical to interview success. Most people will spend their preparation time doing some research about the company they want to work for, what the job entails and rehearsing appropriate answers to the questions they're likely to be asked. The issue of what to wear tends to be secondary and yet it plays such a powerful part in whether someone will hire you or not.

Dressing for interview is like taking a role in a play, your character won't be believable to the audience unless you're in the right costume.

So let's get down to what to and what not to wear at interviews. Before you start trawling through your wardrobe or going out shopping you need to do some important research.

Step 1 – Check the Job Description/Person Specification

If you've been given these documents have a good look at them. What do they tell you about the qualities, skills and attributes the company is looking for? Highlight 3 key areas that stand out most. For example, in a project management role the 3 key skills, qualities or attributes might be well organised, decisive, attentive to detail. In a marketing role they might be looking for someone who is dynamic, creative and pioneering.

These 3 areas should strongly influence how you dress for your interview. So for example, if attention to detail is key, ensure that you have checked the crease on your trousers is sharp, there are no loose threads on your button holes or hems. The knot in your tie is impeccable or you carry a bag with interesting details on it and a tie or scarf with geometric shapes will demonstrate a logical mind.

If creativity is of utmost importance, dress with a little flair so that you stand out from the crowd. You should always look business-like when you dress for interview, but here you have some leeway to show your creativity by adding a pair of quirky cufflinks, a or a piece of stylish bold jewellery.

Step 2 – Look at the company's marketing literature & website

Consider the messages these are conveying about the business. Are they formal or informal? Cutting edge or more traditional. Look at the colours they use are they bright, fun and engaging or cool, sophisticated and serious? For example, visit the website for Virgin Airlines and then for British Airways. They both offer similar products and services but have totally different cultures, backgrounds and approaches.

Reading these subliminal messages will tell you far more about an organisation than any question you ask at the end of your interview. It also enables you to think about how you need to project yourself to fit with their culture.

Step 3 – Ask an ‘insider’ about their dress code

Ring the organisation before your interview and talk to someone about their dress code. Ask the receptionist (they are likely to see everyone that comes and goes in the organisation) or someone who works in the department the job will be located. Explain that you’re coming for an interview and want to make sure you dress appropriately. No one will mind you doing this as it shows you’re doing your homework. If you prefer, you can always remain anonymous, after all you’re likely to be one of several candidates.

To help you in deciding what to wear, here are some essential interview dress do’s and don’t’s to land you that dream job:

DO...	DON'T...
...dress in a co-ordinating suit. Wearing a suit to interview is always your best option as it's better to be overdressed than underdressed	...go to an interview without wearing a jacket. The collar of a jacket shows respectability and is more formal – regardless of how informally dressed your interviewer is, you need to be at least one step up
...pay attention to the details like ensuring your nails are manicured, your hair is neat and tidy and everything matches	...wear brightly coloured nail varnish, go for clear or a french manicure
...wear tights or hosiery even under trousers	...wear open toed shoes or sandals, skirts above the knee, sleeveless or low cut tops
...opt for darker and neutral colours as they are more formal	...dress completely in black, add a splash of accent colour to show a more cheerful, interesting side to your character
...choose a navy or charcoal grey interview suit – navy represents honesty and grey demonstrates neutrality and sophistication	...wear dangly earrings or any other very fussy jewellery or highly patterned garments
...wear or carry one interesting item that helps you be memorable to the interviewer	...forget to polish your shoes!