Dress for Success

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DRESS FOR SUCCESS

TOP TIPS FOR EIW AND OTHER INTERVIEWS

GENERAL CONCEPT: you want to present yourself as a capable individual who has all their ducks in a row. This means your appearance needs to project that image, as much as your words and behavior in the interview. You are bringing your best, most confident, most personable, professional self to these meetings.

“Look good, feel good” is cliché, but also relevant to the hiring process. If you feel comfortable in what you are wearing (and for some students that means being confident that others perceive you as wearing the “right” thing,) you are absolutely going to be better during your interviews. If you are sitting in your interview feeling uncomfortable in your suit or thinking about how you are dressed, it’s possible, and perhaps even likely, that your interviewer might mistake your non-verbal cues as being disinterested or unenthusiastic about the firm.

In addition to giving you confidence, dressing for success is also, in part, about demonstrating your understanding of the professional norms when it comes to attire. It is a way of demonstrating your understanding of the workplace and the profession you are looking to enter. Now, this does not mean that you necessarily always need to conform to those norms one you have the job, and anytime we address subjective evaluations like this, it’s important to note that norms surrounding topics like attire, piercings, and tattoos are evolving within the profession—perhaps more slowly than some would prefer—but interviewing is a unique animal when it comes to these things. Ultimately, the purpose of this guide is not to quash your individual style but rather to give you guidance about what the traditional norms are regarding attire and how normative deviations might be viewed so that you can make informed decisions about whether to conform, or not.

A NOTE ABOUT DRESSING FOR INTERVIEWS: WHILE DIFFERENT OFFICES, CITIES, AND FIRMS WILL HAVE DIFFERENT NORMS WHEN IT COMES TO DAILY WORK ATTIRE, FOR THE INTERVIEW CONTEXT, YOU DRESS AT THE COMMON DENOMINATOR AND ERR ON THE SIDE OF FORMALITY. THIS BOTH HELPS CONTROL FOR THE NOTED DIFFERENCES, AND SHOWS THAT YOU TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY SERIOUSLY.

SUITS:

• Go for solid, dark and neutral colors: dark blue, black, and charcoal gray are the safest choices for your suit. Your suit jacket and pants/skirt should be matching colors. Keep it simple and conservative. Pant suits and skirt suits are both acceptable: wear what makes you feel confident and professional.

• Every student will be wearing some version of a suit at each day of EIW—you will need at least two suit options for the four days of EIW. (This can be a single suit you keep meticulously clean, or two/three suits.)
• Make sure to have your suit properly tailored. For almost everyone, off-the-rack suits will need to be altered in order to look their best, and tailoring can take a week or more—**DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE WEEK BEFORE EIW TO GET YOUR SUIT(S) TAILORED.**

• New suits will need to have the securing threads removed from the pockets, skirt seams, and jacket back vents. (Don’t fall prey to this commonly overlooked issue!)

• How do I know if my clothes fit properly?
  - Button-down shirts should button smoothly and not have any gaping between buttons.
  - Hemlines for pants should generally just break at the shoe—they should not be touching the floor as you walk, nor showing more than your ankle when you sit down.
  - Your jacket should fit comfortably across your shoulders and be able to button without stretch lines at the back seam.
  - Jacket sleeves should come to the base of your hand and no longer. Your shirtsleeve should just barely peek out.
  - Online resources for suiting up:
    - [https://www.wikihow.com/Wear-a-Suit](https://www.wikihow.com/Wear-a-Suit)

• Wear a neutral blouse with a simple collar (or a shell without a collar) or a button-down, cotton dress shirt in a neutral color like white or light blue. Avoid bright colors or loud patterns. Your top should fit comfortably and not appear to be tight, wrinkled, or low-cut. Avoid anything that is going to call attention to your attire rather than your credentials and personality.

• If you are able, consider bringing a backup shirt with you each day in case you spill, sweat through it, etc.

• All of your clothes should be wrinkle-free and crisp (i.e. fresh from the dry cleaners unless they are new).

**ACCESSORIES:**

• If you are wearing a tie, choose a traditional silk tie in a muted solid color or with a simple, understated pattern. Your tie should coordinate with your attire. Do not wear ties with silk-screened images or designer logos.

• Keep jewelry light and simple. Wear small studs or small teardrop earrings. Do not wear more than one pair of earrings, two rings, and one watch or bracelet. Most students choose to remove all non-traditional jewelry (e.g., nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.).

• In the sea of dark suits, you may want to bring a little individualism. Remember, however, that you are interviewing with the most conservative sector of a profession that is known for dressing conservatively. You want the interview to focus on your credentials and personality rather than your fashion sense. Within those bounds, however, you may consider an interesting pin, scarf, jewelry, tie, cufflinks, or funky socks. If the item came from your travels abroad or has some other interesting story attached to it that you can tell when someone comments on it, so much the
better. Remember, however, that it should add to the image of you as a professional. If you are unsure about your flair, ask a counselor!

- Professional bag/folio: you’ll need to carry around extra copies of your resume and transcript to interviews; a beat up backpack or messenger bag will detract from the message you want to send. Consider getting a leather (or leather-look) folio, a modern briefcase or attaché, or something else that you can use for EIW and at your summer job for carrying around the daily necessities. (Again, this should likely be in a classic color and style.)
- Those wearing skirts have an additional consideration around hosiery. While flesh-toned pantyhose are the safest, most conservative choice, bare legs are also an option. (In fall and winter, opaque or semi-opaque tights in dark colors are also an option.)

**SHOES:**

- Wear dress shoes or closed-toe heels that coordinate with your attire. Black, brown and navy are fine, but avoid white. If you wear a belt, your belt and shoes should match. Avoid open-toe shoes, boots, and stiletto heels. Wear leather shoes; avoid suede and light fabrics. Make sure your shoes are polished and shined and that your heels are in good shape.
- Not only your suits but your shoes need to be checked for comfort and proper fit. You’ll be on your feet a lot and frequently hustling between rooms. If you buy new shoes, wear them around your house and even for a several days prior to EIW if possible. If the soles are smooth, consider roughing them up with sandpaper so that you don’t slip on hardwood floors or smooth carpeting.
- For those wearing heels, anything up to 3” should work fine. Heels higher than that can be both impractical for the reasons noted above, and can detract from your professional image.
- For those in womenswear, most flat shoes are not formal enough for an interview. Check with OCP for options that work if flats are your thing.

**PERSONAL GROOMING:**

- **Hair:** Wavy, curly, straight, natural, braided, twisted—all textures can look professional as long as they are neat. For most folks, planning to visit the barber or salon within the week prior to EIW is a good idea so your hair looks its best. Hair should not be done in an elaborate style. Keep it clean and simple. Be sure to keep your hair out of your eyes and your face. If you have very long hair, you might want to pull it away from your face in a very simple, clean style.
  - Around EIW and callback time is not the time to try any major new hairstyle or color changes—you want a style you know how to handle and you are comfortable in.
- **Makeup:** If makeup is part of your regular routine, then plan to wear it. If it’s not, then don’t. The point is to do what makes you feel comfortable and confident.
  - If you do wear makeup, choose the most understated, clean and classic look that’s still “you”. Go with neutral or earthy tones rather than dramatic hot pinks, bronzes, purples, etc. Makeup should not be shimmery, iridescent, or glittery.
• **Fingernails**: should be trimmed and impeccably clean. Clear or pale pink polish are the standbys for those who wear nail polish. (Essie Mademoiselle is a good choice for all skin tones.) Bright colors and/or nail décor is not generally advisable for EIW.

• **Deodorant**: Make sure you have a strong antiperspirant/deodorant and consider bringing a travel size with you in case you need it mid-day.
  - If you normally use deodorant only, pick up a travel size stick/spray with antiperspirant for use on interview days. Between the stress and the August heat, you won’t regret it.

• **Facial hair**: needs to look **extremely** neat, trimmed short and brushed/conditioned. Otherwise, clean shaven daily is the way to go.

• It is not advisable to try new skin care or makeup products in the days before interviews. You will be under extra stress and more likely to have a reaction, which will only make your stress worse. If you have a condition which flares up under stress (such as psoriasis), it is a good idea to have your prescribed/standard treatment in-hand prior to EIW week so you are prepared.

**BUSINESS CASUAL ATTIRE**

“Business Casual” or “Casual Fridays” can be confusing to anyone beginning their professional career. The key is to know the culture and the setting of your work place or the reception to which you are invited and then dressing “up” a notch (since you are trying to impress).

Business casual attire generally includes nice pants/slacks, blouses or button-down collared shirts, and/or dresses. Ties are optional. Blazers and cardigans are appropriate and, for shoes, flats, boots, and closed-toe comfortable shoes are acceptable. Do not wear jeans, shorts, sundresses, or athletic wear.

For less formal events, a knit shirt, golf shirt or dressy sport shirt is acceptable. Tailored jackets, tasteful sweaters and blouses are also good choices. It is also acceptable to wear khakis or casual slacks with a sport jacket, dress shirt, sweater (short or long-sleeve), sweater vest or cardigan.

Attire should always be clean, pressed and wrinkle free, without holes or frayed areas.

If an invitation says “casual,” jeans or khakis are fine. Small insignia such as Polo logos are acceptable, but shirts and slacks bearing large promotional information are not appropriate.

Visual guides for both business professional and business casual are provided in Appendix B.

**ENERGY**

The energy and attitude you bring into your interview can make a huge difference. Below are some tips on keeping yourself in the right frame of mind.

• Bring headphones/earbuds to listen to some upbeat music or some calming meditations in between interviews. It can help calm your nerves and send you into your interviews with a positive attitude.

• Tuck some small, unlikely-to-make-a-mess snacks into your bag for the day to avoid a blood sugar crash: dried fruit, nuts, fruit leather, and energy/protein bars are good choices. Not a
good choice: anything with chocolate (can melt), granola (too crumbly) or lots of liquid (can spill).

- Throw some breath mints (not gum) in your bag if you like them. Just be sure your mouth is empty before you walk into the interview.
- Despite the stress and the opportunities for excess, limit your caffeine and alcohol consumption during EIW and during interview/quasi-interview events. You need a good night’s sleep to bring your best self each day, and being hungover, tired, or over-wired is not anyone’s best self.

We know that this is general advice and you are an individual. What’s right for you may differ from the general advice offered here. If you have any question about your outfit or anything else here before or during EIW, we’re here to help! Feel free to email your counselor or Anne Linder (who really geeks out on this stuff, alinder@umich.edu). OCP counselors will be on hand at EIW with help and supplies for small emergencies, so stop by—we are here to help you succeed!

FINALLY:

While these tips are all aimed at making you feel and look your best, remember that you are a human, interviewing with other humans. None of us are perfect. Sometimes acne flares up, palms are sweaty, coffee gets spilled, etc. When that happens, you’ve got to just own it with grace and humor. The other humans will understand—they’ve been in your shoes! If you can accept life’s imperfections and still roll forward confidently, you may just impress your interviewer more than if things were perfect.
APPENDIX A.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- Suit(s), shirts, shoes, accessories selected
- Suit(s) tailored
- Folio or bag for your extra copies of resume and transcript
- Barber/salon appointment scheduled
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
Have your suit professionally tailored.

An ill-fitting suit, like the one on the left, looks unprofessional and sloppy.
Business Casual
Business Professional
Business Casual

[Images of outfits with green check marks and red X marks]
Interview Shoes