WHAT IS BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL WEAR?

When you dress business professional, you are wearing conservative clothing to portray yourself in a professional manner. Business professional is similar to business formal, but does not necessarily mean you have to break out your best shoes and suit.

Careers that may require business professional dress on a daily basis include finance, accounting and organizations that have a strict dress code policy. Women can wear a skirt or pants suit with heels while men may wear a blazer or suit jacket, button down shirt, suit pants, a tie and dress shoes.

WHAT IS BUSINESS CASUAL?

Business casual is crisp, neat, and appropriate even for a chance meeting with a manager. It should not look like cocktail party or picnic attire, but fall in between. Also, a classic look rather than trendy is suggested.

Basics

Neatly pressed khaki pants and long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirts are safe options for both men and women. Unwrinkled polo/golf shirts are an appropriate choice if you know the environment will be quite casual, outdoors or in a very hot location.

This may not seem like exciting attire, but you are trying to stand out for your good judgment in a business environment, not for your cutting edge look.

WHEN DO I WEAR BUSINESS CASUAL? PROFESSIONAL?

Interviews

Research the employer and this will tell you, also consider the field in which you are interviewing. Business casual may be appropriate for a staff position, however, if you are interviewing for a management position always dress in professional business wear. It is better to be over dressed than under dressed!

Career Fairs

Business casual may be appropriate at some career fairs; however do your research in advance. Pay attention to promotional materials for the event. If in question, go with business professional.

Information Sessions

Sessions held in a classroom or conducted as a presentation to a large group are not as formal as a reception-type event.

An off-campus event, a conference for example, may require business professional attire. This can depend on the industry and type of employer hosting the event.

If the invitation, flyer or notice says to wear specific attire, it’s a no-brainer! When in doubt, ask the host or sponsor about attire for a function you will be attending. It is never wrong to politely inquire about appropriate attire.
BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL KEYS TO SUCCESS

Women

- Wear a conservative tailored suit or dress suit, ensuring that the cut of your blouse-neck does not show cleavage
- Skirt/dress should hit top of knee - avoid extreme slits
- Wear well-shined basic medium/low-heeled pumps (no higher than three inches)
- Limit jewelry and select subtle options. Consider the Rule of Eight, which is to have no more than eight pieces of accessory. This includes earrings, bracelets, a watch, a necklace, rings, and buttons on clothing.

☐ Remove facial jewelry
- Choose small handbag or portfolio

Men

- Shave and have well-groomed, professional-looking hair
- Wear dark blue, black or gray suits
- Select white or blue cotton shirts - avoid other colors or stripes
- Wear a tie and match belt with shoe color. Your tie may be where you choose to add a splash of color!
- Wear well-shined black or cordovan shoes with dark, mid-calf socks
- Wear a conservative watch, avoid earrings or other jewelry.

SPECIFICS FOR BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL

Shoes / Belt
Wear a leather belt and leather shoes. Athletic shoes are inappropriate.

Cost / Quality
You are not expected to be able to afford the same clothing as a corporate CEO. However, do invest in quality that will look appropriate during your first two or three years on the job for a business casual environment or occasions.

Details
Everything should be clean, well pressed, and not show wear and tear. Even the nicest khakis after 100 washings may not be your best choice for an interview. Carefully inspect new clothes for tags, and all clothes for dangling threads, etc.

Common Sense
If it is pouring rain outside and you are rushing to get to an information session between classes and you left home six hours earlier, no one will expect you to show up looking ready for a photo shoot, they will just be happy you made it.

Avoid wearing your worst gym clothes and jeans. If you show up at an event and realize you're not as well dressed as you should be, make a quick, pleasant apology and make a good impression with your interpersonal skills and intelligent questions.

BUSINESS CASUAL KEYS TO SUCCESS

Women

- If it is “club friendly,” you shouldn’t wear it
- Choose casual pants, dresses or skirts that aren’t too tight

Choose skirts or dresses that come to the knee while standing and cover your thighs when seated
- Select tailored shirts, blouses, sweaters - avoid tight shirts and those revealing cleavage

Men

- Shave and have well-groomed, professional-looking hair
- Select long-sleeved shirts (dressier) or short-sleeved in summer
- Select pressed slacks or khakis
- Wear leather shoes or boots, with matching, mid-calf socks
- Ties are generally not necessary, but if in doubt, wear one and match belt with shoe color
- Wear a conservative watch, avoid earrings or other jewelry.
SPECIFICS FOR MEN’S BUSINESS CASUAL

**Ties**
Ties are generally not necessary for business casual, but if you are in doubt, wear one. It never hurts to slightly overdress; by dressing nicely, you pay a compliment to your host.

You can always wear the tie and subtly walk by the room where the function is held; if no one is wearing a tie, discreetly remove yours and return it to your car. If that is not an option, be aware of the bulge that may show if you store it in your pocket.

**Shirts**
Long-sleeved shirts are considered dressier than short-sleeved and are appropriate even in summer. For casual wear, leave your blazer in the car.

Choosing white or light blue solid, or conservative stripes is safest. Polo shirts (tucked in, of course) are acceptable in more casual situations.

**Socks**
Wear dark socks, mid-calf length so no skin is visible when you sit down.

**Shoes**
Leather shoes should be worn. No sandals, athletic shoes or hiking boots.

**Facial Hair**
Just as with interviews, facial hair, if worn, should be well-groomed. Know your industry and how conservative it is; observe men in your industry if you are unsure what is appropriate or are considering changing your look.

**Jewelry**
Wear a conservative watch (checking your Smartphone isn’t an option). If you choose to wear other jewelry, be conservative. Removing earrings is safest. For conservative industries, don't wear earrings.

SPECIFICS FOR WOMEN’S BUSINESS CASUAL

**Ties**
Don't confuse club attire with casual business attire. If you would wear it to a club, you shouldn't wear it in a business environment. Also, most attire worn on television is not appropriate for business environments.

**Pants / Skirts**
Women can wear casual pants, or skirts. Neither should be tight. Fabrics should be crisp; colors should generally be solid; navy, black, gray, brown and khaki are always safe bets.

For the most business-like appearance, pants should be creased and tailored; neither extremely tight or flowing. If you are pursuing a conservative industry and are in doubt, observe well-dressed women in your industry on the job, at career fairs, and information sessions.

**Skirt & Dress Length**
Your skirt or dress should come at least to your knees while you are standing. While you are seated, your thighs should be covered. If your skirt/dress comes to just below the knee, a slit to just above the knee might be acceptable. A very long skirt should not be slit to above the knee.

Generally slits in the center back of a skirt, to facilitate walking and stair climbing, are acceptable. Slits to facilitate a view of your legs are not appropriate for business purposes. Slits should not be visible.

**Shirts / Sweaters**
Tailored knit sweaters are appropriate business casual choices for women. Cotton, silk, and blends are a top choice; velvets and shimmery fabrics suitable for parties are not. The fit should not be tight and cleavage is not appropriate for business and job search occasions.

**Jewelry / Accessories**
Wear a conservative watch (checking your Smartphone is not an option). Keep your choices simple and lean toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style and color. If your industry is creative, you have more flexibility than someone pursuing a conservative industry.

**Makeup**
Keep makeup conservative and natural. A little is usually better than none for a polished look. Nails should be clean and well-groomed. Avoid extremes of nail length and polish color, especially in conservative industries.

**Shoes**
Choose leather or fabric / microfiber in black, navy or brown (to coordinate with your other attire and accessories); white and pastels are not appropriate. For the most conservative look, toes should be covered. Sandals which are neither extremely dressy nor extremely casual might be appropriate.

**Thin straps and heels higher than two to three inches are not appropriate. Chunky heels and platforms are not appropriate.**

Make certain you can walk comfortably in your shoes; hobbling around a job fair in shoes that are pinching your feet does not convey a professional image.

**Hose**
Wear hose if your skirt length is knee length or you are in a more formal environment. Otherwise, they are not essential for business casual.
Purse / Bag
If you carry a purse, keep it small and simple, or carry a small briefcase or business-like tote in place of a purse. A structured bag tends to look more professional than something soft or floppy. Purse/bag color should coordinate with your shoes.

GROOMING TIPS FOR MEN AND women

Hair
Should be clean and neat, with no bright coloring or exaggerated cuts/styles.

Details
No missing buttons, no lint; and don’t forget to remove external tags and tacking stitches from new clothes (students often forget to clip the tacking in the back slit of their jackets).

Hands
Clean fingernails that are mid-length.

Tattoos
In many professional settings, and while attending events, it is best to cover tattoos if that is an option. Wearing a suit jacket, or a shirt with a collar, as well as pants (instead of a skirt) are ways to achieve this.

Padfolios
These are preferred over a bulky briefcase. A small briefcase is also appropriate, but if you have no reason to carry a briefcase, don’t; you risk looking silly.

Back packs
Appropriate to carry to an information session held on campus (after all, you are a student), you will want to leave it at home or at the registration desk of a career fair.

Fit
Clothes should be clean, neatly pressed, and fit properly, neither tight nor baggy. Try them on early to make sure of fit and condition.

Smell
Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly or not at all. No odors on clothes. Do not smell like smoke.

Breath
Ensure that your breath is fresh during your interactions with others. Foul breath can immediately turn people off, and it leaves a lasting negative impression.

ALWAYS AVOID

- Flip-flops
- T-shirts
- Tight or baggy fits
- Strong perfume/cologne, cigarette smell
- Shorts

Resources:
Auburn University Career Center Business Professional / Casual Dress Guide
Images from Google Image Search
career.vt.edu/Jobsearch/BusCasual.htm#when
smallbusiness.chron.com/four-different-types-business-attire-23396.html

Florida Work Experience Program