



## WHEN TO DRESS BUSINESS CASUAL

It will be appropriate at some career fairs and job fairs (attire should be specified in the promotional materials for each event). Some fairs suggest or require interview attire. Do your research in advance.

Most employer information sessions are typically evening sessions held the day prior to an employer's first interview day on campus and business casual is appropriate. Information sessions held in a classroom on campus or conducted as a presentation to a large group don't require you to be quite as strict in your attire as a reception-type event. Some employer information sessions are conducted as receptions on or off campus, perhaps in a hotel facility. In some cases interview attire, or business attire which is more formal than business casual may be called for. This can depend on the industry and the type of employer hosting the event. If you are in doubt, ask the employer before attending.

If the invitation, flyer or notice says to. It's a no-brainer!

When in doubt, ask the host / sponsor about attire for a function you will be attending. It is never wrong to politely inquire about appropriate attire.

## WHAT IS BUSINESS CASUAL?

Business casual is crisp, neat, and is appropriate even for a chance meeting with a CEO. It should not look like cocktail party or picnic attire. Avoid tight or baggy clothing; business casual is classic rather than trendy.

## BASICS

Khaki pants, neatly pressed, and a pressed long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirt are safe 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 trying to stand out for your good judgment in a business environment, not for your cutting edge look.

### *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. Even the nicest khakis after 100 washings may not be your best choice for a reception. 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 12 hours earlier, no one will expect you to show up looking ready for a photo shoot — they'll just be happy you made it. Just 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.

## 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 discreetly walk by the room where the function is held; if no one is wearing a tie, discreetly remove yours.

### *Shirts*

Long-sleeved shirts are considered dressier than short-sleeved and are appropriate even in summer. 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. If you choose to wear other jewelry, be conservative. Removing earrings is safest. For conservative industries, don't wear earrings. Observe other men in your industry to see what is acceptable.

### **SPECIFICS FOR WOMEN'S BUSINESS CASUAL**

Don't confuse club attire with business attire. If you would wear it to a club, you probably 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, at information sessions, etc.

#### ***Skirt Length and Slits***

Your skirt should come at least to your knees while you are standing. While you are seated, your thighs should be covered. If your skirt 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 a stair climbing, are acceptable. Slits to facilitate a view of your legs are not appropriate for business purposes. Slips should not be visible.

#### ***Shirt / Sweaters***

In addition to tailored shirts or blouses, tailored knit sweaters and sweater sets are appropriate business casual choices for women. Cotton, silk, and blends are appropriate. Velvets and shimmery fabrics suitable for parties are not appropriate. The fit should not be tight and cleavage is not appropriate to business and job search occasions.

#### ***Jewelry / Accessories***

Wear a conservative watch. Keep your choices simple and leaning toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style and color. If your industry is creative, you have more flexibility than someone pursuing a conservative industry.

#### ***Cosmetics***

Keep makeup conservative and natural looking. 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 or extremely casual might be appropriate. Thin straps and high heels 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. A briefcase is certainly not necessary for most business casual events. Leather, microfiber and fine wovens are appropriate. Canvas and straw are not appropriate.

### **GROOMING TIPS FOR MEN AND WOMEN**

#### ***Hair***

Should be clean and neat.

#### ***Shoes***

Should be in polished condition. Make sure heels are not worn.

#### ***Details***

No missing buttons, no lint; and don't forget to remove external tags and tacking stitches from new clothes.

#### ***Hands***

Clean fingernails.

#### ***Fit***

Clothes should be clean, neatly pressed, and fit properly, neither tight nor baggy.

#### ***Smell***

Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly or not at all. No odors on clothes. Don't smell like smoke.

#### ***Padfolios***

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.

#### ***Bookbags***

Appropriate to carry to an information session held on campus (after all, you are a student). For career fairs and job fairs, book bags are generally checked at the door, and you should carry a padfolio only. Don't carry a book bag to an event held at a hotel.

**Resource:** [www.career.vt.edu/Jobsearc/BusCasual.htm#when](http://www.career.vt.edu/Jobsearc/BusCasual.htm#when)