



FIRST IMPRESSIONS: YOUR APPEARANCE AT AN INTERVIEW

First impressions are very important and, although clothes do not make the person, it matters very much what you wear. Communications studies have shown that during an initial encounter between two people, more than 70 percent of the message is communicated by appearance alone. (*The 110 Biggest Mistakes Job Hunters Make and How To Avoid Them*, R. Hermann & L. Sutherland). Thus, a first impression is critical to your interviewing success. You want to be remembered for you, not for what you wore. The following guidelines may be helpful as you prepare for the upcoming on-campus interviewing season.

The rule of thumb with respect to interview attire is to **always err in favor of the conservative**. The conservative look is always “in” and a safe choice. Although this does not mean you have to wear black or navy, darker colors are generally preferable. Find a color and style that look and feel good on you. Clothes should always appear freshly laundered and shoes should be well-maintained and unscuffed. Before your interview, try on your interview outfit and make sure that everything fits well. You don’t want to find out on the day of your interview that your clothes have “shrunk!”

Men should wear dark suits with a long-sleeved white shirt and tie. While splashy ties with funky or comical motifs may be in style, they are generally not appropriate for an interview. The darker blue dress shirt is also currently considered “en vogue;” however, more conservative attorneys may frown upon this type of, albeit stylish, attire. Interestingly, attorneys in plaintiffs’ practices are often seen in the more trendy attire mentioned above, as opposed to attorneys in the generally more conservative defense bar. Again, with respect to interview attire, you cannot go wrong by dressing conservatively. No “business casual” wear!

Although **women** have more options for professional attire, such as a suit or a tailored business dress, suits are preferable especially for law firm interviews. Although pantsuits are “in” and perfectly acceptable attire for females within the vast majority of law firms today, it is safest to go with the traditional skirt suit when interviewing with a potentially conservative future employer. With respect to color, women may want to avoid exceptionally bright or off-beat hues. Women should be careful about make-up applications and avoid make-up colors that attract attention. While bizarre nail color may currently be the rage, showing up for an interview with green nail polish may be looked upon with disfavor. Simple accessories are also recommended, such as a string of pearls or a single-strand chain. Too



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much jewelry, or noisy jewelry, could draw more attention to your outfit than to your qualifications. Regarding footwear, again it is best to wear more conservative shoes, such as a standard pump in a dark color. Always wear nylons to an interview. Avoid “business casual” wear!

Obviously, personal hygiene plays a major factor in any interview setting. Studies have confirmed that you will make a better impression at an interview if your hair (including facial hair) is neatly brushed and trimmed, you have obviously freshly bathed, you have clean, well-manicured fingernails, and you have neatly-pressed clothes on (*What Color is Your Parachute?*, R. Bolles, 1996). Women should make sure that their hair is neatly styled, so that it is not a distraction while interviewing. If your hair keeps falling in your face, it will divert attention for both you and the interviewer. Also be careful with overzealous perfume or cologne application. Studies show that over-perfumed candidates usually make poor impressions on interviewers. See Bolles, supra.

Cost may be a concern for many law students. Fortunately, two interview suits and a presentable pair of shoes should get you through the interview season. You may want to try local thrift shops or discount warehouse stores like Marshalls or Sims. Your clothes should fit you well and be comfortable, no matter what interview apparel you choose. On-campus interviewing and all interviewing can be a tiring process, with long days and many consecutive interviews. Make sure that your attire can get you through the day with OCPD.

INTERVIEW APPEARANCE “DO’S” AND “DON’TS”

DON’T:

- Fall prey to the latest trends; you will never go wrong in a crisp white shirt and dark conservative suit
- Wear any garish or off-beat colors or patterns
- For men, wear ties with splashy or comical motifs
- Wear shoes that are scuffed or otherwise poorly maintained
- Over-accessorize; don’t wear too much, or noisy, jewelry
- Wear off-beat nail color or make-up



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DO:

- Drench yourself with perfume or cologne; don't wear it at all
- Wear open-toed shoes, sling backs or sandals
- Wear hair clips. However, barrettes, on the other hand, are acceptable
- Be well-groomed: make sure your fingernails are clean and neatly manicured
- Neatly comb, brush, and/or style your hair, including any facial hair
- Freshly launder and press your apparel
- Try on your interview outfit ahead of time to make sure that everything fits, no missing buttons, no spots, etc.
- Polish your shoes
- Wear a conservative suit and shoes in a dark or muted color
- For Women: wear nylons!
- If pulling hair back, tie with a barrette or scarf; never a hair clip

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