

PERSONAL APPEARANCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Personal presentation is how you present yourself in everyday situations. This is a communication skill that is essential in gaining employment and being part of a workplace environment. What you say and do are part of your personal presentation, as well as your outward appearance. Dressing smartly, being clean and having good personal hygiene, and carrying yourself well is all part of making a strong first impression and appearing professional.

Regardless of how you might feel about it, you will constantly be evaluated and re-evaluated by the people around you, particularly by employers. Your appearance at work sends many messages about how you view the environment, how much respect you have for yourself and your work, what groups you identify with, and where you think you belong within the organization. Making just a few adjustments to your appearance may lead to more and better opportunities. The following suggestions and tips will be useful for you as you enter the workforce.

Clothing / Dress

Dress the Part

Wearing appropriate clothing for your industry is key. Appearing neat and tidy is important to show you've made an effort. Whatever the dress code is at your workplace, do your research and take the time to fit in, while remaining true to yourself. It's okay to stand out sometimes, but you don't want to be the only one wearing jeans and sneakers when everyone else is wearing a suit and tie.

Know the Expectations

Begin by researching the type of clothing worn by people in your chosen industry. Be sure that if there is a dress code at your place of employment, you are aware of it and become familiar with it. A good rule of thumb is to look around and if no one else is wearing that type of clothing, you probably shouldn't either.

Neat and Tidy

Be sure that your outfit is clean, dry, and not wrinkled. Laying your clothes out the night before might be helpful to make sure everything is properly laundered and looks good before the rush of your morning routine.



Professional, Company Representative

The most important thing to remember is that you are a professional, regardless of what career you are in, and you are a representative of the company or organization you work for. How you look when you show up to work every day and when you're at work events will influence what people think of you. Dressing in a clean, neat, and modest way each day will ensure you are a good representative of yourself and your company.

Dress for the Job You Want

There is a popular saying, "Dress for the job you want, not the job you have" that simply means dress the part. Your personal presentation and appearance will have an impact on the first impressions you make on others and you want that to be positive. Dressing for the job you want could be totally okay, but be aware that if you show up dressed like the top executives in your company, that may be seen as unprofessional because they have earned the right to dress how they please, and you have not (yet). Also keep in mind the job you have what appropriate dress is for that job. As an example, if you're a preschool educator, dressing in a suit is not the right clothing for that job. The bottom line is to dress smart and put some effort into your appearance.

More information on the types of business attire, with examples, can be found in this article: [Guide to Business Attire](#) from Indeed.com.

TYPES OF BUSINESS ATTIRE

Casual

- Informal clothing that might be worn not only at work, but also outside of work
- Avoid wearing casual clothing with clients and during interviews
- Jeans, t-shirts, shorts, sandals, sneakers

Smart Casual

- Another form of casual attire with a stylish twist
- Appropriate for more flexible offices
- Dresses, blazers, trousers, sports jackets, khakis, button-down shirts

Business Casual

- Common in many workplaces
- Generally appropriate for interviews, client meetings, and office settings
- Good way to dress if you're unsure of the setting since it isn't too formal or too casual
- Pencil skirts, button-downs, khakis, blazers, sport coats

Business Professional

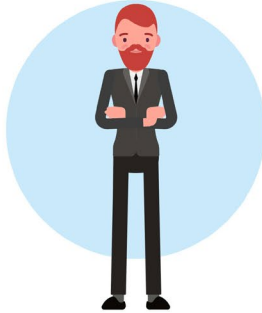
- Traditional attire for more conservative settings or companies
- Well-fitted, tailored clothing
- Dresses, skirts, slacks, button-downs with blazers, dark-colored suits, ties

Business Formal

- Usually reserved for the most formal settings such as award ceremonies, benefits, special dinners or other evening work events
- Similar to "black tie", but reserved to maintain professionalism
- Pantsuit, skirt suit, dark suit and tie, black suit

COMMON DRESS CODES FOR WORK

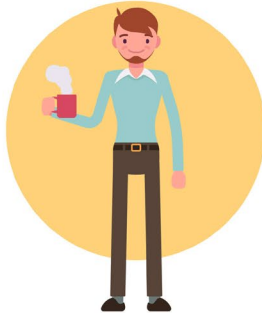
Business Formal



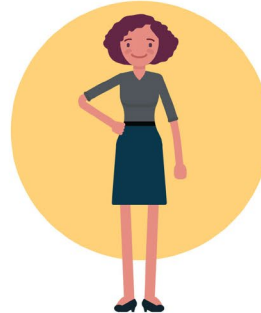
- ✓ Suits
- ✓ Dress shirts
- ✓ Ties
- ✓ Stockings
- ✓ Closed-toe shoes



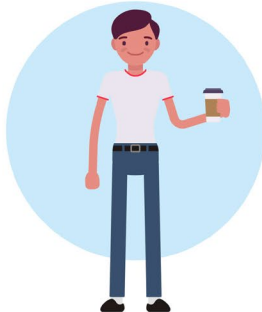
Business Casual



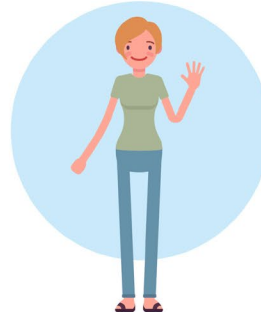
- ✓ Suits
- ✓ Dress shirts
- ✓ Optional ties
- ✓ Polos
- ✓ Sports jackets
- ✓ Dresses
- ✓ Skirts
- ✓ Blouses



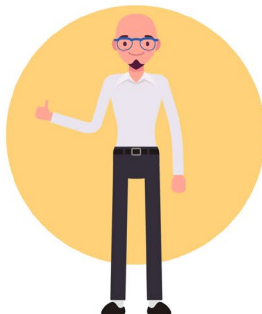
Casual



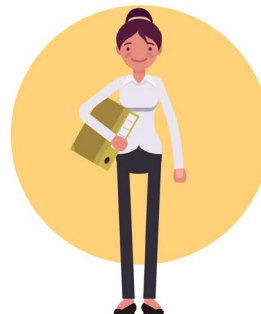
- ✓ Jeans
- ✓ Casual tops
- ✓ T-shirts
- ✓ Shorts
- ✓ Capri pants
- ✓ Athletic shoes



Uniforms



- ✓ The same outfit for everyone
- ✓ Similar clothing (black pants, white shirt)



Other Appearance-Based Considerations

Many companies and employers require employees to follow a dress code that can also include restrictions on piercings, tattoos, makeup, nails, hair, facial hair, and more. As long as these policies are not discriminatory, they are, for the most part, legal. Some variations may exist between men and women in the policy, however, major differences in the requirements between genders should not be present.

Hairstyles

Your employer may have rules and restrictions on the type of hairstyle you can wear as an employee. Extreme haircuts, like a mohawk, or crayon-colored hair may not be permitted as part of your company's dress code. It is important to be familiar with the types of hairstyles that may be permitted in your industry. If, for example, you are a programmer working remotely, it may not matter. Do your research ahead of time and prepare yourself for the expectation that you may not be able to wear your hair exactly as you like in the career that you choose.

It is also worthwhile to become familiar with hairstyle-based discrimination. This type of discrimination, based on hair texture, is a form of social injustice that Black candidates and employees may face in the workplace if they wear their hair in more natural ways. Policies and "guidelines that call for 'professional' or not 'extreme' looks can disproportionately lead to bias against Black employees" (McGregor par. 15) and these types of policies generally restrict traditional African-American hairstyles. According to The CROWN Act, Black women are 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair and are 80% more likely than white women to feel as though they have to change their hair from its natural state to fit in at the office.

The CROWN Act (Create a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair) "is a law that prohibits race-based hair discrimination, which is the denial of employment and educational opportunities because of hair texture or protective hairstyles including braids, locs, twists, or bantu knots" (CROWN Act). At the time of publication, the CROWN Act has been passed into law in 7 states (California, Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Washington), 17 states proposed a CROWN Act but it was not passed, and another 7 states have filed for a CROWN Act (CROWN Act). It is recommended to look into the laws in your state of employment to be familiar with your rights related to hairstyle.



Tattoos and Piercings

Though tattoos and piercings have become more a part of mainstream culture, it does not mean that they are a welcome addition to a company's dress code. It is not against the law to discriminate against someone with tattoos or piercings in the workplace. Historically, tattoos and piercings could have cost you the job, however, some companies are becoming more relaxed in their policies regarding body art. While it is becoming more commonplace for folks to have tattoos and piercings, that does not mean that all industries or companies within an industry will find it acceptable.

What to Expect

- You may be asked to cover any visible tattoos.
- You may not get hired if you have visible tattoos and facial piercings that would be difficult to cover.
- Types and locations of tattoos and piercings may be received differently.
- The genre, quality, and visibility of a tattoo may impact an employer's decision.
- The size and location of a piercing will likely also have an effect on the employer's decision. A small, traditional ear piercing may be viewed differently than large, gauged piercings or a nose ring.
- Restrictions on body art will vary depending on the industry and the specific role or job.



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE GETTING A TATTOO / PIERCING

1. Tattooing and body piercing carry some health risks.

- Skin infections, scarring, and allergic reactions are just some of the related health issues that body art practices can carry.

2. It can be painful.

- Getting a tattoo or non-traditional piercing can be quite painful depending on the size, location, and an individual's pain threshold.

3. Tattoos are permanent.

- When deciding to get a tattoo or selecting the image(s) you want tattooed, be mindful that your tastes may change when you are older.
- As your skin changes, stretches, and ages your artwork will be impacted.
- If you think you might regret a particular design, you should skip the tattoo.
- If you believe you want a career where body art isn't favorable, you may want to skip it.

TIPS FOR JOB SEEKERS WITH BODY ART

1. Cover it up!

- While it's not fair that an employer may stereotype you based on your body art, there are no laws against it currently and it is likely to happen.
- To ensure success in your interviews, be sure to cover your tattoos with your normal clothing and cover any others with bandages if absolutely necessary.
- Remove piercings except for traditional ear piercings.

2. Remove it.

- Removing a piercing permanently is easy enough. Just take out the ring or stud and leave it. However, if you have gone the route of large gauged ear piercings, you will likely be looking at some type of surgery to diminish the gaping holes that will remain.
- Laser tattoo removal is an option, but it is very costly. While the average cost of a tattoo is around \$200, laser removal can cost up to \$5000.

HOW TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF BODY ART ON YOUR FUTURE CAREER

1. Choose a small, noncontroversial design.

- Start small and in a less visible location. You can always add more later if you decide you want to, but starting small is a good idea if you aren't sure about it or if you want it to have as little impact on your future career as possible.

2. Do your research and ensure that the tattoo parlor or piercing shop has the required permits and follows proper procedures.

- Tattoo and piercing shops should be as clean as a dentist's office.
- Talk with other customers who have had work done by the artist and / or shop about their experiences and the quality and cleanliness of the work.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions if you are concerned or unsure about anything.
- Making sure the place is clean and they are following the proper procedures will minimize any infections or scarring that could occur.

3. Make sure your body art can be easily covered.

- Getting a face or neck tattoo is definitely a bad idea and will significantly limit your chances of employment in the future.
- Hands and fingers are another place you might want to reconsider, as well as the forearms.
- Stretching your ears to an extreme size with gauged piercings may also be something you want to take your time considering as well as any facial piercings.

4. Just wait.

- Waiting until you are older and have a better idea of your career before getting any type of body art is always a good choice.



Questions for Employers Regarding Personal Presentation

1. "Could you talk a little about the company culture and any policies I should be aware of, such as dress code?"

- This could also be asked of the HR contact before the interview so you have an idea of how to dress for that.
- Otherwise, it should be asked during your interview when the employer asks if you have any questions (and if they have not already covered the information).

2. "Is there an employee handbook?"

- This would be asked after you have the job.
- If there is an employee handbook, this will likely hold answers to many of your questions regarding personal appearance and more.