



Suits & Slurps

A Guide to Interview Dress, On-the-job Attire and Etiquette Dining

There are two sure-fire ways to send your job offer spiraling down to the circular file - slurping your soup and dressing inappropriately. This handout will discuss attire for the interview as well as what to wear on the job. It will also address the art of dining during the interview - a veritable obstacle course!

Interview Dress

While the college campus may be the perfect place to exhibit your flair for the latest in fashion style, the interview is not the place to do so. With very few unusual exceptions, sandals and sweatshirts are out. Ox-fords, business suits and skirts are in. Neckties and hosiery are uncomfortable to most people, but they are a fact of life in interviewing. Even though many organizations have relaxed the internal company dress code, interviews still follow the conservative standard.

So, what to wear? First of all, research the organization prior to the interview. Explore the dress requirement typical of that career field. For example, Silicon Valley will call for a different image than Wall Street. Visiting the organization to pick up an annual report or employer brochure will enable you to see how the employees are dressed. You can also call and ask them. But this is not the time to be put through to the hiring manager. Ask to be connected to the Personnel office and say: *"I have an interview with _____ in the _____ dept. for a position as _____. Could you please tell me what would be appropriate dress for this interview?"*

Once you have determined the standard, decide if your current wardrobe needs updating. Most likely, it will. Remember, stylish is not conservative. You should be doing the talking, not your clothes. This doesn't mean you need to go out and purchase a whole new wardrobe. Go for quality over quantity - two well-chosen suits will take you all the way to the job offer. Once you are hired and actually making some REAL money, you can round out your wardrobe based on what you see colleagues wearing on a daily basis.

Suits

Men: A traditional suit is preferred to a blazer. The color should either be a dark blue or grey in either a solid or invisible plaid with a pressed long-sleeved (even in summer!) white dress shirt. If you buy or borrow one, a conservative sports coat and dress slacks are best.

Women: Skirted suits are almost always preferable. A solid navy, grey or black suit with a solid or light colored blouse is recommended for most positions. Avoid brown, green or pastel suits. Business dresses are acceptable in fields that are less formal and less conservative. Avoid frilly collars and cuffs.

Shirts

Men: White shirts are always your first choice. Solid blue is an acceptable alternative. If you don't own either, it is time to go buy them. Get plain or button down cotton - polyesters and nylon are out.

Women: A light colored blouse is ideal.

Makeup

Men: Avoid heavy cologne.

Women: Natural looking and conservative. Avoid bright colors. Use a neutral or clear nail polish on clean and manicured nails. Avoid heavy perfumes.

Socks/Hosiery

Men: Dark, neat and preferably over the calf.

Women: Light, natural color, plain style (no patterns).

Shoes

Men: Clean and polished leather lace-up black or dark brown shoes are best. Avoid shoes with a run down heel.

Women: Shoes should be conservative and compliment the color & style of the interview suit. Low to medium heels are ideal. Basic pumps, toes should be closed, no strappy shoes, and avoid multi-colored trim.

Neckties

Men: Ties can definitely make a statement about who you are. If who you are includes a Bugs Bunny tie, then develop an alter ego for the interview. Conservative silk ties are best. Be sure the tie coordinates with the suit, is solid or has small neat patterns. Be sure the knot is neat and centered on your neck. The bottom of the tie should just reach your belt.

Belts

Wear a black or brown belt, one inch wide, no large buckles.

Hair

Men: Clean well groomed and professional looking. If it is long (ie. past your shoulder) cut it. Remember, the choice to cut it is yours, but the choice to hire you is

the interviewer's. Avoid beards and mustaches - but if you must, be sure it is neat and trimmed.

Women: Hair should be freshly cleaned and neatly styled. Long hair should be worn as conservatively as possible.

Accessories

Men: No flashy cuff links, rings or gold chains. Wedding or college ring is fine. No earrings. Not even one small one. No visible body piercing.

Women: One conservative, non-dangling earring per ear, one ring per hand. No dangling or distracting bracelets. Avoid purses of any size - carry a portfolio or briefcase instead. No visible body piercing beyond earrings.

On-The-Job Attire

Once you have landed the job, it becomes critical that you continue to make the best first impression. What you choose to wear is the first important decision of each day. It is important because it will help to shape the impression you make in meeting with people face to face and the image they have of you later on the phone or via email. Here are 14 tips that can help you dress the part, adapted from "Job Choices 2001."

1. Wear shoes that are well maintained. The way you take care of your shoes says a lot about you. It tells people if you pay attention to detail or have a tendency to let things go.

2. Schedule haircuts at regular intervals. Your hair is one accessory that you take with you every day, everywhere. Schedule appointments regularly - don't wait until you hair looks like it needs to be cut.

3. Press your clothing. Even permanent press clothes need to be ironed or touched up to have a "finished" look.

4. Keep a "business professional" outfit at the office for emergencies. Suppose a client company requests a last-minute meeting on your company's "business casual" day?

5. For men: **Button your American-cut blazer or jacket** when you stand. You'll present a more polished look (Women don't have to do this.)

6. For men: **Wear socks that cover your calves.** Pretty clear cut.

7. For men: **Wear an undershirt** under your dress shirt. Why? There are four reasons: 1) An undershirt worn beneath a dress shirt makes a white shirt look even whiter: 2) it adds body to the dress shirt: 3) it keeps even a lightly starched shirt from itching: and 4) it protects the dress shirt from perspiration.

8. For women: **Don't wear more than 13 accessories.** Start counting what you have on - your earrings (one per ear, please), your necklace, rings, watch, bracelets, belts, etc.

9. For women: **"Business Casual" does not mean short skirts.** Keep the length the same regardless of the day so you look like you mean business.

10. For women: **Don't wear slacks** to work if you've never seen your top level women wear them. If you want to succeed, you should look the part by not wearing slacks on business casual days, even if your colleagues choose to do so.

11. For women: Don't wear hosiery and shoes that are darker than your hem - **match the hem or lighter.**

12. For women: wear skin-toned hosiery when your business outfit consists of a short-sleeved jacket or dress. This will give you a **balanced look** by having as much of your legs showing as your arms.

13. Your real taste in clothes comes out on business casual days. Putting together a business casual wardrobe is just as important and costly and a professional one.

14. Dress for the position you want, not the position you have. Company decision-makers say that even if people have the knowledge it takes to assume a position, if they don't look the part, they are passed over!

Business Professional vs. Business Casual

Every company sets it's own standards for what it considers business professional and business casual. These definitions may vary widely - one company's professional dress may be another company's business casual. Pay close attention to the organizational culture during the interview and once you are hired, to determine your organization's dress code. Try to determine if your company is more conservative (banking, finance) or less conservative (silicon valley).

In general, for men, business professional means wearing a suit or blazer and slacks. For women, business professional is a suit, a blazer with a shirt or blouse, or a dress with appropriate accessories. In a conservative organization, business casual may mean a jacket and trousers with a colored or striped shirt instead of a white one. In a less conservative company, business casual may mean khakis and a blazer with a golf shirt. For women in a conservative organization, business casual may mean a blazer and skirt. If the company is less conservative, business casual could include a light sweater or knit top under a blazer with a shirt or slacks.



The Interview Meal



This could be the most daunting meal of your postgraduate career. Often, the second interview involves lunch, dinner or a reception. How you conduct yourself probably won't make or break your candidacy, but you should know how to conduct yourself when you bite into an olive and discover a pit!

Here are some basic rules of engagement in waiter warfare.

Utensils Etiquette

As a rule of thumb, when you face a full battalion of knives, forks, and spoons, work from the outside in. In other words, use the flatware the furthest from the plate first. The one exception is the salad fork - it is usually closest to the plate.

Used utensils must never touch the surface of the table or the tablecloth because they might make the cloth dirty. Even the clean handles of your fork and knife should not touch the table.

At the end of a course, place your used utensil on a flat dish. Do not leave a fork or spoon in a bowl or cup (that is why there is usually a flat dish under the soup bowl!) where it might flip and assault your host.

Between bites, your utensils should rest on the edge of your plate. Your knife rests on the back of your plate; your fork sits on the side of your plate. When you are finished, place your knife and fork so they lie horizontally across the center of the plate. The blade of your knife should face toward you.

Napkin Rules

As soon as you are seated, put your napkin in your lap. Sometimes, at very formal restaurants, the waiter may do this for you.

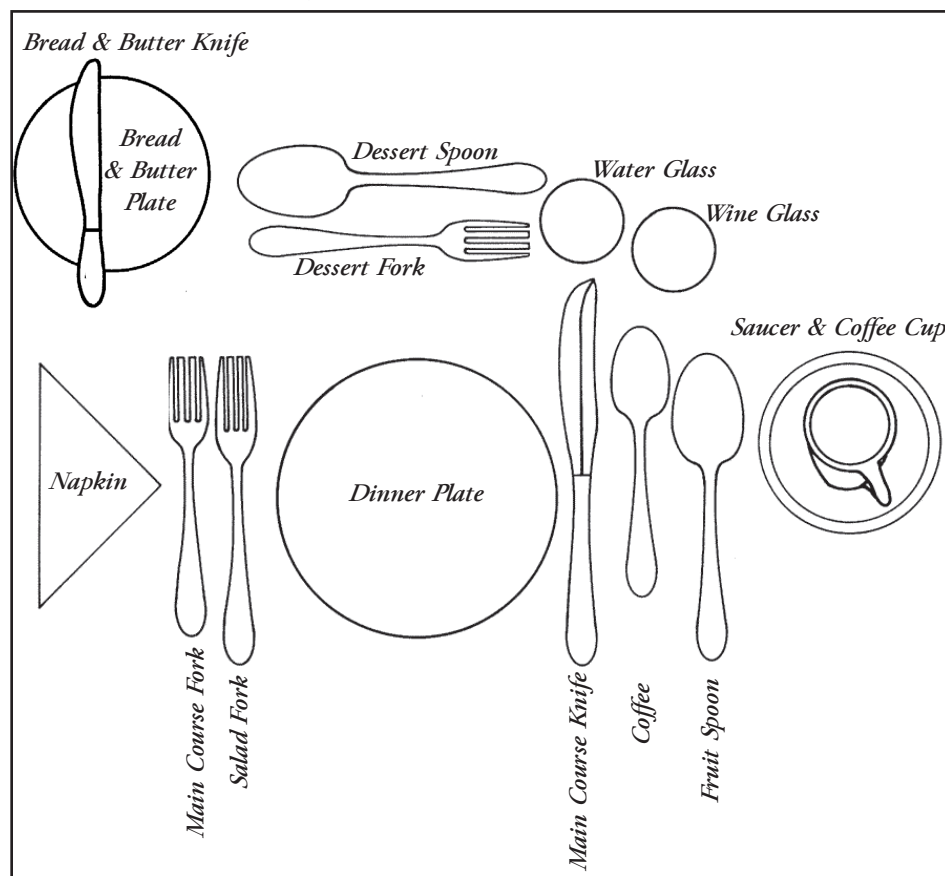
Treat your napkin very gently during the meal. Do not crumple it or wad it into a knot. If you use your napkin (and you should), gently dab at your lips. Etiquette books say (no kidding!) your napkin should NOT get dirty in the dining process. It is meant to catch food from falling into your lap (which, of course, it won't) and is should gently dust the crumbs from your lips.

When you are finished, place your napkin next to your plate. Do not refold it. Do not leave it on the chair when you get up.

Handling Awkward Situations

You bite into an olive and discover a pit. Your last bite of fish had a bone in it. You didn't realize just how fatty the meat was. Now, you're not sure you can swallow what's in your mouth.

No guttural noises or crinkled faces allowed - but you don't have to try to swallow the inedible. If you need to remove something from your mouth drop the olive pit into the palm of your hand and put the pit on your plate. Remove the fish bone using two fingers like a pair of tweezers. Set the bone on the edge of your plate. If you think the sight of your chewed meat is going to make your fellow diners gag, bring your napkin to your lips and remove the meat.



The basics:

- If you are not sure what to order, follow your host's lead.
- If the recruiter is not first in line to order, ask him/her, "What do you recommend?"
- A chicken breast or vegetable plate is always safe.
- Stick to soft drinks, tea, coffee, and water. Avoid beer, wine, and mixed drinks.
- Cut one bite (meat, fruit, or vegetables) at a time. Keep your fork prongs pointed down, not up.
- With dinner rolls, break off and butter one small piece of bread at a time; avoid making a sandwich.
- Never make slurping or yummy sounds (even if the food is wonderful and you're very, very hungry).
- When sharing a sauce with others, spoon some of it on to your plate; don't dip your food into it.
- If you need to leave the table temporarily, place your napkin on your seat.
- Keep your elbows off the table.
- Drink from YOUR water glass; it is to your right.
- Dining is not a race to see who can finish first. Eat at the same pace as your host or hostess.
- Always taste food before you add salt.
- If your host insists that the waiter bring the dessert menu, he/she wants you to have one.
- If you are a non-smoker and your host asks for a table in the smoking section, grin and bear it.

Do:

- Go prepared to be conversational.
- Read national and local newspapers ahead of time so that you can discuss news and events.
- Skim the menu quickly.
- Order a medium-priced entree.
- Sit up straight.
- Relax and keep the conversation focused on business-related or casual topics.
- Say please and thank you to the waiter.

Don't:

- Talk about personal relationships, recent parties, politics, sports, or religion.
- Don't eat the garnish.
- Don't drink from the soup bowl.
- Don't use toothpicks in the presence of the recruiter.
- Don't discuss dietary restrictions; downplay your food preferences.
- Don't order foods that require twirling or licking, are apt to splatter or spray, or require you to wear a bib.
- Drink alcohol if you are under age 21; don't have more than one drink if you are 21 or over.
- Don't argue over the check or offer to pay the tip; the host who invited you must take care of both.
- Don't blow your nose in your napkin.
- Don't eat as if this is your last meal. On the other hand, don't dine on half a lettuce leaf. You'll make the best impression by eating like a human - not like a wolf or a bird.
- Don't get too comfortable. Even if the meal isn't technically an interview situation, you need to be on your toes.



Fingers or Fork?

What is the right way to eat french fries? Pizza? Here is a primer on when to use the fingers and when to use the fork.

Finger foods

Berries, if served with the stem
Caviar on toast
Cheese on crackers
Corn on the cob
Crisp bacon
French fries (informal situations only)
Hamburgers
Hors d'oeuvres
Hot dogs
Olives
Onion rings
Pizza (informal)
Tacos

Fork foods

Berries without stems
Cake
Clams
Fish
French fries (formal situations)
Fruit
Ice cream served on cake or pie
Large chicken pieces
Oysters
Pastry
Pizza (formal)
Shish kabob
Shrimp
Sushi (or use chopsticks, if provided)
Steak

Spoon foods

Berries with sauces
Ice cream
Melon
Peas
Soup

Foods to avoid

Unfamiliar foods
Spaghetti
French onion soup
Buffalo wings
Ribs
Bony fish
Shellfish
Big sandwiches
Cheesy food
Foods requiring special utensils