

## Workplace/Professional Attire

(From Wikipedia's Dress Code: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dress\\_code](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dress_code))

In the workplace, it's vital that you be aware of your "rhetorical situation" regarding appearance. Just as you compose communication in print and digital formats, you will also compose a message about yourself and about your workplace in the clothes that you wear. You do not want to send the wrong message. If you have questions about attire, you should ask your future employer about the organization's dress code. It is also acceptable to ask for specific examples if you are confused about definitions of "business casual" or "smart business." Though the Wikipedia pages below are good starts, each organization will have its own expectations and requirements for attire. *For interviews in professional or academic settings, you should always wear a business suit—it is a sign of respect.*

Keep in mind that the categories below vary by culture, geographic location (U.S. west coast vs. east coast), and occasion. The listings are ordered from least to most formal:

**Dress-down or casual Fridays:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casual\\_Friday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casual_Friday)

- Unless you're at a hip dot-com, this is probably the least casual attire you'll wear at work. Be aware that not all organizations follow this practice.

**Business casual:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business\\_casual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business_casual)

- The most common category in the workplace, this attire can be dressed up with a sport coat or blazer kept in your office for the surprise meeting with the CEO.

**Smart casual:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart\\_casual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_casual)

- Often blurred with business casual, this category is a little more formal but also very common in the workplace, especially on the U.S. east coast and in the U.S. northeast.

**Business:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_standard\\_business\\_attire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_standard_business_attire)

- As the name suggests, this category is the most common in the business, legal, and political worlds. It is most conservative attire worn in the workplace.

**Semi-formal:** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-formal>

- Not worn in the workplace but instead at social functions "out on the town," semi-formal attire is appropriate for weddings, the theatre, or other artistic events. This category is divided into "daywear" and "eveningwear."

**Formal:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formal\\_wear](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formal_wear)

- The most ceremonial category of attire, formal wear is reserved for fancy weddings, theatres, or other upscale artistic events, such as award programs. Other occasions might include state functions. This category is also divided into "daywear" and "eveningwear."

Though some might argue the finer points of these categories, I've found in my experiences in the professional and academic worlds that these descriptions are fairly accurate. If you have doubts, it's best to ask someone who currently works at the organization or who is hosting the event.