

Dressing for Success: Business Casual Guidelines

Northland College Career Education

The basics:

- Business casual is crisp, neat, and is classic rather than trendy.
- Clothing should be neither very tight nor very loose.
- Clothing that covers the legs, chest, and shoulders is highly recommended.
- Khaki or dark pants that are neatly pressed, and a pressed long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirt are always good choices.
- Remember that you are not trying to stand out for your cutting edge look, but for your good judgment in a professional environment. A good rule of thumb is to dress for the status of the job that you want, not the place you are at currently.

Clothing choices that fit in the business casual category:

- Shoes: Wear leather shoes that are in good condition. Flats, dressier boots, and low heels are acceptable. Avoid sandals, athletic shoes, or hiking boots.
- Socks: Wear dark socks that are long enough so you don't show skin when you sit down.
- Pants/Skirts: 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 (fit to correct length). Skirts should come to at least the knees while standing. While seated, thighs should be covered. Skirt slit, if present, should not go above the knee while standing. NO jeans or jean skirts!
- Shirts/Sweaters: Long-sleeved shirts are considered dressier than short-sleeved, and are appropriate even in summer. Choosing white or light blue solids, or conservative stripes, are your safest bet. Polo shirts (tucked in, of course) are acceptable in more casual situations. Sweaters are also appropriate, if they fit well, are knit, and not highly patterned. Matching collared shirt and tie under a sweater is a nice business casual look.
- Sport blazers and cardigans: If they fit well, are in good condition, and are not highly patterned, blazers and cardigans are good business casual choices.
- Ties: Ties are generally not necessary for business casual, but if you are in doubt, you should wear one. It never hurts to slightly overdress. By dressing nicely, you pay a compliment to your host.
- Belt: If you choose to wear a belt, it should match and fit well. Leather is the best material for business casual. Try to match your belt color with either your shoes or your pants/skirt.

Accessory choices for business casual:

- Wear no more than 3 pieces of jewelry. This ensures your jewelry is not distracting.
- Your nails should be clean, neat, and an appropriate length.
- Your hair should be out of your eyes.
- Make-up should look natural.
- Avoid perfume and cologne. This includes body spray and strongly scented aftershave.

Need clothes for an interview?

NWCEP has a Career Closet you can use free of charge, but you must make an appointment. Visit the [Career Closet web page](#) for more information, call them (715-682-9141, ext. 100) or email careerclaset@nwcep.org.