

# Student Guide on Professional Business Attire

## *How to Dress the Part for a Solid First Impression*

What you wear sends a powerful message about who you are. You want to present an image that's professional and credible to your prospective employers. At the UBC Sauder School of Business, we expect students to make a positive first impression and we have guidelines for professional attire at our events that fall into categories of **business formal** and **business casual**. In a workplace setting, expectations for professional attire vary depending on the industry and workplace so it's best to get prepared for any occasion – especially an important job interview or networking event.

### **BUSINESS FORMAL**

Business formal is a high standard of professional attire consisting of a full business suit that includes a blazer with dress pants or a dress skirt. A business formal suit is also distinguished by:

- **Darker suit colours:** A black suit is considered the most formal, and other colours such as navy and gray are considered slightly less formal.
- **Solid-coloured shirts and blouses:** Solid colours are more formal than patterns, and white or black is considered more formal than bold or lighter colours.
- **Complementary colours:** Shirts and blouses should complement the suit such as a white or light coloured button-up and tie or a solid-coloured blouse. A matching blazer and dress skirt or dress pants are slightly more formal than an unmatched suit.
- **The 'two-patterned rule':** Wear no more than two patterns with your suit.
- **Optional Vest:** A '3-piece suit' includes a dress vest and when worn with your skirt or pants and blazer presents slightly more formal, and is optional to wear with your suit.
- **Formal footwear:** Wear heels/pumps, flats, or dress shoes (e.g., oxfords) that match your suit – just make sure your shoes are clean, polished, and comfortable for your big day!



**Quick Tie Tip:** If you're wearing a suit with dress pants a collared shirt, generally speaking, you should also wear a tie. If you're wondering which tie to choose, choose a colour or pattern that complements your suit, but don't wear anything too bold for your job interview such as a tie with animals or other prints (if you're wondering which prints are best, stick to paisley or stripes).

## BUSINESS CASUAL

Business casual means less formal than business formal but still professional. Generally speaking, business casual includes:

- Professional dresses or skirts, dress pants, chinos, or khakis (but not jeans or athletic pants for example).
- Sweaters, blouses, collared shirts with or without ties.
- Patterns and colours are acceptable as business casual (but not hoodies, t-shirts/tank tops, or tops with slogans).
- Clothing should be crisp and not wrinkled.
- Footwear should still be professional for an office setting such as loafers, dress shoes or boots, heels/pumps, or flats (e.g., not flip flops or running shoes).



## CASUAL

Casual is also a style of attire that applies to your comfortable day-to-day wear (which may include jeans or casual pants, t-shirts, sweatshirts and hoodies, casual dresses and skirts, for example). For your regular classes, you can dress in casual attire (unless there's a guest speaker or class event and you're directed otherwise). **However, keep in mind you still need to be presentable**, which means avoiding items of clothing such as pajamas, athletic wear, or wrinkled/torn clothing.

**Use your judgment when choosing casual wear.** For example, stylish sweatpant joggers, when paired well with crisp tops, may be presentable for the classroom; sweatpants that are sloppy or appear to be gym wear are inappropriate. Similarly, a sun dress may be versatile enough to wear to the classroom, depending on the style and material. When in doubt aim for comfortable but conservative.

## **Prepping for your big interview? Follow these guidelines:**

- Match your attire to whatever the most senior individuals would wear at the place you want to work.
- If you're meeting with industry professionals or clients who dress professionally, you should also dress professionally in your interview.
- If necessary, modify your attire for your second interview.
- At least one day before your interview, decide what you'll wear and prepare your outfit. This avoids last-minute problems such as a stained tie, torn nylons and unpolished shoes.
- When in doubt about what is appropriate wear for your interview, err on the side of business formal, but always do research on the company to get a flavor for how to dress for your interview.

***Remember: Find clothing that fits you properly and looks polished and professional. Make sure you're confident and comfortable in your clothing to help you focus on your interview or event so you can ace it!***

