Whether you're interviewing, attending a career fair, meeting with a recruiter, or about to start a new job, it's important to know what's appropriate to wear for the occasion. The wrong attire can create a bad first impression and cause you to lose an opportunity before you even say a word. If you're in doubt, follow these simple guidelines.

When to Wear Business Professional

Even if the organization you're interviewing with isn't business professional in the office, it's always good to put your best foot forward. Similarly, even if you're attending a client meeting and know the client is going to be dressed casually, you should still dress professionally; you're not only trying to sell them a product or service, you're also selling yourself.

Business Professional for Men

- Dark-colored (navy, black or dark grey) two-piece suit
- Button-up, pressed, solid-colored dress shirt (blue or white are always safe choices)
- Solid-colored tie
- No earrings or visible tattoos
- Dress shoes

Business Professional for Women

- Suit/pants suit or appropriate-length dress or skirt with jacket
- Close-toed shoes
- Natural-looking makeup
- No bulky jewelry
- No visible tattoos

When to Wear Business Casual

The term "business casual" is often ambiguous—from nice jeans and a button-up shirt to just a slight variation of professional dress. Whether you're going to your first day on the job or attending a career fair, be on the safe side and always follow these best practices:

Business Casual for Men

- Slacks or khakis
- Button-up dress shirt
- Dress shoes
- Tie (optional)
- Short-sleeved polo shirt (avoid logos)

Business Casual for Women

- Dress pants or appropriate-length skirt
- Nice blouse or sweater
- Conservative footwear
- Simple or conservative jewelry

Use caution: Short-sleeved shirts may not be appropriate at every organization. Dress in a button-up, long-sleeved dress shirt your first day and take notice of what your new co-workers wear to get an idea on what's acceptable. Also, it's completely appropriate to ask your hiring manager or HR about their organization's definition of business causal before your first day. Similarly, if attending a career fair, check their website to clarify suggested attire for the event.

Women have more options than men when it comes to business casual attire. When in doubt, lean toward more conservative looks.

Of course, use these suggestions as guidelines, not hard and fast rules. Every organization is different. What may be appropriate in one office may not be appropriate in the next. Don't be afraid to ask! But when it comes to job interviews and other first impressions, always dress professionally.