

# NAVIGATING DRESS CODES

by Career & Professional  
Development

# Dress Categories



You will encounter a variety of different types of professional activities with recommended dress.

Most often referred to as “**Business Formal**” and “**Business Casual**”, these dress categories are located on a broad spectrum that cannot be defined by one outfit!



# Where You May Find These Dress Categories

## Business Formal

- Corporate networking events
- Conferences & competitions
- Awards events
- Presentations/pitches
- Interviews
- Client meetings

## Business Casual

- In-class
- Community events
- Social activities
- In the workplace

# YOUR BRAND

You get to help shape it by the way you present yourself to others – take note of how you want to present yourself, remain true to you, identify your individual goals, be aware of the situation and stakeholders – and you decide on what your first impression will be.

# AUTHENTIC SELF & CONFIDENCE

# Things to Consider

Things to consider that will often move an outfit along the lines of the spectrum (think of each factor as points):

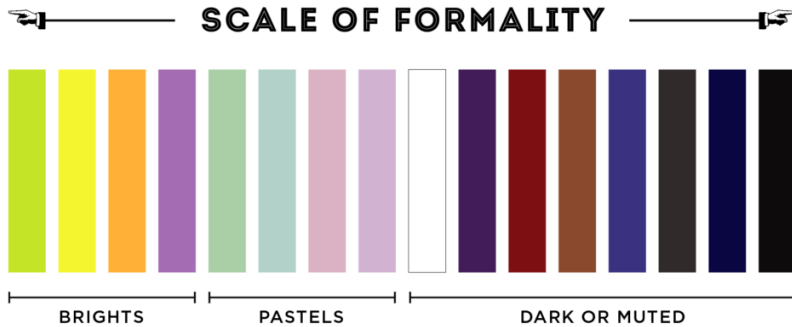
- Colour
- Fabrics
- Patterns
- Structure
- Accessories



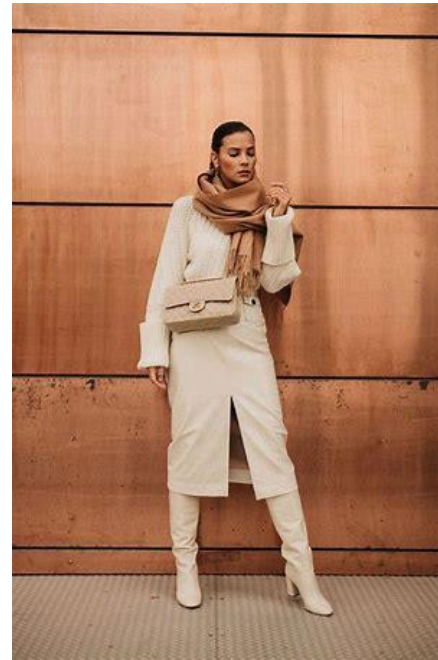
# Colours



The more neutral the colour, (ie. black, navy, charcoal grey), darker/deeper colours or fewer colour combinations will move an outfit towards the more formal end of the spectrum



GENTLEMAN'S GAZETTE







# Fabrics



For more formal looks consider cotton/cotton blends and wool blends; natural fibers are good to maintain structure and minimize wrinkles (except for linen!).

Special note that fleece/sportswear is rarely business casual or formal.

Jeans will typically move your outfit towards the casual end of the spectrum.





# Pattern



The more complex, larger or colourful the pattern, the more the outfit may move away from the formal end of the spectrum.

More traditional patterns:  
stripes  
houndstooth  
plaid

Potential to be less formal:  
floral  
paisley  
checkered  
polka dots







# Structure



The more tailored,  
the more we move  
towards the formal  
end of the spectrum!

Loosely structured  
items will lean to a  
more casual feel.







# Accessories



Shoes – structure , material and colour influence the perceived formality of shoes. An open-toe shoe may have a more casual feel than closed-toe. Be mindful of attire meant for activities other than work such as flip-flops which will likely not be considered business casual. Materials such as leather and vegan-leather are considered to be more formal. Neutral colours and/or a solid colour palette are likely to feel more formal.

Ties – will lean an outfit to more formal  
Bags/briefcases lean more formal but backpacks are now common places at work.

Watches – completely up to you! Smart watch, traditional watches with leather or metal bands, no watch – they span the entire spectrum.





# Fit, Comfort & Cleanliness

The ensure a polished and put together outfit, you'll want to ensure proper sizing. This will move an outfit to the more formal end of the spectrum.

Be aware of rips & tears, stains and wrinkles!

Comfort – no matter what you choose to wear, make sure you are comfortable wearing it!



# KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Observe the dress category of individuals, teams and/or organization

Consider whether the sector has traditionally been more conservative or more progressive

## Most Importantly...

# BE YOU!

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