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WEST ALABAMA

Dressing for Success

Maybe you've heard the expression, "Dress for the job you want, not the job you have." That sage advice actually applies *beyond* the workplace. Whether you're attending class, working on an internship, or doing a presentation, how you present yourself does have an impact... on how others perceive you and how you perceive yourself.

Presenting yourself in a positive and professional way doesn't mean you have to spend a fortune on designer clothes and manicures. It simply means putting your best foot forward so you feel confident and project your very best self.

Here are a few ways you can do that:

Invest in a few basics – By selecting some key wardrobe items that can go from casual to corporate, you can stretch your investment further. Plus, foundational pieces like tailored black pants or a navy blazer never look dated or out of style. These foundational pieces are easy to dress up for work – by adding a crisp white shirt and tie to your blazer – or dress down for class – say, over a pair of jeans. A small wardrobe of key pieces like those, plus a few select accessories for variety, can take you from class to work to professional networking without missing a beat.

Maintain your clothes well – Your foundational wardrobe doesn't have to be expensive, but it does have to look well put together. Make sure you fix dropping hems, replace missing buttons, and retire anything that shows too much wear. Keep your washable items clean and pressed, and take dry clean items in at least every third wear.

Don't forget your feet – Shoes can say a lot about a person. Yours should be clean and polished, with fresh laces and heel taps as needed. If you don't feel comfortable shining your own shoes, take them to a local shoe repair shop for maintenance; it's not expensive and will extend the life of your shoes. Don't forget to choose socks *without* holes. For women, consider the culture at your workplace when deciding to forego tights or pantyhose. Many workplace environments are casual enough that they are not required; others are not. If you're not sure, take a cue from the people around you (especially those in charge).

Mind Your Accessories – When you're working with a foundational wardrobe, accessories are your chance to show some personality. Add color with jewelry, scarves, neckties, even socks, to make your basic pieces seem fresh with each wear. Since accessories are typically less expensive than shirts, dresses, or jackets, you can change your look with new accessories the second time you wear that black sweater. Depending on your chosen field and your personal preference, consider smaller jewelry or more muted colors that work in *any* situation.

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Tend to your personal grooming – It should go without saying that routine bathing and deodorant are pretty much expected. Beyond that, be sure your overall appearance is neat and well-groomed. Most workplaces are welcoming of many things that would've been taboo just decades ago, including beards, longer hair for men, creative hair colors, visible body art, and piercings. There's no reason to change yourself, but you may consider a more conservative slant, particularly for interviews or networking opportunities. A well-trimmed beard, and combed hair will always come across as professional, regardless of length.

Dressing for success doesn't have to mean dressing for someone – or *like* someone – else. It should instead be the most professional version of yourself. Find a look that suits your style and personality as well as your chosen field, and you'll always make a great impression.