



Guide to Dressing for Interviews with Legal Employers

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For Women

Your Suit

Women's suits come in a wide variety of styles and colors. For law interviews, muted shades work best. While black, gray, and navy blue suits are always appropriate, suits in subdued shades of tan, brown, deep green or teal, burgundy, and plum are also good choices. Fire engine red suits convey a sense of power, but because they make such a bold statement, they are not the best choice for law firm interviews. A pinstripe or other subtle design is acceptable; however, avoid busy patterns that detract from your face, voice, and the professional message you wish to convey.

What you wear under your suit is important, too. Pick a collared shirt or a blouse with a high or crew neck. Modest V or scoop necks are acceptable only if no cleavage is revealed. Make sure that your bra is not visible to the interviewers (due to deep cleavage, gapping buttons, etc.), and avoid sheer blouses.

A skirt suit remains the most conservative choice for interviews with legal employers. Many professional women appreciate the comfort, warmth, and style of a pantsuit. However, some attorneys (men *and* women) do not consider pantsuits to be dressy enough for court appearances, client contact, or job interviews. You will not know if your interviewer is "pro pantsuit" or "anti pantsuit." Accordingly, the safest bet is to wear a skirt suit to the interview. AFTER you receive the job, look around the office to see when other women attorneys wear pants to work (every day versus casual Fridays, days where court appearance and client contact is expected, etc.). If other women wear pantsuits, feel free to wear yours, too.

For an interesting discussion of pantsuits for women attorneys, read Phyllis Horn Epstein, Women-at-Law at 133-38 (2004).

Suit skirts should have a modest length and a great fit. Skirts should hit at the knees, give or take one inch. Do not select skirts that end two or more inches above your knees. Remember that skirts should drape over the body and should not cling to your hips or rear end. Before your interview, put on your suit skirt, place a chair in front of a full-length mirror, and sit down and cross your legs. If you can see your underwear or the underside of your thighs, then select another suit for the interview. Additionally, have a friend give you an honest assessment of your “back view” so that you know your underwear is not showing.

Just like the skirt, the suit jacket should also fit well. Make sure you can button all of the buttons with no gaps of shirt showing.

Your Legs and Feet

Select closed-toe shoes with a low-to-moderately high heel (traditionally called “pumps”) in neutral colors. Keep your shoes in good condition and polish or shine them when needed. Sandals are great - - but not in the interview. Toenails should not be visible, no matter how good your pedicure is. When in doubt, ask yourself, “would I wear these shoes to a club or bar?” If you answer “yes,” choose another pair of shoes for the interview.

Most women find panty hose uncomfortable. That being said, hose are still a part of the professional wardrobe and should be worn to interviews. Select flesh-toned hose (black hose can be worn if they coordinate with the suit) and carry a spare pair in your purse in case you get a run. AFTER you get a job at a law firm, look around and see if other women attorneys go without hose. If you see several women with bare legs, chances are that you, too, can forego hose in warm months.

Your Hair

Before your interview, visit the restroom and check to make sure your hair is in place. If you have long hair, you may wear it down if it does not hang in your face. If you have a tendency to twirl your hair or to continually brush it out of your face (a nervous habit many women have), consider pulling it back into a simple bun or low ponytail. Securing hair off your face with a barrette is fine, too (so long as your barrette came from the adult and not little girls’ section of the store). Avoid scrunchies, butterfly clips, and high “cheerleader” ponytails, as they tend to make women appear less polished and more immature.

Your Jewelry

Think *small, classic, and not too much*. Pearl or diamond studs or small silver/gold hoops are always good choices. Avoid shoulder-dusting chandeliers or styles that will

keep drawing the interviewer's eyes to your ears. Limit rings to one on each hand (an engagement ring/wedding band set counts as one ring). A classic silver, gold, or dark leather watch is fine to wear; however, avoid dangly bracelets. Necklaces should be conservative and not detract from your face.

Many women tend to over-accessorize. As a rule of thumb for interviewing, less is more.

Your Makeup and Fragrance

By all means, makeup is appropriate to wear to law firm interviews. In fact, properly applied makeup conveys a sense of maturity. While freshly-scrubbed faces suggest wholesomeness and athleticism, they may also suggest immaturity and inexperience to some interviewers. If you are personally opposed to wearing cosmetics, you certainly should follow your conscience. However, if a daily makeup routine just is not part of your lifestyle (due to exercise, outdoor activities, or simply lack of time), you may want to consider a basic "interview day look" of sheer foundation, a coat of mascara, and neutral shades of eye shadow, blush, and lipstick/gloss. If you are unsure about selecting or applying makeup, visit a cosmetics counter - - staffers are trained in makeup application and can help you pick the most flattering shades.

As a rule of thumb for fragrance: no one two feet away from you should be able to detect your perfume. You would hate to aggravate an interviewer's fragrance allergy during your interview, so keep your fragrance light.

For Men

Your Suit

Men's interview suits should be dark. Think black, gray, navy blue, or very dark brown. While a small pinstripe is acceptable, avoid plaids and other bold patterns. Select a suit in a single-breasted style.

Unlike many women's suits, most men's suits are not "made to fit" right off of the rack. Your suit will most likely need to be tailored to fit your particular frame. Most stores that sell suits have personnel who are trained to know the proper fit of men's suits. These professionals will tell you how long the suit sleeves should be, how the suit should fit across your shoulders and back, and how long your pants should be (traditionally referred to as the "break" of the cuff). Strongly consider working with such a professional when selecting a suit.

Shirt selection is also important. White and ivory shirts are classic choices and are always appropriate for law firm interviews. You may also select shirts in shades of very light blue, very light gray, and ecru (beige with just a hint of yellow). Although many stores display suit coats with bold-colored shirts, that look is not appropriate for interviews. Avoid dark shirt colors such as black, charcoal, navy blue, burgundy, and purple. Also avoid bright shirt colors such as pink, apple green, and deep yellow.

Make sure your shirt collar will stay in place during the interview. Button-down collars are acceptable. DO NOT select short-sleeve dress shirts. Even if you think you will “hide” the sleeves under your suit coat, you never know when a legal employer will encourage you to “take your coat off and make yourself comfortable.” Be prepared for that statement by wearing long sleeves.

Your Tie

Your tie should coordinate with your suit and shirt. Select ties made of silk or silk-blend fabric. Business-appropriate ties come in a variety of colors. Ties with background colors of black, gray, burgundy, blue, green, and yellow can all be worn to interviews. Avoid “beach” colors such as orange, pink, purple, or turquoise. You may also wish to avoid fire engine red ties because of the power that color conveys (let your interviewer have the power in the interview!). Ultimately, the print of your tie is more important than the background color. Select a conservative design that will not detract from your face or business demeanor. Small stripes or geometric shapes convey a professional image. Save any theme ties (i.e., “Save the Children,” Tabasco bottle motifs, Cardinals/Chiefs/Mizzou prints) ties for AFTER you get the job. Then, gauge the demeanor of your office; if other attorneys (partners and associates) wear “fun” ties to work, chances are you can, too. As starting lawyers, you should probably not wear bow ties to interviews.

Your Feet

Wear black mid-calf or over-the-calf dress socks (navy blue socks can be worn with navy blue suits). Black dress shoes go with anything; however, dark burgundy/brown shoes (often referred to as “cordovan”) may be worn with dark brown or navy blue suits. Leather, lace-up shoes are the most conservative choice for interviews. Keep your shoes in good condition and polish/shine them a day or so before the interview.

Your Jewelry, Face, and Fragrance

A watch and a wedding ring (if applicable) are the only pieces of jewelry a man should wear to a law firm interview. Please leave earrings and all other pieces of jewelry at home.

Unless you have an established beard or moustache, please remember to shave the morning of the interview. Stubble always gives a “scruffy” appearance. If you do have a moustache or beard, make sure it is neatly groomed. It is best to avoid “unusual” facial hairstyles (i.e., long sideburns, “soul patches,” etc.).

The same rule of thumb for women’s perfume applies to men’s cologne: no one two feet away from you should be able to detect your fragrance. Keep your fragrance light to avoid provoking an interviewer’s fragrance allergy.