

How to Build a Top-Notch Professional Wardrobe on a Budget

Building a Top-Notch Professional Wardrobe – One Piece at a Time

'What IS the new standard in professional dress?''What do I wear to an interview to be taken seriously?' 'What, exactly, IS Friday casual attire?'? 'If I am limited on what I can spend on new clothes, how can I look MODERN and PROFESSIONAL?'All good questions and all in need of some serious answers.

The 'NEW'? Standard in Professional Dress: Fortunately, or unfortunately, truly professional dress standards have not changed much for men or women over the past 50 years...'The Suit' still reigns supreme. Now, it's true, 'The Suit'? doesn't always look like it used to; we have updated versions for both men and women. The styles may change considerably over the years, but you won't ever go wrong with a well-made, dark, two to three button, light-weight wool 2-piece suit. With any suit, FIT is key and if it doesn't fit well, see a tailor. Cheap suits tend to fit poorly, and a well-made suit in a quality fabric will 'fit like a glove.'

JACKETS AND BLAZERS – FIT TIPS FOR MEN AND WOMEN: When shopping for a jacket, items to consider with respect to fit include:

* **Sleeve length -** long sleeves should land around the middle of your hand when your arms are straight down.
* **Fit through the shoulder -** if it feels even a little tight across the shoulder, go up a size, you can always have a tailor nip the waist if it feels big there.
* **Jacket Length -** Many trendy style suits are offering 'shrunken jackets'? These are only flattering on teenagers and runway models, DON'T do it. Stick with a tailored jacket that hits midway down your hip.
* **Does it button -** And I don't mean, when you suck in and hold your breath can you get the button closed for a split second. A good quality suit should button easily at the waist without too much or too little fabric around the middle.
* **Shoulder pads come and go -** Steer clear as a general rule, although shoulder shapers that are light weight, and merely maintain a strong silhouette, are a good idea.

**MEN:** Opt for a flat front trouser without a cuff at the hem. Cuffs and pleats come in and go out of style, and when they are out your suit is instantly dated. (Not to mention, pleats can visually add weight. Keep lapels to a moderate width and steer clear of any trendy slim cut or double breasted varieties for your go-to staple suit. For suit colors, Charcoal, Navy, Black or a very faint pin stripe are classics that are as versatile as your favorite blue jeans.... As you continue to build up your wardrobe, having fun with one or two ‘trendy' suits, (say a bolder pattern or non-traditional cut) can add some personality to your wardrobe, and the blazer from these more ‘trendy' pieces are great with a collared shirt and dark denim for Fridays at the office, or even a night on the town.

**LADIES:** While 2 piece suits are good, 3 or 4 piece suits add so much versatility; you can mix and match the individual pieces with blouses, sweaters and accessories and create limitless looks. 2 piece suits are available with pants OR a skirt. A 3 piece suit consists of a blazer, pants AND a skirt, and a 4 piece suit adds a simple sheath dress to the mix. I always advise women to opt for light-weight wool (season-less) with 2-4% Lycra. The fit is better AND more forgiving. Also, do not pay attention to the size on the tag, fit is more important that squeezing into your 'regular size...if it bothers you that much, you can always cut it out.

When opting for a 2 piece pant suit, look for a flat front suit pant without front pockets. Front pockets add bulk, and if you gain a pound or two, they will be pushed up under the front of your pant and the seam will create a horizontal line across your mid-thigh...not exactly the best way to camouflage last night’s second helping at dinner. If you are in love with a suit that has front pockets, you can always have them sewn shut, a simple alteration that shouldn't cost more than $10-20 at the tailor (or dry cleaner). Back pockets are fine, but if you find that they 'ride up'? during the day, you may want to have them sewn shut as well. This will help smooth the silhouette.

Skirt Suits are a wardrobe classic that every woman should own...follow the above rules for your jacket fit. Skirts can be either straight, A-line, pencil or a 'flippy skirt'?. Straight skirts are the most classic and timeless, though not always the most flattering. A straight skirt is great for women with a few extra pounds, as they do not cling at the hip and accentuate the widest area of the body. A-line skirts are a nice choice for relatively thin, muscular types; This skirt with fit through the hip and then move outward away from the body, a great choice to balance a top heavy silhouette. Pencil skirts can do wonders for one's figure....that is, the slim/curvy figure. Pencil skirts should not be too tight, or you will struggle entering and exiting vehicles, not to mention sitting at your desk. A classic pencil skirt should hit just below the knee, for the most flattering effect. A 'flippy skirt'? has a similar silhouette at the pencil skirt, except at the hem there is a slight widening of the skirt opening, or a separate piece of fabric sewn on the bias creating movement, these skirts typically stop at the knee.

**FRIDAY CASUAL:** All too often I see Friday casual taken much too far in the office environment. If jeans are allowed on a Friday, make sure they are free from stains, rips and holes and they are not overly faded or worn out. On top, gentlemen should still be opting for either a polo, tucked in with a belt, or a button down shirt, sans tie. Blazers or cardigans are also office appropriate. Ladies, top off those jeans with a colorful blouse, sweater set or top and blazer. Heels or nice boots pull the look together. Friday casual DON'Ts: Flip flops, gym shoes, shorts, tank tops, and spaghetti straps are NEVER office appropriate. Skirts that are too short should be retired or saved for after hours, and hair and make-up should be as polished as it is on a Monday morning. Don't end up the subject of office gossip by being the one person who doesn't understand Friday Casual etiquette.

# How to Find and Buy a Professional Wardrobe on a Budget

It is possible to build a great looking, classic and polished professional wardrobe on a budget; the key is in making smart purchases.

**Men:** Start with a dark neutral suit, charcoal grey, black, or navy. Next up, add a few white shirts, a quality pair of dress shoes, a leather belt, a few pairs of dress socks and a couple of ties. From here, add a colored shirt or two, another tie, and eventually a second suit and pair of dress shoes. Suits are the most expensive part of the professional wardrobe, and you will get a huge return if you invest in a quality suit up front. A professional man can always look polished with a minimum number of items, changing your tie changes your whole look! Once you have a few suits, you can expand your wardrobe by adding slacks, cardigans, long sleeve v-neck sweaters and patterned shirts one at a time. Before you know it, you will have the professional wardrobe you always wanted.

**Women:** Start with a dark neutral suit, charcoal grey, black, navy or beige in the summer months. Next up, add a few tops/blouses in neutral colors, a quality pair of pumps, a polished handbag and a few pieces of conservative jewelry. From here, you can grow your wardrobe with brightly colored blouses, sweater sets and scarves, and eventually a second suit or separates that can mix and match with your original suit, as well as another pair of classic pumps. Suits are the most expensive part of the professional wardrobe, and you will get a huge return if you invest in a quality suit up front. A woman can really maximize her wardrobe with minimal expense by adding a scarf or statement necklace, such as pearls, to an ordinary suit/dress. If you get bored, try belting a cardigan or blouse over a pencil skirt and topping it with a cardigan or blazer. With the right key pieces your options will be limitless!

Source: <http://www.jwilliamsstaffing.com/blog/blog-detail/how-to-find-and-buy-a-professional-wardrobe-on-a-budget-3165.cfm>, as adapted.