



Five Work Wardrobe Must-Haves

Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

Every closet needs some basic items around which a complete wardrobe can be built. These include those core pieces that easily mix and match with other elements in your closet or work just as well on their own. The goal is to have a wardrobe that will work in a variety of situations. The key is finding pieces that are compatible and interchangeable, especially if you're on a budget.

A polished wardrobe not only looks good, it says a lot about you. It's a reflection of your personality and the manner in which you conduct yourself. Your clothes can tell the world that you are neat, competent and professional, or sloppy, inappropriate and inexperienced. If you were an employer, which would you prefer?

Michelle T. Sterling, principal of Global Image Group image consultants says there are a number of career wear "must-haves." For more than 10 years, Global Image Group has helped individuals and executives in top corporations hone their professional images.

Check out these five wardrobe fundamentals that, according to Sterling, should be found in the closets of every successful man and woman.

- 1. Basic suit.** Every closet needs one of these. For men, navy or gray are classic colors that work well in a variety of situations. For women, black does the trick. Whether it's for an interview, client meeting or personal event such as a wedding, you will be ready if you have one of these hanging in your closet.
- 2. Business Casual Gear.** For client outings or informal meetings out on the road, a less formal attire often is more appropriate. Just how casual is "business casual" depends on the culture of your company. However, business casual rarely means sweat pants or jeans and gym shoes.
- 3. Crisp White Shirt/Blouse.** We defy you to find a situation where a simple, white blouse or shirt looks out of place! Pair it with a suit, as part of a business casual ensemble or with jeans ... the possibilities are endless.
- 4. Simple Accessories.** A stash of accessories can coordinate with multiple outfits and give those basic pieces a dash of style and a variety of different looks.

Ties for men. If you steer clear of intricate patterns and wild colors, you'll have no problem matching them to most of your wardrobe.

Scarves for women. Scarves are a quick way to add a splash of color. However, if a scarf is not your thing, a simple chain with a pendant makes a great addition to any outfit.

A reversible black/brown belt for men will work with just about any pair of pants you throw at it.

A sleek metal or leather watch.

Tote bag for women or briefcase for men.

5. Versatile Shoes. For men, a pair of lace-up shoes with a thin sole in both black and brown is guaranteed to go with all your work attire. For women, black pumps are like the white blouse, you just can't go wrong with them. Choose a medium heel height, and they truly can be worn with everything from a suit to a pair of jeans.

These essential pieces are the chief ingredients of a solid business wardrobe. Cost does not have to be a factor in building a career clothing collection because these basic items come in all price ranges from Armani to Target. Just remember Sterling's advice, "No matter where you are on the company ladder, presenting a professional image is always important."

Kate Lorenz is the article and advice editor for CareerBuilder.com. She researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues. Other writers contributed to this article.

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