Depending upon your current fashion statement, whether it be the latest trends for the club scene or merely college senior casual, venturing into the world of work may be cause for a drastic shift in your wardrobe.

Some of your individualism, at least from 9 to 5, might have to be shelved, or kept in the closet. In most business and technical settings, when it comes to your appearance, conservative and conformity are the order. Each company will have its own guidelines, so it is important to know your future or potential employer before you meet them. How liberal or conservative is the dress code? Don’t try to set any new standards, especially in the interview. When in doubt, it is better to be too conservative than to be too flashy. For men and women, a suit is the best bet.

Some guidelines:

**MEN**
A two-piece suit will suffice in most instances. Solid colors and tighter-woven fabrics are safer than bold prints or patterns. Bright ties bring focus to the face, but a simple pattern is best for an interview. (A tip for larger men: use a double Windsor knot to minimize a bulky appearance.) Wear polished shoes with dress socks high enough so no skin is visible when you sit down and cross your legs. (Do not wear white socks!)

**WOMEN**
A suit with a knee-length skirt and a tailored blouse is most appropriate. Although even the most conservative organizations allow more feminine looks these days, accessories should be kept simple. Basic pumps and modest jewelry and makeup help to present a professional look. Pants are more acceptable now, but are not recommended for interviews or on the job itself until you’re sure they are permissible.

**Staying Within a Budget**
For recent graduates just entering professional life, additions to wardrobes, or complete overhauls, are likely needed. However, limited funds can be an obstacle. Image consultant Christine Lazzarini suggests “capsule wardrobing.” For example, by mixing and matching, she says an eight-piece capsule wardrobe can generate up to 28 ensembles.

Before shopping, Lazzarini advises establishing a budget, 50 percent of which should be targeted for accessories. For women, “even a brightly colored jacket could be considered an accessory when it makes an outfit you already have look entirely different.

The most important piece in any wardrobe is a jacket that is versatile and can work with a number of other pieces, according to one fashion expert. This applies to men and women. “If you focus on a suit, buy one with a jacket which may be used with other skirts or trousers,” says Gina Tovar, national women’s fashion director for Nordstrom’s Illinois Region. “Then add a black turtleneck, or a white shirt. These are the fashion basics that you can build on.”

A navy or black blazer for men can work well with a few different gabardine pants. Although this kind of ensemble would be just as expensive as a single suit, it does offer more versatility.

Company representatives often recommend a briefcase, or at least a resume folder. “When I see one,” says one recruiter, “it definitely adds to the candidate’s stature. It is a symbol to me which indicates that the individual has done some research and is probably going to be able to give me whatever I ask for. In other words, it shows that he or she is prepared.”

**A Final Check**
And, of course, your appearance is only as good as your grooming. For interviews especially, create a final checklist for yourself:
- Make sure your hair is neatly trimmed
- Use makeup conservatively
- No runs in stockings
- Shoes polished (some suggest wearing your sneakers on the way to an interview and changing before you enter the interview site)
- Women should avoid excessive jewelry; men should refrain from wearing earnings
- No visible body piercing or tattoos
- No missing buttons, crooked ties, or lint
- No heavy perfume or aftershave
- Do not chew gum during the interview