



UNIVERSITY OF MONTEVALLO Career Development Center

GENDER NEUTRAL ATTIRE

ANDROGYNOUS CHIC

If your day-to-day attire doesn't conform to a traditional gender norm, your workplace clothing shouldn't have to either. In this day and age, there should be no position that requires you to dress in a way that makes you uncomfortable.

Gender-neutral (non-binary, androgynous, unisex) clothing is appropriate for anyone to wear, regardless of their gender identity. Whether you are a woman who steers clear of overtly feminine apparel, a man who prefers a more gender-neutral look, or a gender non-conforming or transgender person, you should be able to dress professionally without a problem.

For example, a standard button-down shirt is fine for anyone to wear in the workplace. It can be dressed up or down, and paired with slacks, a blazer, or a tie. Basic slacks or pants can be dressed up or down depending on the office environment and you can pair slacks with a wide variety of tops, shoes and accessories to build a more individualized look.



AUTHENTIC AND PROFESSIONAL

Gender-neutral (or gender-free) clothing is attire that avoids what is traditionally considered hyper-masculine or hyper-feminine elements.

There are many non-binary clothing options available for all forms of business attire, from casual to formal. While it is important to observe your company's dress code, you don't have to sacrifice your individuality to find clothing that makes you feel comfortable and professional.

Observe a proper level of professionalism. Unless there is an industry standard, opt for business casual or perhaps more professional attire for your first day on the job. Take note of how other employees are dressed and base your level of professional dress accordingly. You can also consult the human resources department for dress code advice.

Stay true to who you are. If you've never felt comfortable in a dress, opt for a pantsuit. If sport jackets are not your style, perhaps a vest better suits you. If a blazer is not you, try a sweater or cardigan. Heels or flats? Necktie or bowtie?

In most work settings, there is room for personalization and individual expression. You can typically get away with adding your unique flair to a standard style.

Confidence is key, and it is hard to be confident when you feel uncomfortable in your clothing. Wear clothing that highlights your personality and allows you to be yourself.



APPROPRIATE ATTIRE

What you wear to a job interview and what you wear to the office everyday is typically not the same thing. Interview attire tends to be more formal, more understated, and more about making a good first impression. A suit (or some version thereof) is almost always the best bet for an interview.

Everyday work wear can be described as business casual, smart casual, or office appropriate. In some cases, the employer may have a dress code in place that impacts what you wear to work.

Deciding on the right look will be a matter of balance between what reflects your personal (individual, unique) identity and what complies with the company's expectations. There are industry standards to consider as you realize that some work settings are more traditional (rigid) about attire while others are more progressive (flexible, creative) about attire. There are ranges of tolerance for personal expression in the workplace.

Ultimately, candidates should choose occupations and employers whose values, style, and culture match theirs. Trying to adapt to an uncomfortable dress code that conflicts with your comfort and authenticity is not conducive to productivity and satisfaction.

CODES | POLICIES | COMFORT

Dress comfortably for work, but do not wear anything that might be distracting or could offend your coworkers or make them feel uncomfortable. Your clothing choices should reflect good judgement, discretion, common sense, and professionalism.

If an employer has a dress code, it is generally expected that it avoids gender stereotypes and that it is enforced consistently. The intention of a dress code policy is to ensure employees embody the company's brand and professional image. Providing an expectation of professional dress when conducting company business, it can be helpful to enumerate what type of dress is not appropriate in the workplace.



Examples of fairly universal dress code items: No sweatpants, shorts or athletic apparel. No dirty or worn clothing. No slip-on shoes or sandals. No Jewelry that can cause a safety hazard.

Generally speaking, employers have a right to establish employee dress and grooming guidelines during work hours if they are reasonable and serve a legitimate business purpose. Such purposes include: Maintaining a brand or job specific image with customers and competitors... Safety, such as requiring employees to wear closed-toe shoes, goggles or gloves... Visibility, such as requiring employees to wear uniforms so that they are clearly recognizable to the public.



What does it mean to dress androgynous?

It is about people expressing their gender identity in ways that are non-binary or more gender fluid. People are dressing for their preference and their body, rather than the society's traditional ideas of gender.



What makes an outfit androgynous?

It can be described as mixed-gender clothing and accessories. The aim is to avoid constructing a visual distinction between masculine and feminine physical characteristics and, therefore, express non-binary gender identity.

TIPS | ADVICE | IDEAS

For any employee intentionally avoiding clothes with a connotation to a gender, there are plenty of options.

In work environments, suits, sport jackets, blazers, and vests tend to be genderless. Many shirt styles tend to be unisex. And tailored dress trousers are fairly universal. Even ties and suspenders have become more androgynous.

Khakis and polo shirts are a classic option for any gender seeking a business casual look for an office setting.

While jeans and leggings are generally frowned upon, based on their look and fit, there are some occasions when they may be okay. Check on the appropriateness of jeans and leggings in your work setting.



Tee-shirts are universally unsuitable as professional attire. Graphic tee-shirts, in particular, are never a good choice. In the same vein, any clothing with ideological messages or symbols should be avoided. Subtlety is the rule of thumb regarding lapel pins, buttons, and ribbons.

The most androgynous looks typically down-play sexual or gender connotations and de-emphasize body type. Masculine or feminine looks are replaced with a more unisex style.



GENDER INCLUSIVE BRANDS

There are fashion designers who specialize in clothing styles that are gender neutral, unisex, androgynous, and non-binary:

Haute Butch
VEEA
Kirrin Finch
Dang Sthlm
Peau De Loup
One DNA
Sharp Suiting

Wildfang
Too Good
Riley Studio
Gender-Free World
69 World
Big Bud Press
Topman

LOOKING GOOD

Workplace clothes should be clean, in good condition and free of wrinkles or holes, lint, pilling and excessive fading. They should fit properly and not be too tight or too baggy.

Whether you present masculine or feminine or neutral, a professional appearance is always required. Generally, you should avoid styles, patterns, and designs that are too flamboyant, playful, sporty, or cute.

When in doubt about colors, it is safe to go with neutral colors, such as black, taupe, beige, brown, navy, and gray are good options. Red and white are excellent accent colors.

Piercings and visible tattoos should align with what you know to be the organization's culture. Be aware that some employers have a negative view of tattoos and piercings.

Stay away from any accessories that are too flashy or distracting. Hats should be avoided. Go easy on the jewelry. Avoid excessive make-up. Nail polish and any nail treatments should be lowkey.

Jeans and shorts are almost always inappropriate. Tank tops, tee-shirts, workout clothing, sweatpants, or yoga pants should be avoided.

Footwear options typically focus on dress shoes, whether oxfords, loafers, heels, or flats. Some casual styles are okay, including some types of tennis shoes. Flip-flops and other such casual footwear are usually not worn.



Gender Neutral Interview Attire and Business Clothing

<https://www.liveabout.com/gender-neutral-interview-and-business-clothing-2061166>

Guide To Gender-Neutral Attire

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/starting-new-job/gender-neutral-attire>

Gender Neutral Guide: What to Wear to an Interview

<https://www.zippia.com/advice/what-to-wear-for-an-interview/>

Androgyny & Gender Expression in the Workplace

<https://www.inhersight.com/blog/diversity/androgynous>

Gender-Bending Fashion Brands for Professionals

<https://fairygodboss.com/articles/9-gender-bending-fashion-brands-for-professionals>

How to Dress for an Interview as a Butch Woman

<http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/11/07/how-to-dress-for-an-interview-as-a-butch-dyke/>



University of Montevallo
CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER
 205-665-6262 | Station 6262 | Farmer Hall 2nd Floor
www.montevallo.edu/career