

# Graduation Day: What is Business Casual?

*by Pamela Fay*

Business casual may be required in the workplace as the operating norm, on casual Fridays or when attending company-sponsored social events. Depending on your chosen field, it may also be the best choice for job interviews and career fairs. So, if the dress code for your graduation ceremony is business casual, you're in luck. The investment you make in selecting and putting together your graduation outfit could form a foundation of versatile work pieces to jumpstart your career wardrobe.

## **Business Casual for Men**

For men, business casual may include khakis, dark pants, and long-sleeved shirts. A graduation, which may occur outdoors on a warm late spring day, can be a bit more casual than everyday office wear. Short sleeve shirts, such as golf or polo shirts, may work. However, if you select a dress or button-down shirt, it should have long sleeves. A tie is not necessary unless specified. If you're not sure, wear a tie; you can always take it off. Business casual does not require a sport coat and you could not wear one under a graduation robe in any case.

## **Business Casual for Women**

In addition to creased dark or khaki pants, women can wear similarly colored knee-length skirts. Select tailored cuts with uncomplicated lines. Avoid tight cuts, clingy materials or anything that you would wear in a club or while entertaining at home. A center slit that provides ease for walking is acceptable in long skirts. However, the slit should be no higher than above the knee. On top, wear a tailored blouse or shirt in cotton, silk, or a silky blend. Sequins, shimmer and sheer party clothes are not business casual. Of course, cleavage should be covered. Women can wear any sleeve length up to sleeveless, but leave the cutout and peek-a-boo sleeves for another occasion. Although a tailored dress in a neutral color will work, a skirt and blouse can be more comfortable for long sitting periods during the graduation ceremony. Be sure to select a fabric that resists wrinkling.

## **Shoes**

Both men and women should wear leather, high quality faux-leather (if vegan) or microfiber shoes that are in good condition. Select dark neutral colors that coordinate with your outfit and a style that is more classic than trendy. Clunky heels, platforms and gladiator sandals are better left for the club. Neither men nor women should wear athletic shoes, trail or hiking shoes, or flip-flops. Although sandals may not work for an office, they can be appropriate for graduation provided they are neither too dressy nor too casual. Remember that you may be on your feet for awhile so choose shoes that are comfortable for long periods of standing and walking.

## **Accessories**

Keep jewelry to a minimum. Men should forego earrings. A conservative watch may be all you need. If you must carry a bag, opt for a small clutch or French purse. Although scarves and patterned stockings may be in style, your best choice is to keep it simple and understated. Since hosiery may be in or out of style depending upon the area of the

country in which the graduation takes place, women should use their best judgment as to what is customary for the area. If in doubt, wear hose or pants.

### **Other Details**

Business casual is a crisp, professional look. Make sure the clothes you select fit well, are neatly pressed and freshly laundered. Use your lint brush, cut protruding tags and loose threads, and make sure all buttons are secure and hems intact.

### **References**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute; Business Casual Attire

<http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/BusinessCasualAttire.html>

“Fabulous at Every Age: Your Quick and Easy Guide to Fashion”; Nandini D’Souza; 2009