

Unit 5 Professional Image

1. YOU ARE THE MESSAGE YOU SEND OUT

1.1 Taking Stock of Your Image

Do you want to create a positive first impression? You can imagine how important it is for job interviews, at your first meeting with your colleagues and superiors, and when you meet clients for the first time, to name a few instances.

What first impression do you make on people meeting you for the first time? How do they form that impression? It is through the image you project – your clothes, your grooming, your voice and your behaviour tell people who you are even before they establish personal contact with you.

Activity 1



Here's a quick checklist to help you take stock of the image you project.

	Factor	Poor	Average	Above average	First-rate
1	Communication skills				
2	Quality of voice				
3	Presentation skills				
4	Eye contact				
5	Handshake				
6	Social skills				
7	Table manners				
8	Posture/body language				
9	Fitness				
10	Grooming				
11	Dress/personal style				
12	Manners				

Give yourself the following points for every factor you have judged to be:

First rate	-	3	Above average	-	2
Average	-	1	Poor	-	0

Total your points.

Here is how you fare in the image stakes:

- | | | |
|---------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| < 8 | - | Your image is killing you. Do something, quick! |
| 9 – 12 | - | You are Mr/Ms Average. You offend few, but you also score little with people who matter – bosses, for example. |
| 13 – 24 | - | You show some promise but you present an inconsistent image. Put in some effort and you will shine. |
| 25 – 36 | - | You know the value of image and you've worked at it. You may have had the advantage of being brought up with an appreciation of etiquette, grooming and style. You may also have been motivated enough to learn other aspects through special training or reading. Well done! |

Adapted from *Presenting Yourself* by Mary Spillane

Activity 1 lists some of the factors that contribute to your image. Communication Skills refer to not just verbal but also writing skills although the former is usually how you are judged at first. You may have covered some of the other factors and skills in the course of your Communication Skills modules. In this unit we will take a closer look at business attire.

2. YOUR ATTIRE SPEAKS BEFORE YOU DO

You need to look well put-together if you want to be treated with respect and to be taken seriously at work. This section provides tips on how to choose the items for your working wardrobe. It is hoped that, armed with these tips, you can begin to build up your wardrobe with minimum wastage of time and money.

Start with the advice laid out here, and after you have spent some time in the working world, you will, no doubt, get a sense of how to vary your wardrobe to assert your individuality without losing track of the ‘corporate look’.



Fig 1: Your attire tells the world whether you are ready for work.

Complete your e-learning on *Power Dressing* and fill in the blanks below. Tips given in addition to the e-learning package are given in full, without blanks for you to fill in. Do remember that your e-learning package provides you with the safest guidelines that will never fail you. The advice here is based on studies conducted in formal business circles. These guidelines tend to be on the conservative side. Play it safe when you are new, before you are acclimatised to your company’s culture, the client’s expectations and know how much leeway you have in terms of dressing.

3. BUSINESS ATTIRE FOR MEN

3.1 Shirts

3.1.1 Colour

- **Pure white or off-white?**

Both white and off-white shirts are suitable for business. When well tailored and pressed, they help to project a clean, crisp image. When worn with a dark suit or trousers, they suggest authority and draw attention to the face.

- **What about light blue?**

A white business shirt is more formal than a light blue one, but a light blue one is still perfectly acceptable for business wear.

So is dark blue fine too?

Where shirts are concerned, the lighter the shade, the more formal and conservative it is. However, medium shades of blue and grey when worn with darker coloured trousers can still project a credible business image. When you need to project a semi-formal, rather than formal, image, wear a dark coloured shirt with lighter coloured trousers.



Fig 2: Lighter shirt and darker pants, or the reverse? The effect is different.

▪ **Now for yellow ... and pink!**

Yellow and pink shirts are acceptable for normal everyday office wear. However, they are not the best colours for power dressing.

3.1.2 Design

▪ **Are my sleeves the right length?**

When trying out a shirt for fit, crook your elbows. The end of the cuff should just cover your wrist bone. Anything longer or shorter than that is a poor fit.



Fig 3: Check that your wrists don't show when you bend your arms.

▪ **Should I have buttoned-down collars?**

Both the buttoned-down and the standard collars are appropriate for business wear.



Fig 4: If they're well tailored and pressed, both these collars are right for business wear.

▪ **What's the right fit for collars?**

Button up your collar. If you can still stick two fingers in snugly, you have the correct collar size.

- **What about Mandarin collars?**

While the standard collar tends to suit everyone, not everyone can carry off the Mandarin collar. The Mandarin collar cannot be worn with a tie, which is necessary for professional business occasions.



Fig 5: You can't wear a tie with a Mandarin collar.

- **What's the right fit for the back and shoulders?**

Button up your shirt and look at back in the mirror. If there are horizontal lines pulling across your shoulder blades, the shirt is too tight. If the back falls in waves as a curtain does, the shirt is too big.

- **What's more formal – a plain shirt or a patterned one?**

A plain shirt is more formal. Moreover, it is also easier to coordinate ties with a plain shirt than a striped or patterned shirt. Having said that, stripes are less informal than more elaborate patterns.



Fig 6: The striped shirt looks smarter; the patterned shirt is more casual.

3.2 Trousers

3.2.1 Colour

- **What's a better choice – light shades or dark shades?**

Where trousers are concerned, the advice is the opposite of that for business shirts. Here, the darker the shade, the more formal it is, and the more authority you project.

- **So black is ideal, then?**

Black is the most formal of colours. Black trousers and suits are best suited to formal and conservative evening functions. What a lot of us call 'black trousers' are in fact deep charcoal grey.

- **What shades of grey can I pick for trousers?**

Charcoal grey is also recognised as an international business colour. Grey projects stability and reliability. Do stock up on charcoal grey trousers and suits; just vary the texture and design. The deeper the grey, the more authoritative you look. In some

business circles, light grey suits are associated with under-performers and under-achievers.

- **What shades of blue can I pick for trousers?**

Navy [a very deep shade of blue] is recognised as an international business colour. Navy projects authority. It would be wise to stock up on navy trousers and suits, with variations in texture and design. Just remember, the deeper the shade, the more authority you project.

- **Is brown a good colour for trousers?**

If you like brown, wear the darkest shades. Studies have shown that brown tends to lessen one's credibility, especially at job interviews, where it can make you look duller and less sophisticated.

- **How about green trousers?**

Green is even more informal than brown. It is a non-conservative colour and therefore less appropriate for formal business purposes.

3.2.2 Design

- **How long is long enough?**

The hem of your trousers should just cover the top of your shoes. When you're standing, your socks should not be visible. If your trouser legs fall in several creases above your shoes, they are far too long.



Fig 7: Your socks should not be visible when you're standing.

- **Should my trousers have cuffs?**

Whether your business trousers come with cuffs is immaterial. However, if you wish to look taller, you'd be better off without cuffs.

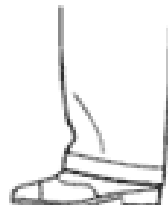


Fig 8: Trousers with cuffs work better on tall men.

- **What is the right fit?**

If your belt is the only thing holding your trousers up, they are far too loose. It will result in fabric bunching around your waist. This does not help you project a professional image at all.

Conversely, if you have to struggle to put your hands in your trouser pockets, your trousers are far too tight.

3.3 Ties

With a change of ties, you can create different impressions given the same outfit.

3.3.1 Colour

- **Black is always safe, right?**

Black ties, especially if they are made of leather, are often associated with people who are anti-establishment and do not respect authority. They are therefore less appropriate in business circles. Use these with caution.

- **What if I tone it down to a grey?**

Grey is a more suitable colour than black.

- **Which should I wear – a red tie or a burgundy tie?**

Burgundy is a classic colour for ties as it conveys authority. Red, on the other hand, is an attention-grabbing colour. It is a great colour to incorporate into your tie [i.e., as one of the colours on your tie] for presentations to large groups.

- **Do I wear a tie in solid navy or something with two shades?**

Actually, both are good choices. A solid navy tie projects authority and professionalism. However, a two-coloured tie can sometimes be considered as more formal than a single-coloured tie – provided that it consists of predominantly one colour, with the second colour occurring minimally in the design or pattern.

- **Is more than two shades fine, too?**

A two-coloured tie is definitely more conservative and formal than a loud, multi-coloured one. Generally, the more colourful your tie is, the more informal you look.

3.3.2 Design

- **Where should my tie end?**

Your tie should just cover your belt buckle. A tie that is worn too short or too long indicates the ignorance or lack of polish of its wearer.



Fig 9: Note where the tie should end.

- **Is the bow tie a good alternative?**

Bow ties are not recommended for conservative occasions such as job interviews. Neither are they recommended for conservative industries. They are more suited to formal occasions that call for the use of a tuxedo.



Fig 10: The bow tie belongs with a tuxedo.

- **What patterns are good choices if I don't want solid colours?**

The foulard tie [with small, repetitive patterns] is the classic business tie. The design must be small, no larger than a five-cent coin.

The pin dot tie projects power and elegance. Make sure the dots are small. The larger the dots, the more fun and clownish you tend to appear.

A tie with broad stripes resembles a school, rather than business, tie. The thinner the stripes, the more business-like it looks.



Fig 11: The plain, pin-dot and striped tie are all very safe choices. The right-most one looks more school-boyish than the rest.

- **Should I put on floral, patterned or striped ties?**

The floral or patterned tie is more appropriate for semi-formal business or social occasions, provided the print is muted and not loud.



Fig 12: Ties and shirts with loud patterns and colours spell fun, not business.

3.4 Shoes

3.4.1 Colour



- **I need a formal pair of shoes. Should I get black ones or burgundy ones?**

Both colours are considered formal. Black, because it is the most formal of colours, and deep burgundy, because it is a good alternative to black.

- **How about brown?**

The darker shades of brown are considered polished enough for formal wear.

- **What other colours should I get? How about white or blue?**

The safe options for men's shoes are black, deep burgundy and dark brown. Avoid wearing any other colours, especially white.

3.4.2 Design

- **I see laced-up business shoes in different styles. Does it matter which style I pick?**

The simple laced-up shoe is the safest and most appropriate business shoe, although fancier lace-ups are still acceptable. A general principle for shoes is that the fancier they are, the less appropriate they would be for business.



Fig 13: Good investments for business shoes.

- **What about slip-ons?**

Lace-ups, whether simple or fancy, are more formal than slip-ons. However, the latter are still acceptable if they are in formal colours such as black, deep burgundy or dark brown.

- **And shoes with buckles?**

Even simple slip-ons are still better than shoes with buckles. However, the latter is still acceptable for business wear if the rest of the shoe is simple in design. Also, ensure that the buckle is made of a material that doesn't tarnish. Tarnished buckles suggest that you are sloppy about your grooming.



Fig 14: Get these when there's money left over.

- **Boots look so cool. How can I carry them off at work?**

You can't. Boots and boot-like wear, as well as other chunky footwear, do not belong in the office. Best avoided too, are shoes with rubber soles. All these styles are too casual for business wear.



Fig 15: Great for other turf, not the office.

3.5 Belts

Belts are essential in men's business wear.

They should complement your attire.

3.5.1 Colour

▪ Does colour matter?

It does, and black, being the most formal of colours, is a very safe choice. Deep burgundy also makes a good alternative to men's belts.

Where brown is concerned, the darker the shade, the more formal it is. Thus, avoid the lighter shades at all cost. Do note that a brown belt should preferably be worn with dark brown and other warm-coloured trousers.

▪ Silver or gold buckle?

Both are fine. The difference lies in your position in the business world. Again, a belt with a gold buckle is more formal and professional than one with a silver buckle. The leather belt with the gold buckle is a typical power belt.

However, a belt with a silver buckle, when worn with grey or navy trousers, is entirely appropriate. It is less formal in appearance, and is more popular with younger men in more junior executive positions.

The crux is that the colours must match – warm colours [e.g., gold, brown] generally do not go well with cool colours [e.g., silver, grey].

▪ Which item of my attire do I coordinate my belt with?

They should match your shoes.

3.5.2 Design

▪ What style of buckles is acceptable?

A leather belt with a plain, professional-looking buckle is more formal than a chunky belt with a big cowboy buckle. The latter is more appropriate with jeans or casual wear.

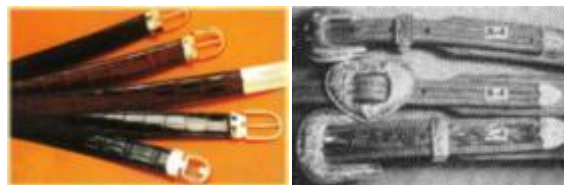


Fig 16: Less is more – the simpler, the more elegant and business-like.

3.6 Socks

In professional circles, you will look incomplete without socks.
Does it matter what socks you wear?

3.6.1 Colour

- **Black or white?**

Black is definitely a better choice than white. However, wear black socks only if you are wearing black trousers or black shoes. Avoid white socks unless you wish to project an unsophisticated, school boyish image.

- **Blue socks? And brown?**

These colours are highly favoured in business circles. Essentially, your socks should match and blend in with the colour of your trousers. This will not only give you the illusion of added height but also give you a polished appearance.

- **How about bright, cheery colours?**

The brighter the colour, the more informal the socks are. It is wiser to choose more muted colours. For patterned socks, ensure that at least one of the colours of the socks matches the colour of your trousers or your shoes.

3.6.2 Length

- **Ankle socks are the in thing. Can I wear them for work?**

Save your ankle socks for after work. For work, your socks should come up to your calf. This is so that when you sit and cross your legs, your bosses, colleagues and clients do not get an eyeful of your naked shin, hairy or otherwise!

3.7 Watches

Should you wear colourful watches or watches in silver or gold?

3.7.1 Colour

- **How colourful can the straps get?**

Black and brown leather straps are definitely more suitable than more colourful ones. The latter, no matter how attractive or fashionable, have no place in the business world.

- **Silver or gold bezel and strap?**

A watch with a silver bezel and strap is a safe bet. So is a combination of silver and some gold. A shiny all-gold watch may look out of place in the day.

3.7.2 Design

- **Straps – thick or thin?**

The thicker the strap, the more informal the appearance of the watch and the wearer is. Furthermore, a big, chunky watch may overwhelm a small or average-built wearer.

- **Classic or funky designs?**

Stick to watches with more classic or conventional designs. Definite no's are cartoon character watches. Also, avoid unusual or over-trendy designs if you wish to project a professional image.

- **Metallic or plastic?**

A classic analogue watch in metal, with either a leather or metal strap, is definitely more formal than a plastic digital watch.



Fig 17: The digital watch with rubber/plastic straps is not for your business suits.

3.8 Briefcase

3.8.1 Colour

- **Black or brown?**

Actually, both black and dark brown suitcases project an equally professional image. However, while you can coordinate both warm and cool coloured outfits with a black suitcase, a brown suitcase goes better with warm coloured outfits.

- **Only dark brown will do?**

The deeper the shade, the more formal the appearance of the briefcase is. Nevertheless, the light brown suitcase is still acceptable for everyday business use.

- **And burgundy too?**

Yes, burgundy is fine too. Colours other than burgundy, black and brown are deemed too informal.

3.8.2 Design

- **Short handle or long strap?**

The briefcase with a short handle is more formal than that with a long strap. However, the latter is still acceptable for business use.



Fig 18: The one on the left looks smarter, but both are business-like enough.

- **Will a document holder do?**

While a briefcase with a short handle is more formal, a document holder made of good quality leather or imitation leather, is acceptable if you do not have many documents to carry.

- **Document holders – is plastic fantastic?**

The leather document holder is a better choice than the plastic file. The plastic file projects the image of someone fresh out of school [and therefore lacking in experience], financially challenged or unsophisticated. Similarly, avoid carriers like paper files or envelopes.



Fig 19: No, not an impressive way to tote your documents.

3.9 Hair

3.9.1 Colour

For Asians, a natural colour like black or dark brown is more appropriate than unnatural colours like red and blonde. This is not to say that red and blonde are totally inappropriate. They look natural on Caucasians but less so on Asians.

3.9.2 Style

Men with long and untidy hair are seen as lacking in attention to detail and poorly groomed. If your fringe is longish, use gel/wax to hold it up and away from your eyes. It is more advisable to sport a shorter, neater hair style. However, do not go to the other extreme and wear your hair in a crew cut. On most young men, it tends to project a too-young, inexperienced image.



Fig 20: Not a haircut that many can pull off.

4. BUSINESS ATTIRE FOR WOMEN

4.1 Jackets

4.1.1 Colours

- **What colour should I pick for a formal business occasion?**

Black is the most formal of colours. It looks good when teamed with an item of a different colour, be it a dress, blouse or skirt.

- **What about grey?**

Grey is fine. It is an international business colour. It projects an image of stability and reliability. Since it is a dull colour, brighten it up with accessories.

- **And cream?**

A cream-coloured jacket is formal enough and can be adopted as a classic in your business wardrobe.

- **Now for yellow ... and pink!**

Jackets and suits in yellow, pink, lime green and other bright or pastel shades are either too loud or too delicate for power dressing.

4.1.2 Design

- **What is the right length?**

The jacket that spells power is hip-length. However, if you are particularly long-legged, you can still pull it off with the longer jacket for formal wear.

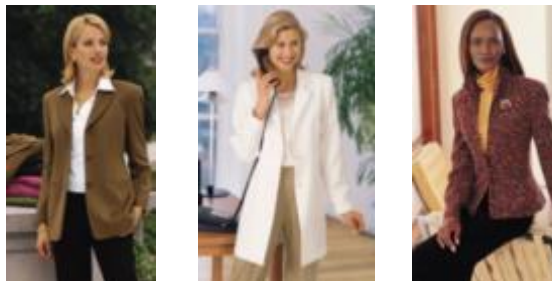


Fig 21: The hip-length, thigh-length and cropped jackets.
You need height to carry off the jacket in the centre well.

- **Are cropped jackets out of place, then?**

Although the hip-length jacket is the more conventional length and more suitable for power dressing, the cropped jacket has a place, too. When worn with a short [not mini] skirt of the same colour and material, it is appropriate for business wear too.

- **What's better – a straight-cut jacket or something nipped in the waist?**

Generally, the shaped jacket, which is nipped in at the waist, projects a more well-groomed image. It looks more well-cut and therefore smarter. However, the fit must never be so tight that the buttons look like they are going to pop open. Also, if you do not have a clearly defined waist, it may be better to opt for a straight-cut jacket instead.

- **What's better – a V-neck or a close neck?**

The V-necked collar requires you to wear a blouse and skirt with it, while the close-necked jacket can be worn with just a skirt. In formal business wear, a 3-piece suit, and hence, the V-necked collar, is more suitable.



Fig 22: The three-piece looks more formal.

- **What's better – patch or slash pockets?**

Jackets with slash pockets, or none at all, create a cleaner and leaner image than jackets with patch pockets. The latter are more suitable for less formal business occasions.



Fig 23: This jacket is informal on two counts – it has patch pockets and it's denim.

4.2 Blouses

4.2.1 Colour

- **Light or dark?**

In general, in the world of power dressing, the darker the shade, the more authority you project. For example, navy blue looks more authoritative than pastel blue.

- **What colours do you recommend?**

Besides charcoal grey and navy, burgundy is good for power dressing, too. The richer the shade, the more authority you project. Pick these colours over others such as purple and pink.

- **So is white or off-white out?**

On the contrary, a white or off-white blouse projects a clean and crisp image, and can be included as a classic item in your wardrobe. When worn with a dark suit, it signals authority.

4.2.2 Design

- **Sleeves – long, short, or none?**

All are acceptable, provided the ensemble is correctly put together. In the case of the long-sleeved blouse, you have the option of wearing it with or without a jacket. However, short-sleeved or sleeveless blouses should be worn with jackets.

If the blouse and skirt are of the same colour, then the jacket can be in a contrasting colour. Or if the jacket and skirt are of the same colour, then the blouse should be in a contrasting colour. Alternatively, all three pieces can be of the same colour.

- **Should all my blouses be long?**

Both long and short blouses can be worn on business occasions. Long blouses must be tucked into the skirt, while those that hover just below the waistline do not need to be tucked in. Note that short blouses are not so short that your midriff shows!



Fig 24: Tuck long blouses in.

- **Simple lines or lots of details?**

Blouses with clean cuts and simple necklines tend to make you look more elegant and professional than blouses with fussy details such as lace, puffed sleeves and ruffles.



Fig 25: Discreet, tasteful patterns like the one on the left are fine.
The one on the right isn't.

4.3 Skirts

4.3.1 Colour

- **Is black ideal?**

Black skirts project credibility and sophistication. Visually, they help you look smaller if you are of big built. It makes a useful basic item in your wardrobe.

- **What shades of blue can I pick for skirts?**

Navy [a very deep shade of blue] is recognised as an international business colour. Navy projects authority. It would be wise to stock up on skirts and jackets, with variations in texture and design. Just remember, the deeper the shade, the more authority you project.

- **What shades of grey can I pick for skirts?**

When combined with, say, a navy blouse, a charcoal grey skirt is one of the safest choices for business wear.

- **How about white?**

Pure white is too stark and harsh for most skin tones.

- **Is brown a good colour for skirts?**

Brown is an earthy colour that makes you appear approachable and less intimidating.

- **How about green and other fun colours?**

Fun and bright colours, such as lime green, are not advisable for formal business purposes.

4.3.2 Design

- **How long is long enough?**

The knee-length skirt is definitely more appropriate than the mini skirt. Remember that skirts ride up when you sit down. So, avoid skirts with short hem-lines and peek-a-boo slits, as well as tight-fitting skirts as these may damage your credibility.

- **Is my skirt too long?**

Both knee-length and long, straight skirts are appropriate for power dressing. In general, where skirts are concerned, the longer the hemline, the more formal you appear.

- **Is straight, or flared, better?**

The straight skirt is more appropriate than the flared one. The flared skirt, or any skirt with fussy details, like patch pockets, lace or ribbons, is considered too informal a style for business wear.

- **How about the A-line skirt?**

Both the straight and A-line skirts are appropriate for business wear. In fact, these two styles suit most women's body shapes, and are the best styles for power dressing.



Fig 26: Straight and the A-line skirts are suitable; minis and flared [and floral!] skirts aren't.

4.4 Dresses

4.4.1 Colour

- **Black is always safe, right?**

Black, when worn on more than half the body, is too formal for business wear. It should be used largely for evening wear.

- **What about brown and grey?**

Brown, an earthy colour, helps you project an approachable image. Grey is an international business colour that will help you project an image of stability and reliability.

- **What about bright and fun colours?**

Bright and fun colours lessen your professional credibility. Red, for example, is an attention-seeking and attention-grabbing colour. It is a great colour to wear, however, for presentations to large groups.

4.4.2 Design

- **How long is long enough?**

The longer the dress is, the more formal it is. The thigh-length dress is too informal for business wear.

- **When is a dress too long?**

The ankle-length dress is very formal, and hence, is inappropriate for power dressing. It is best reserved for formal evenings.

- **What about the jacket dress or the shift?**

The jacket dress, which has jacket lapels and long sleeves, is more formal than the shift dress, which is slightly loose-fitted and has short or no sleeves. The shift needs to be teamed with a jacket.



Fig 27: Throw a jacket over your shift and you'll look ready for work.

4.5 Jewellery

4.5.1 Colour

- **Is gold or silver suitable?**

Gold and silver, in moderation, project a serious and professional image. Gold can be used to enhance warm-coloured outfits, like a brown suit. Silver can be used to enhance cool-coloured outfits, such as grey or blue.

- **How about pearls?**

Pearls are more formal than silver. They can be worn for formal evening functions.



Fig 28: Pearls make your outfit look more formal.

- **Is diamante or coloured jewellery acceptable?**

Elaborate diamonds and coloured stones, and especially diamante jewellery, are considered too formal and dazzling for daytime business wear.

4.5.2 Design

- **Should necklaces be long or short?**

A simple, short necklace or chain is more practical and business-like than a long strand. This is because whenever you move, the long chain tends to move around more than the short one.

- **Dangling ear-rings or ear studs?**

As a general guideline, the longer the ear-ring, the more visually distracting it will be. Stick to ear studs and simple drop ear-rings.

- **Small or big ear-rings?**

Keep your ear-ring design small, simple and non-distracting. Large ear-rings draw attention away from you to themselves. Also, avoid wearing more than one pair of ear-rings at a time.



Fig 29: Keep jewellery simple and elegant, as on the left.

- **Simple or elaborate brooches?**

Wear only simple and elegant brooches. A well-chosen brooch can truly enhance your image. However, you should only wear a brooch if your outfit is of a simple design and solid colour.

- **Simple or elaborate rings?**

A simple, classic design is a better choice than a chunky novelty ring. Rings, like other pieces of jewellery, should be worn in moderation. Thus, one ring on each hand is enough.

4.6 Watches

Should you wear colourful watches or watches in silver or gold?

4.6.1 Colour

- **How colourful can the straps be?**

Black and brown leather straps are definitely more suitable than more colourful ones.

- **Silver or gold bezel and strap?**

A watch with a silver bezel and strap is a safe bet. So is a combination of silver and some gold. A shiny all-gold watch may look out of place in the day.

4.6.2 Design

- **Straps – thick or thin?**

An average strap of 1 to 1.5 cm would be the best for power dressing. A watch with a very thin strap, although very elegant, may be too formal for daytime power dressing. However, if you are very petite, this style may suit you.

The thicker the strap, the more informal the appearance of the watch and the wearer is. Furthermore, a thick, chunky strap may overwhelm a person of average or small built.

- **Classic or funky designs?**

Stick to watches with more classic or conventional designs. Definite no's are cartoon character watches. Also, avoid unusual or over-trendy designs if you wish to project a professional image.

- **Leather, metallic or plastic?**

A classic analogue watch, with either a leather or metal strap, is definitely more formal than a plastic digital watch.

4.7 Bags – handbags and briefcases

4.7.1 Colour

- **Black or brown?**

Actually, both black and dark brown bags project an equally professional image. However, while you can coordinate both warm and cool coloured outfits with a black suitcase, a brown bag goes better with warm coloured outfits.

- **Only dark brown will do?**

The deeper the shade, the more formal the appearance of the briefcase is. Nevertheless, the light brown bag is still acceptable for everyday business use.

- **And burgundy too?**

Yes, burgundy is fine too. Colours other than burgundy, black and brown, are deemed too informal.

4.7.2 Design

- **Long or short strap for my handbag?**

Choose handbags with straps that are of the right length for you. The bag should not end at an area that is unflattering, for example, the widest part of your hips.

- **Or no strap or handle at all?**

Handbags with handle straps are more acceptable for power dressing than the clutch bag. The latter, depending on its quality and shape, may be deemed either too casual or too formal for business purposes.



Fig 30: Handbags are suitable, purses/clutch bags are not.

- **Angular or rounded design?**

If you have angular structures, choose a structured or angular bag. Rounded bags suit ladies with more rounded or contoured features.

- **Can I use a tote bag or a haversack?**

Both bags are considered highly unprofessional in appearance. Do not use either as a substitute for a handbag or suitcase. Haversacks are too casual while tote bags make you look ready for the Great Singapore Sale, not business.



Fig 31: Totes and haversacks/backpacks are popular, but not business-like.

- **Will a document holder do?**

While a briefcase with a short handle is more formal, a document holder made of good quality leather or imitation leather, is acceptable if you do not have many documents to carry.

- **Document holders – is plastic fantastic?**

The leather document holder is a better choice than the plastic file. The plastic file projects the image of someone fresh out of school [and therefore lacking in experience], financially challenged or unsophisticated. Similarly, avoid carriers like paper files or envelopes.

4.8 Shoes

4.8.1 Colour

- **I need a formal pair of shoes for work. Should I get black ones?**

Yes, because black is the most formal of colours. Wear them with cool-coloured clothes such as blue, grey or black for a polished, coordinated look.

- **How about brown?**

Brown is acceptable for formal wear. Wear them with warm-coloured clothes for a polished, coordinated look.

- **What other colours should I get?**

A deep blue is a good option and so is burgundy. Avoid wearing other colours, especially stark white. Avoid red, too, even if they coordinate with your clothes. Burgundy is more appropriate for power dressing.

4.8.2 Design

- **What design is ideal?**

It's the classic court shoe. It covers the foot and has a heel of 1.5 to 2 inches.



Fig 32: Left, centre – very business-like; right – much less so.

- **What about flats?**

Flat heels are informal. They do not help you project a professional image.

- **And court shoes with buckles?**

This variation is acceptable for formal business wear. However, it is still the classic court shoe that is the perfect business shoe.

- **Boots look cool. How can I carry them off at work?**

Boots and boot-like wear, as well as other chunky footwear, do not belong in the office. Best avoided too, are shoes with rubber soles. All these styles are too casual for business wear.

- **What about other styles such as platforms, strappy sandals, etc?**

Sorry! The more covered up the shoe, the more formal it is. Open-toed shoes, platform shoes and strappy sandals are unacceptable for power dressing.



Fig 33: Pretty. And pretty useless for business.

4.9 Stockings

In professional circles, the look isn't considered complete without stockings. But what shade would you pick?

4.9.1 Colour

- **Skin toned or coloured?**

Skin-toned stockings make you look professional and business-like. Do not attempt to match the colour of your stockings with that of your clothes, unless your skirt hem happens to be grey or black. Matching grey or black stockings have a slimming effect on the wearer.

- **How about white?**

White stockings, like white shoes, suggest that you are not willing to work hard.

- **Sheer or opaque?**

Sheer, or almost transparent, stockings, are more business-like than opaque ones.

4.10 Hair

4.10.1 Short hair

- **How should I style my hair for formal business occasions?**

Short hair that is neatly swept back with gel can give you a more sophisticated and well-groomed appearance. It is therefore a very suitable style for formal business occasions.

- **My hair is wavy and the curls go in different directions. Your advice?**

Messy and unkempt hair tends to suggest a lack of interest and attention to detail. Tame your waves if you can to project a well-groomed appearance. However, do not try to achieve this by using hair bands and clips. These tend to make you look school girlish and unprofessional. A good cut by a hair stylist and some effort on styling your hair after every wash should fix the problem.

4.10.2 Long hair

- **Should I let it down, or tie it up in a bun?**

Although the bun is more formal, both styles are equally acceptable in the corporate world. Long hair that has been tied back in a bun or in an upswept style is a sign of high self-esteem, confidence and self-discipline.

- **Can I tie up my hair?**

Although it is important to look neat, tying your hair in a school-girlish, bouncy pony tail or braids is out of place in the business world. On the other hand, letting your long hair fall messily projects an image of sloppiness.

Long hair has to be neatly groomed. Long fringes have to be cut to an appropriate length or neatly gelled back.



Fig 34: Wear your hair short [Abby] or long [Bo], and style it neatly. Or style long hair into a chignon/bun, like Cara. Don't sport Danielle's pony tail or Elena's shaggy mane.

4.11 Make-up

- **What's better – more, or less make-up?**

Make-up should always be used in moderation. Stick to neutral and natural colours, and use them to highlight your most flattering facial features. Avoid excessive make-up and using overly bright and unnatural colours in business circles.

- **Is no make-up the best, then?**

Having the right amount of make-up is essential to good personal grooming. Never go for an interview or make a presentation without make-up. The right amount of make-up helps draw attention to the face without being overly distracting. At the least, apply some foundation to even out the skin tone, a soft dash of blusher for a healthy glow, eye shadow and some lipstick. Use neutral and natural colours.



1. Revisit Activity 1 on the first page. Pair up with a classmate and rate each other's image as seen on the day of your mock interview or formal presentation. Now you get a sense of how someone else sees and rates you.
This is how my classmate rated me:

	Factor	Poor	Average	Above average	First-rate
1	Communication skills				
2	Quality of voice				
3	Presentation skills				
4	Eye contact				
5	Handshake				
6	Social skills				
7	Table manners				
8	Posture/body language				
9	Fitness				
10	Grooming				
11	Dress/personal style				
12	Manners				

You may or may not agree entirely with your classmate's assessment, but it will definitely be food for thought.



Fig 35: Is that you?

My greatest strengths are: [a] _____

[b] _____

I would really like to improve my:

[a] _____

[b] _____

I can make these improvements by:

[a] _____

[b] _____

2. You may have noticed some similarities and some differences between the tips for the use of colours for the two sexes. Work in groups of about four, with both genders. Summarize the recommendations from your e-learning.

Put a tick if the colour works well in the wardrobe and a cross if it doesn't. Add notes and explanations wherever you can.

Colour	Men's shirts	Women's blouses
White/off-white	√ <i>Team with dark suits/trousers</i>	√ <i>Crisp image if worn with dark suits</i>
Lighter shades	<i>The lighter the shade, the more formal</i>	
Darker shades		<i>The darker the shade, the more authoritative</i>
How to combine light and dark shades	<i>Combine lighter shirts with darker pants; image is too casual if combination is reversed</i>	
Main difference in the use of colour	<i>Darker colours do not work very well for men's shirts; they work well for women's blouses. [White/off-white work well for both.]</i>	

Colour	Men's trousers	Women's skirts
Dark colours	√ <i>The darker the shade, the more authoritative the image.</i>	√ <i>The darker the shade, the more authoritative the image.</i>
Navy, charcoal grey, dark brown	√ <i>The darker the shade, the more authoritative.</i>	√ <i>The darker the shade, the more authoritative.</i>
White	X	X

Colour	Men's shoes	Women's shoes
Black	√ <i>Black is the most formal of colours.</i>	√ <i>Black is the most formal of colours.</i>
Dark brown, burgundy	√ <i>The darker the shade, the more authoritative.</i>	√ <i>The darker the shade, the more authoritative.</i>
White	X	X
Coordinate the colour with	<i>Belt</i>	<i>Handbag</i>

You may want to summarize the information for other items as well.

3. **Look Right, Travel Light**

Some of you [2 boys, 2 girls] have landed your dream jobs and have been given a one-week overseas assignment. Each of you needs to get about four classmates to help you pack. Besides 5 days at the overseas office, you have to do a presentation for a large group and attend a dinner with your overseas colleagues. It is summer and the weather is very much like Singapore's. Remember that your colleagues from the overseas office are picking you up from the airport and you don't want to be seen with a huge luggage bag.

The class gets into four teams for this purpose. Help your friends plan the wardrobe to pack. You need to specify:

- The type and colour of each item, e.g. off-white shirt

The group with smallest number of items wins, provided:

- There are sufficient pieces for proper hygiene!
- You coordinate the pieces well enough for a varied look.

You deserve bonus points if you take into account other considerations such as:

- The wearer's natural colouring and how your planned wardrobe complements it.
- Where you can buy these items at reasonable prices.



Fig 36: You enjoy a more varied look if you mix, match and coordinate your pieces well.