

All *dressed* up

Whether you're going to a networking event, business lunch or conference cocktails, you want to be sure you're not committing a fashion *faux pas*. Stylist Robin Powis deciphers the dress code.

Dress codes. It's like a whole other language. When you're trying to make a good impression, the last thing you want to do is show you have no idea about the etiquette of style. Worse, you could be giving the impression that you don't respect your host's request about what to wear to an event. To avoid these blunders, follow this guide on dress codes – and what they really mean. And remember, if in doubt, always ask the host.

Smart casual

Smart casual is a dressed up version of a casual look. This might be for a work-related sporting or outdoor event. It doesn't mean what you wear on the weekend but rather a smarter version of what you wear to dinner at a good friend's house.

DO: Wear dressy jeans, pants or skirt and flats or medium heels, leather boots or good sandals. Patterns, prints or plains work in linen, cotton, wool or corduroy.

DON'T: T-shirts, shorts, thongs – anything you'd go to the beach in – are a no-no.

Business attire

This is usually the dress code for most places of work and it typically refers to a classic and professional look with immaculate grooming and accessories. Nevertheless, if you're joining a new organisation, always check its definition of business attire. For example, a law firm requires a more conservative look whereas in the advertising industry you are expected to be more creative.

DO: A tailored matching suit or knee-length dress in a fabric with a fine or subtle pattern,

and a light to medium texture. Enclosed leather shoes with a medium heel and minimal embellishment. Try subtle blended makeup.

DON'T: Wear ill fitting, uncoordinated clothes in clashing colours. No revealing necklines or tight tops.

However, "business casual" (often referred to as "casual Friday") is still tailored but the key difference is that your tops and bottoms don't have to match. They just need to look coordinated. There's a subtle difference.

Lounge suit

This look is appropriate for day or night. It's the sort of outfit that can be worn to an afternoon wedding, to attend a networking event after work or meet a client for dinner.

DO: Wear a classic structured dress, a matching business suit, pants suit or dressy top and pants. If you are going straight from work, glam up with sparkling earrings, high heels and a clutch bag. Also perfect is a cocktail suit in a fabric with sheen like silk or brocade.

DON'T: This is not the occasion to wear a cocktail dress, sequins or anything you would wear to a nightclub or party.

Cocktail

A cocktail event is a pre-dinner event usually after 5pm, and is more dressed up than what you wear at work. It's usually a "drinks and canapés" affair and is popular with product launches, conferences events, and some networking occasions.

DO: Wear a cocktail or party dress that is knee-length or a dressy pants suit or an elegant skirt and top. The dress is usually made from silk, satin, or sequins

and worn with chic strappy sandals and accessories.

DON'T: A very short dress in bright florals or patterns or a dress in rough fabrics like tweed, linen or knits.

Black tie or formal

There is little difference between black tie or formal. The look is elegant and chic. Expect a black tie dress code at prestigious awards ceremonies, corporate balls and major industry events.

DO: Think long evening gown or a short knee-length cocktail dress that's distinctly for wearing in the evening. Think Collette Dinnigan in a fabric of silk, lace, sequins or such. Embellish with glamorous accessories and an evening sandal or pump with a small evening bag.

DON'T: A structured tailored day dress, suit or top and skirt in cotton, stripes or patterns.

White tie

White tie is the most formal of all and is a glittering, gala occasion often with dignitaries attending, or a "red carpet" affair. This is what you wear when you get your invite to a gala dinner next time Princess Mary is in your town.

DO: Dress to the nines in a floor-length gown in a sumptuous fabric with precious

jewellery. No costume bling here at all. If you wear gloves remember, the shorter the sleeve, the longer the glove.

DON'T: Any hem higher than the floor is not appropriate for this special occasion. **L**

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