

# DRESS FOR SUCCESS IN BUSINESS



Jane Jackson, Career Management Coach

## ABOUT JANE JACKSON

**Jane is Sydney's respected career management and life Coach. She is a speaker, author of #1 Amazon best seller, "[Navigating Career Crossroads](#)" and host of "[Your Career](#)" Podcast on iTunes, Spotify and YouTube.**



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## CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN (OR WOMAN)



PEOPLE WILL JUDGE YOU ACCORDING TO THE WAY YOU DRESS.

What you wear and how you wear it forms part of your personal image and speaks volumes, subconsciously or consciously, to everyone you come across on a day-to-day basis, whether it's virtually or face-to-face.

What you wear also plays a role in how you feel about yourself. When you look smart you feel more confident and act like the best version of yourself. Even if you work remotely away from the office, the best version of yourself isn't wearing dirty gym gear or a smelly oversized t-shirt. Depending on the industry you work in, your dress code might lean towards corporate attire or smart casual for business meetings or networking. When you're working from home you might be more inclined to wear lounge wear.

You can still express your individuality, but regardless of the 'look' you end up going for it's a good idea to have a basic understanding of the do's and don'ts - what makes some clothing look good on a person and what should be avoided? This e-book is intended to give you some basic grooming and styling tips to help you project the right image to match your personal brand.

## THE RIGHT FIT



CLOTHING THAT FITS CORRECTLY LOOKS AS THOUGH IT'S AN EXTENSION OF YOU, NOT A MERE AFTER THOUGHT OR A MEANS OF AVOIDING ARREST OR THE ELEMENTS.

Here are some tell-tale signs of correct and incorrect fit above the belt.

### ABOVE THE BELT

Horizontal creases and stress lines tell the same tale – the garment is too tight. Vertical wrinkles or draping mean the opposite. Fabric sits smoothly on well-fitting clothes.

Fastenings should be fast. Buttons must engage the corresponding button holes and neither should stray from their intended position. Zippers are meant to move without protest.

Petite or small individuals are especially advised to avoid clothing that's too large. You'll run the risk of looking waif-like and even cute. It's often better to have some items made to measure rather than simply abbreviate the sleeves or trouser legs of a still-too-large garment.

Correct size is equally critical for the very tall or large. Anything too short or tight has 'shrunk-in-the-wash' or 'outgrown-it' connotations.

Cynics will notice how generous some manufacturers of females clothing are, caressing the ego more than the garment does the body. Buy the garment you put on your back, not the printed size on the tag. Fortunately for men, clothing sizes are more standardized. Still, try before you buy!

## SPECIFIC TIPS FOR A STANDARD SHIRT OR BLOUSE

### COLLARS

Can you insert one finger between your neck and the buttoned collar? If you can insert 3 or 4 more, the collar will probably move. If you can't insert even one, your neck probably can't.

### SHOULDER LINE

The seam where the sleeve joins the body is correctly placed just beyond the outermost edge of your shoulder. If you want to look miserly, tightness around the shoulders and armholes is a good start. The seam that falls too far below the shoulder edge will make you look as if you're wearing a bigger person's shirt.

### WIDTH OF SHIRT

You should be able to pinch aside 2.5cm of fabric on either side of your shirt for comfort.

### SLEEVE LENGTH

Long sleeves on shirts finish just below the wrist bone. With short sleeves, it's a matter of styling. For men, a little over a centimetre of cuff is a conventionally acceptable amount to have visible below the jacket sleeve.

## BELOW THE BELT

Flattering fit below the belt is all about waist fit and being able to move comfortably.

### GETTING WAISTED

The waistband of men's tailored trousers must sit where the actual waist is. Expanding girths have tempted some to wear their trousers like the hipsters they were never intended to be. Unfortunately the trouser crotch is lowered by the same distance with visually unappealing results.

Your pants or skirt, for the ladies, is the correct size if you are easily able to insert two fingers at the waist.

Pleats and pockets are supposed to sit flat when you stand. If they splay open the garment is too tight.

If your belt is the only thing saving you from arrest, avoid the toddler pants look and have your trousers taken in.

### FREEDOM TO MOVE

Be able to sit and stand easily. When purchasing new trousers, check how they feel when you sit down – cross-legged if you're very active.

Ensure you are able to pinch aside at least 2cm of extra fabric either side of the hips. Women especially have to watch out for horizontal creasing across the front of skirts and the upper leg of trousers. Very tight skirts have a tendency to ride up when you sit down. Consider how easily you can get in and out of cars without unintended exposure.



## SUITING UP WHEN REQUIRED



IT'S UNLIKELY YOU WILL WEAR A SUIT WHEN YOU WORK REMOTELY FROM HOME. HOWEVER, DEPENDING ON YOUR JOB THERE CAN STILL BE OCCASIONS WHEN A SUIT IS NECESSARY.

A business meeting with management or clients may require a suit, or maybe when attending formal networking events.

Here are some tips when it's time to suit up.

### WOMEN'S SUITS

Which colours are guaranteed to work in women's business suits? Common business basics like the five below (there are more) are virtually immune to fashion. Context determines the extent to which these are winners

## GREY

Projects neutrality and reliability. Currently, textile mills, designers and retailers are enamoured with grey, a relief for some who regard their business wear as an overhead in their working life.

## NAVY

Conveys conservative authority. It's a good choice for a strict budget but not always favoured by women at the top – one client called it the 'colour of middle management (women)'. Navy downplays gender differences in business wear.

## BLACK

Projects formality and is useful in establishing new professional boundaries. I rarely recommend it for staff review or counselling. Depending on your desired outcome be cautious about short black skirts!

## BEIGE/TAN/STONE

Are the least threatening of business colours. Subject to garment styling, these shades can be boring when unrelieved by a contrasting colour; or can convey a quiet chic (thank or blame Armani!)

## RED

Has the longest wavelength of pure colours and attracts attention – ask packaged goods manufacturers. Wear it when you want to stand out (provided not everyone else is wearing it) AND in the appropriate quantity. Most women successfully limit red to a jacket only. When you want to adopt a low profile, a red suit won't help.

## MORE TIPS

The most unsupportive colours are visibly stamped with expired use-by dates. Unless you have unlimited resources, avoid suits in fad colours. Acid green suffered this fate not so long ago.

## PASTEL

Nursery or gelato shades confer less visual credibility than mid to darker shades. There are exceptions in very hot, especially tropical climates.

## BRIGHTS (EG. EMERALDS AND HOT PINKS)

Brights are memorable, 'good news' colours. They compete with communication that's intended to be serious and respectful – e.g. A TV

journalist in hot pink covering news about a school bus disaster, or a politician in banana yellow delivering a controversial policy.

## MEN'S SUITS



IF YOU ASKED ME TO DRESS A MAN IN CLOTHING THAT WOULD OPEN BUSINESS DOORS, AND HIS TWIN BROTHER IN CLOTHING THAT WOULD HAVE DOORS SLAMMED IN HIS FACE, THE FIRST DISTINCTION I WOULD APPLY IS COLOUR.

### DARKEN UP

In western cultures, the general rule is that dark colours project more authority. Imagine sky blue police uniforms or pale grey barristers gowns – the wearers would lose much of the visual authority they currently enjoy. In male business wear, a dark navy or charcoal suit is a visually foolproof way of projecting seriousness and professionalism. There are other ways but the overlap between sartorial pioneering and tangible success is remarkably slim.

## BEWARE BROWNS AND GREENS

Too many published sources and business people liken brown suits to sartorial suicide or 'career limiting moves'. The tiny, tiny percentage of men who can ignore these comments grace the top echelons of business with deepest of chocolate brown, brown/black painstakingly tailored into exquisite marvels of clothing technology and at heart stopping expense.

## MORE TIPS

The further you deviate from conventional greys and navies, the better the quality has to be. This includes beiges, greens, and teals and, dare I say, brown.

The cooler the climate, the stronger the correlation between dark shades and authority. If very dark fabrics make you look funereal, a mid-blue or grey fabric with a light tie will resurrect you.

## INSIDE OUT



IN NEARLY ALL WORK CONTEXTS, UNDERWEAR IS MEANT TO SERVE ITS PRACTICAL PURPOSES INVISIBLY.

Here are some tips.

### DISCRETION

The visible panty line is a visual problem that afflicts both genders. It's like a visual noise squealing of constriction. X-ray vision might reveal briefs that are undersized or so shrunken that they provide a bondage-like fit.

When slips, bra straps or any other undergarments sneak into view, the wearer appears to be oblivious to what is happening on her body. If it looks deliberate, especially in the workplace, it communicates a confusion of public and private.

Occasionally, in the ever-contracting fashion cycles, underwear has made it to outerwear, e.g. Lace camisoles peeping out of blouses or jackets. Alluring.

When combined with business wear, the mixed messages may be useful, more often NOT!

Note: It's not advisable to have any type of lacy underwear/camisole showing for an interview!

## SUPPORT

Ill-fitting bras are unsupportive of the wearer in more ways than one. In urban western society, a sagging bust line is associated with age or neglect. I'm being honest rather than politically correct.

In the workplace, going braless is totally inappropriate, unless your industry relies on this gender signal for its revenue.

## SINGLETS / TANK TOPS

The white singlet under the business shirt is more indicative of the wearer's market segment than the climate. They generally convey a conservative message.

Often associated with pre-baby boomer generations, singlets form a perfect match with traditional (not the restyled) Y-fronts. Clark Gable is reputed to have caused singlet sales to plummet when he appeared on screen without one.

## FACIAL ATTRACTION



YOU STRENGTHEN THE PERSONAL CONNECTION YOU MAKE WITH OTHERS WHEN YOU DRAW ATTENTION TO YOUR FACE.

Film star features are sometimes helpful but alone, always insufficient.

Here are a few points to ensure that the props you choose support your expression of whom you are.

### ATTENTION

Red has the longest wavelength of pure colour and this attracts the human eye. Hence more lipsticks draw attention to faces. Brightness also attracts the human eye. Flashes of vivid colour in ties draw attention upwards. Jewellery worn close to the face, particularly earrings create visual interest.

Just be careful that something, which initially attracts attention doesn't ultimately upstage you. You want people to remember YOU, not your hairstyle or something inanimate on your person. So, how do you make the distinctive an extension of you?



## RELATIONSHIP

Choose to wear on or near your face, that which has a visual relationship with the structure of your own face. There are two basic facial types. Some faces are composed of straight lines and angular features. Well known examples include David Bowie and Grace Jones. Others are mostly composed of curved lines and rounded features.

When something you wear repeats your own structural lines, it looks as though it 'belongs' on you. Visualise round earrings on Oprah and long pointed ones on Lady Ga Ga. Now image if they swapped.

What if you're in-between? Go by the shape of your jaw. If you're really in the middle, enjoy the choice. The point is, as with most things, in the case of jewellery, less is more.

## HAIRY MESSAGES



HAIR IS ONE OF OUR MOST OBVIOUS AND CONTENTIOUS  
PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS.

Many rational people choose their hairdresser more carefully than their physician while others view any concern with this growth on the skull as indicative of the deficiency of its contents.

Hair still identifies gender, occupation, religion and social class or subculture. It is usually the first of our grooming efforts to respond to personal change.

Following are 4 basic messages of hair. Outside specific contexts such as Mardi Gras or theatrical events, whatever the intention of the person, they generally apply.

## SELF ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE

The better cared for your hair, the more on top of your life you appear. A distinguishing feature of the more dominant or successful members of a group of social animals is the better condition of their fur, feathers – or hair.

## ORDER

The more controlled the hair, the more ordered but less flexible the person will appear. At one extreme is hair that receives little or no intervention from its owner, e.g. unrestrained biblical locks and back-to-nature hair. The other is overkill!

For example, hair scraped into an architectural bun, immovable helmets of lacquer, vestigial strands painstakingly arranged across an expanding bald spot. Somewhere in the middle is a balance appropriate to most business and social situations.

## CALLS FOR ATTENTION

Hair requiring frequent touching – the curl that falls over the eye or the fringe that justifies the continual flick of the head, has been uncharitably called

'Follow Me' hair. Similarly, any arrangement vulnerable to the slightest air conditioning currents is a distraction or an embarrassment waiting to happen.

## UP TO DATE, DATED OR DATELESS

A current cut helps to indicate that the person is in the here and now. Dated hair suggests that a person's thinking is still in that era. Constant chopping and changing of styles communicates instability unless you are a hair stylist.

However, if you wish to indicate changes in your lifestyle, marital status, career or beliefs, changing your hair is an effective visual echo.

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