

Lose the College Interview Look

by Pamela Fay

Although the trend toward casual business attire began in Silicon Valley, it quickly spread to even the most buttoned-down companies. Suits are still required when you are looking for a job, particularly in financial services or the legal profession. But, in today's business environment, formal suits are rarely worn by women. Once you pass that final interview, break up that skirted suit and add them back in your wardrobe as more versatile separates. However, for client meetings and company gatherings, you still want to look your best without appearing stuffy. Spice up your workday wardrobe with trendy yet professional alternatives to create a casual suit look.

Formal Jacket

Forget about trying to use your formal jacket as part of a casual suit. It will look like exactly what it is—a suit jacket that has lost its mate. Instead, pair it with jeans for a day shopping trip to the city. For your casual suit, pair the skirt with a colorful cardigan belted at the waist. Try a bright color like yellow or apple green. For a more subdued look, try a saturated jewel tone like wine or ruby. Or top the skirt with a leather or suede jacket, either in a structured lapel style or something totally sleek and modern like a scuba jacket. If the skirt is fitted, for example a pencil skirt, an unstructured soft lambskin or suede jacket, one that drapes the body, would work, as well. Play with the length. A cropped silhouette or swing style can be very chic. If you opt for a longer jacket, resist the temptation to extend the hem over your hips. It will look dowdy, cut your leg length, and make you appear bottom heavy. Your jacket or sweater should end at the hip unless you are very leggy.

Matronly Skirt

A formal suit skirt without the jacket can look ill-fitted. They are usually too straight to be considered a pencil and too narrow to be considered full. If you are going to recycle suit skirts, make sure they fit you in the waist and hips and that they are hemmed at or above the knee. But, there are many alternatives to suit skirts which will give you a more casual suit look. Nicely tailored trousers work well. Select flat-front pants that skim easily over your thighs and fall straight from the widest part of your hips to your shoe. A seasonless gabardine is tasteful for any work occasion, but casual enough for the look you are trying to achieve. Tailored walking shorts are a nice alternative to pants. Make sure they are moderately cut and wear them over tights. If you prefer to wear a skirt, select a trendy pencil or a pleated number. Avoid pleats at the waist unless you don't mind the added bulk there. For the same reason, avoid fuller skirts; under a jacket or sweater, the extra fabric does not favor most women.

Fussy Bow Blouse

Instead of a blouse, try a fine quality t-shirt or tank top with finished edges. If the edges are not finished, layer on necklaces or scarves to complete the look. If your jacket or cardigan is roomy enough, you can layer a lightweight v-neck over the t-shirt. Allow the t-shirt to peek out from under the hem of the v-neck to add more dimension to the look. This layered look is both a casual and practical one for women in the workplace.

Sensible Shoes

Lose those sensible, black, walk-a-mile pumps. You don't have to wear sky high stilettos, but you can wear trendier footwear. Boots are always a good choice in the winter. Select from equestrian, lace-up, or a more classic dress boot. You can even pair ankle boots with shorts or with skirts if you like. If you prefer flats, try oxfords or classic penny loafers. Don a pair of patterned tights, slip into your shoes, and your casual look is complete.

References

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