

Professional Presence: What to Wear + Modern Manners



Professional presence is about looking prepared, communicating respectfully and being aware of how your choices affect others.

Dress for the Setting

When in doubt, choose polished, clean and comfortable.

- Wear clean, wrinkle-free clothing that fits well and allows you to move comfortably.
- Avoid clothing that is revealing, overly casual, stained or damaged.
- Choose shoes you can walk and stand comfortably in.
- Keep accessories and personal style appropriate for the setting.
- Remove hats, sunglasses and earbuds/headphones when meeting with others.
- Keep your overall appearance neat and well-groomed.
- Make sure nails, hair and makeup are clean and work-ready.
- Avoid chewing gum during interviews, meetings or professional events.

Tip: When you're unsure what to wear, check the organization's dress expectations or choose one level more polished than everyday wear.

Be Mindful of Scent

Strong scents can be distracting or trigger allergies.

- Go light on perfume, cologne and other scented products.
- Use deodorant and maintain good personal hygiene.
- Brush and floss regularly.
- Be mindful of foods, smoking and other things that can affect your breath or clothing before an interview or meeting.

What Are You Carrying?

Keep it simple and professional.

- Choose a bag or backpack that is clean, practical and easy to carry.
- Bring only what you need.
- Consider bringing a portfolio or professional-looking folder.
- Make sure you can easily greet someone or shake hands without juggling your belongings.

Phones: Know When to Put Them Away

Your phone can help you stay connected, but it can also be distracting.

- Silence your phone during interviews, meetings, classes and professional events.
- Avoid texting or scrolling while someone is talking to you.
- Take personal calls somewhere private whenever possible.
- Follow your employer's phone-use rules.
- Protect your privacy and avoid discussing personal or confidential information in public.



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Practice Good Hygiene

Professionalism also means helping maintain a healthy environment.

- Wash your hands regularly.
- Keep tissues and hand sanitizer available.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue.
- Stay home when you're sick when possible and follow workplace policies.

Communicate With Confidence

Professional communication is more than what you say.

- Make appropriate eye contact.
- Greet people professionally: "Good morning," "Nice to meet you," or "How are you?"
- Smile and show that you're engaged.
- Ask questions and listen actively.
- Be aware of your posture, facial expressions and body language.
- Give people your full attention.

Follow Up

A thoughtful thank you can make a lasting impression.

After an interview, meeting or networking conversation:

- Send a brief thank-you email or note.
- Thank the person for their time.
- Mention something specific you discussed.
- Reaffirm your interest when appropriate.

Handle Feedback Professionally

Feedback is part of every workplace.

- Listen without becoming defensive.
- Ask questions if you need clarification.
- Focus on what you can learn or improve.
- Stay respectful, even when feedback is difficult to hear.
- Apply the feedback when appropriate.

Professionalism isn't about being perfect. It's about being prepared, respectful, adaptable and aware of the people around you.



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