



Dressing for Summer

How to stay professional

As the temperature outside rises, PA's are often tasked to help ensure staff within the organisation are dressed appropriately for the summer season. As the workplace becomes increasingly relaxed with regular dress-down days and flatter business structures, many organisations are leaving it to staff to interpret appropriate dress rules for the office.

Summer presents particular problems and the practical issues of staying cool, combined with a more relaxed feel produces more fashion faux-pas than any other season. Whilst other nations seem more at ease with summer dressing, our climate (more temperamental than temperate these days) means we simply don't get enough practice at it!

So what should we be aiming for? As summer brings the same variety of formal and informal occasions as the other seasons, then a varied wardrobe is still required. However, it is acceptable to have a generally more relaxed look in most environments and certainly the colours and fabrics you choose are likely to be more varied.

In an informal atmosphere you should aim to look comfortable and casually smart, modern and appropriate. Your summer wardrobe should show that you retain your respect for your job and your organisation, just as much as your winter wardrobe does. It's tempting to wear holiday clothes on hot days but, if you do, your professionalism will plummet.

Too much flesh on show, bare midriffs or underwear showing – on men or women – is an absolute no-no. Women in the city are often tempted to bare their legs in summer but often inappropriately.

So what about short-sleeved shirts or shorts for men? If your working environment is casual then short sleeves will be fine, and even in some formal workplaces city shirts with short sleeves will be acceptable. If in doubt, look around and see what others do or decide for yourself if you're happy to set a new trend. Above all, leave your Hawaiian beach shirts for the Hawaiian beach!

Shorts – for men and for women – are only for smart casual workplaces and need to be long, clean, structured and worn as part of a co-ordinated look, with a belt. Baggy, combat or beach shorts should be kept for holidays and weekends, never for the office.

If your job requires more formality, you'll still need tailored jackets or suits, but of course the fabrics and colours can be chosen with the season in mind. You simply need to work out what you'll wear underneath! For women, a cool, strappy top will be fine as it will keep you cool and enable you to keep your jacket on. If you are likely to want to take your jacket off, choose wider shoulder straps and more discreet necklines, jackets with short sleeves, a cotton or fine wool twin-set or a tailored shirt-dress.

For men in a job where a city suit is required, choose a lighter weight fabric – the finest wools are cool and breathable. If you can be less formal then a cotton or linen jacket over co-ordinating trousers will work, whilst a pure cotton shirt will keep you cooler than polyester.

Summer requires lighter colours (worn with something dark underneath if you have deep colouring yourself, to balance your own colouring) and lighter, more relaxed fabrics. Cotton and linen, either pure or mixed with other fibres, will keep you cool, as will lightweight wool. Natural fibres breathe and allow air and moisture to flow freely whereas synthetic fibres tend to trap heat and therefore odour, one of summer's biggest challenges for many.

Summer accessories are perhaps one of the major pitfalls. Shoes and bags need to be appropriate and that means structured and neat for more formal looks and casual (but not too casual) for more relaxed looks. Flip-flops, beach shoes and trainers all look wrong in the workplace and large unstructured bags are best kept for holidays, especially brightly coloured or woven types.

So summer in the city isn't really that difficult and should be fun – a time to enjoy the sun and a more relaxed atmosphere. Plan ahead, work out what you need in your wardrobe to fit your role and workplace and to keep you cool. Then when everyone else is quietly steaming, you'll look and feel cool, calm and professional.

Top Tips - Dressing for Summer

- Work out how you can remain cool yet professional. Choose breathable fabrics such as cotton, linen and light-weight wool with small amounts of polyester to help with crease-resistance. Shoes are often a particular problem, especially for women, but the usual rules apply. They should be smart and business-like and should co-ordinate with your outfit. Don't fall into the trap of wearing light coloured, high-heeled strappy sandals with a smart business suit just because it's summer.
- For women, if you need to wear a jacket for meetings, find a cool sleeveless top to go underneath. If you wear light-weight trousers you can get away with not wearing hosiery, which will keep you cooler. Just ensure you choose shoes that look smart, won't rub and that will be comfortable all day. If you're wearing a dress or skirt in a light-weight, flimsy fabric, ensure your underwear won't show through or display any unsightly lumps and bumps.



- For men, check whether short-sleeved shirts are acceptable in your organisation and whether a tie is expected at all times. Ensure you choose 100% cotton or a high percentage of cotton in your shirts to keep you cool. Equally, a silk tie will breathe whereas a polyester one won't.
- Think business-like for colours and styles and keep it simple and smart. For example, in some organisations men are allowed to wear shorts when it is really hot, but these need to be worn with appropriate shoes and neither item should be beachwear.
- When the hot weather comes, however keen you are to downsize your clothes so you look and feel cooler, just stop and think whether the items you are choosing will look cool and professional. If in doubt, leave them out.



What 'Not To Wear'

- Anything that you would wear on the beach, to the gym, to weed the garden, on holiday, for dressing up in the evening or for casual weekend wear should be avoided.
- In particular, avoid showing too much flesh – for males and females! Whatever you expose out of work is up to you, but don't expose it at work! It's distracting or, in some cases, offensive for others and diminishes your credibility and authority.
- For women - strappy beach tops with bra straps showing, exposed midriffs and thongs or flip-flops.
- For men - open-toed sandals are inappropriate business attire and sandals with socks are a definite no-no.



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