

10 Crimes of Work Fashion

By Laura Morsch, CareerBuilder.com

Fair or not, appearance matters in the workplace. Just ask Desiree Goodwin. The Harvard assistant librarian sued the university in 2005, claiming she was rejected for jobs or passed over for promotions 16 times because her supervisors viewed her as just as "pretty girl" who "wore sexy outfits," according to media reports.

When it comes to professional perception, clothes make a difference. According to a survey by Office Team, an administrative staffing firm, 80 percent of workers say a person's work wardrobe affects his or her professional image.

This means that dressing appropriately is a must if you want to be taken seriously at work. But knowing what's acceptable attire isn't easy in today's workplace. Business-casual dress codes vary widely between companies, and even between departments. The following items, however, are almost never acceptable to wear to work:

1. The Crime: Poor-fitting clothing.

Too-tight clothing is never flattering and usually too revealing, but too-baggy clothes make you look sloppy and unprofessional. Pant length also matters -- if you're showing too much sock or leg, expect to be teased all day about an upcoming flood.

Redemption: Find a good tailor. It's a rare person who actually looks good in clothes directly off the rack. Buy an item to fit the fullest parts of your body, and the tailor can nip in the rest.

2. The Crime: Too much perfume or cologne.

You never want your co-workers or clients to smell you before they see you, and a colleague could be severely allergic to your favorite scent.

Redemption: Apply perfume or cologne with an extremely light hand. If you spritz too much, put some rubbing alcohol on a cotton ball and dab off the excess.

3. The Crime: Shorts or too-short skirts.

Showing too much leg is never a good professional move -- for women or men. Revealing a little leg makes men appear overly casual or sloppy, and makes women look more sexy than serious.

Redemption: Men should stick with long pants, and women should wear skirts that hit within an inch-and-a-half of the knee.

4. The Crime: Out-of-control hair.

Whether it's frizzy coifs or bushy beards, wild hair just doesn't look professional.

Redemption: Women and men should invest in a good haircut and some styling products that can reduce poufiness and make hair easier to manage. Men should keep their facial hair well-trimmed, or better yet, go clean-shaven.

5. The Crime: Dirty, ripped or torn jeans.

Even on casual Fridays, ripped jeans look too dirty and messy for the workplace.

Redemption: When you do choose to wear jeans to work, make sure they are well-fitting and in extremely good condition.

6. The Crime: Cleavage

There are very few legitimate jobs where showing off your chest, belly or rear-end cleavage is a good career move. Remember, your best or fanciest dress isn't necessarily appropriate for work.

Redemption: Cover up. Whenever possible, avoid wearing anything low-cut or low slung to the office. If you can't part with your V-neck shirts, simply buy a few camisole shirts to wear underneath them. And bare middles or plumber butts? JUST SAY NO! Do a bend-over test to be sure exactly how you look in your clothes as you move and sit.

7. The Crime: Tank tops.

Showing too much skin in the office is never a good idea in the office, and tank tops are especially inappropriate for men. Be sure your midsection is fully covered too!

Redemption: If it's hot outside and you're going out with friends after work, simply keep a cardigan or jacket at your desk to cover up. That way, you'll stay comfortable in frigid air conditioning and look professional when your boss stops by.

8. The Crime: Noisy jewelry and Body Art.

An armload of bangles or long, dangling earrings are perfect choices for a bar, but downright distracting in the office. Don't pierce anything that makes other people cringe. . And tattoos – think very carefully about the message you are sending.

Redemption: Keep your office jewelry simple. A small pendant, stud earrings and a delicate bracelet look much more professional than trendy pieces. Save your flashier jewelry for happy hour. Save the eyebrow, nose and belly rings for off-hours. Cover the tattoos.

9. The Crime: Gym attire.

Even in the most casual workplaces, flip flops, yoga pants, shorts, T-shirts and running shoes make you look sloppy and apathetic.

Redemption: If you're going to the gym or catching a flight after work, change into your comfortable clothes in the bathroom on the way out.

10. The Crime: Extremely high heels.

Extremely high heels are too sexy for the workplace -- not to mention impractical. Few things would be more embarrassing than wobbling or tripping over your extreme footwear in front of the boss.

Redemption: The highest heels you should wear to the office are 2 inches. That way, you'll actually be able to walk in them, and they'll be comfortable enough to wear all day. You might feel shorter, but you'll no longer fear grates or sidewalk cracks or sprained ankles.

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