

Corporette's Guide to Basic Women's Suiting

*It can be tricky for women to find a great [interview suit](#) — but our shopping guide for women's suits will help you get started. We update the text of this page often; in the meantime **please add your own comments about women's suiting on this page**. Please keep all comments on this page strictly on topic. **Last updated: December 2016.***



Interview Suits for Women: A General Note

If you are interviewing for a conservative job (law, investment banking, consulting, etc.), the whole point is that the interviewer is interested in your brain — not your fashion sense. Your resume and your words should speak louder than your clothes, and to that end, the entire goal of the interview outfit should be to make sure that it doesn't distract the interviewer. Show personality through your words, not your clothes.

(Pictured at top: [Blazer](#) / [Blouse](#) / [Skirt](#) / [Watch](#) / [Pearls](#) / [Earrings](#) / [Pantyhose](#) / [Heels](#) / [Tote](#) — see more specific thoughts on which suits are best for women, below.)

The Best Color Suit for Interviews

What color suit should you get? Most people will tell you that young professional women should buy a [navy suit](#) or a [dark charcoal suit](#), if only because both colors are less severe than black. Personally, I think a black suit is fine as well — and if you're on a budget, it's easier to break the suit into separates once you're working. (In fact, black suits are so popular right now that one reader even wondered if she could “get away” with a [gray suit for interviews!](#)) Please do not try to [match different black fabrics](#) to “make” a suit, though. If you're only buying one or two suits, do your best to avoid pinstripes — they tend to be more memorable, harder to accessorize, and the pieces tend to be harder to wear as separates. (If you do end up buying one, though, check out our tips on [how to wear a pinstriped suit](#) and [how to mix a dark blue pinstriped blazer with black](#).) Eventually you may want to [expand your suit collection](#) with non-traditional suit colors.

What Women Should Wear Beneath Suit Blazers

What to wear beneath the suit? From a practical perspective, sleeves are good things — even if the sleeved item is a short-sleeved silk sweater rather than a camisole or “shell.” This will help you extend the number of wears before you have to dry clean it (and you shouldn’t have to [dry clean your suit](#) that often). Otherwise, for an interview you want something that isn’t too fussy — a white, blue or pink button-down can be great, provided there is no gaping. (Check out our [Guide to the Best Tops under Suits](#).) A short-sleeved silk sweater can be great (like those made by [August Silk](#); you can also occasionally find them at [Banana Republic](#), [Talbots](#), and [Ann Taylor](#)), or even a silk jersey t-shirt can be fine provided that it looks like new and is opaque enough.

While prints are acceptable, the safest way to play it safe is to go with a solid color that flatters your skin tone. (A white blouse with a black suit is fine, but it sometimes has just a hint of “I might be a waiter — or a hired killer” look about it with women, so be warned.) Some people think a square neck is the best look of all with suits; others prefer to wear blouses beneath their suits. In terms of [what colors to wear with your suit](#), for an interview it’s probably best to stick with solid classics (white, black, or pastels like blue, pink, or lavender).

How to Choose Shoes & Bags For Your Suit

What accessories (shoes and bags) should I wear? Note that [you can wear black leather with navy](#) (as well as cordovan, a [reddish burgundy](#) that can be difficult to find in women’s shoes). In the men’s world, brown is often thought to “dress down” a navy suit. Our [Guide to Comfortable Heels](#) may be helpful to you, as well as our most recent roundup of [comfortable black pumps](#), and the readers’ comments there — ultimately you should be looking for a closed-toe pump that you can walk in for at least a few blocks, in case your interview includes lunch at a local restaurant. In terms of [what bag to carry to an interview](#) — I always like to carry a bag that is big enough to hold a folder with copies of my resume in it. (I empty the usual contents of [my purse](#) into the tote bag and just carry the one bag.) The bag doesn’t have to be leather — a nylon one is lighter, in fact — but it should be as nondescript as possible. If you’re curious for specific brand recommendations, check out our roundups of [professional tote bags](#). In general, note that T.J.Maxx and the like can be great spots to find a simple black tote bag. **As for jewelry** — think conservative here. Your earrings should be posts, or at the very least things that don’t swish about if you nod your head. (See above re: distractions.) You should wear a [watch](#) (yes, even if you use your cellphone to check the time — watches signify reliability to the interviewer). I’m always a fan of [a simple, high-quality pearl necklace](#); a larger statement necklace would also work provided that it fits with the rest of the outfit. Avoid wearing bracelets that will make noise if you shake hands.

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GUIDE TO INTERVIEW SUITS

Blazer: Buy a dark suit (black, navy, or charcoal) with matching separates. Don't forget to rip any vent in the back of your blazer sewn closed with an X.



Top: You can save on dry cleaning expenses by wearing a sleeved top beneath your blazer – look for something that fits well and has no issues with gaping or cleavage. Options: button-fronts; thin, opaque sweaters; “nice” t-shirts; matching sheath dresses.



Skirt/Pants: Skirts should be at your knees or (at most) 1” above them. Make sure any slits don't go too high, including while seated. Don't forget to rip any vents sewn closed with an X. For pants, look for trousers, not ankle-length pants.



Watch: Wear a watch, even if you use your phone to check the time – a watch says you're responsible.



Pantyhose: Unless you're wearing pants, look for nude-for-you pantyhose. Tights may be acceptable in colder weather.



Heels/Flats: Wear shoes you can walk in comfortably for at least two blocks. Make sure they're shined and free of scuffs!



Jewelry: Think classic, not interesting. Small posts or huggie earrings work best. A round-shaped necklace or classic string of pearls can be a great look with a number of different tops.

Bag: Your bag should be large enough to hold a folder for your resume. You may also want to include light makeup, a pair of flats, and a snack bar if you've got back-to-back interviews.

OK: On to the suit itself.

Skirt Suit v. Pantsuit

Skirt or pantsuit? Traditionally, the most conservative answer here was a skirt suit — times are fortunately changing and in all but the most conservative of places a pantsuit is usually fine. (If you're interviewing in the South, for certain judges, or with senior partners over age 75 or so, you still may want to play it safe and go with a skirt suit.) There are still pros to the skirt suit anyway, though: if you're looking to buy something classic, the pencil skirt has been in for eons, while suiting pants have gone through a number of trendy iterations — plus, they really should be hemmed for either heels or flats, which limits your shoe choices more than a skirt does. Another pro: If you're buying a suit on a budget, it can also be far easier to find a skirt that looks good by itself and can be worn as a separate in your wardrobe. The major con: a skirt suit generally does mean [pantyhose](#), although tights may be acceptable in colder weather. [Avoid a miniskirt](#) at all costs, and be careful of vents in the skirt — what seems like an acceptable side-slit may reach mid-thigh once you're sitting down. (Always, always, always do an [interview mirror check](#): pull your chair to the front of a full-length mirror and sit down in front of it, to assess your interview outfit.) You may also want to check out our [poll on proper hem lengths](#) for skirts — it seems like *just* above your knee is a good length. Please back away from the [shorts suit](#). If you're only buying one suit I'd avoid the [short-sleeved suit](#) as well.

Skirt Suits & Pantyhose

Do I really have to wear pantyhose? In the past, readers have frowned on wearing [tights for interviews](#) — and bare legs are certainly not advisable. [Nude-for-you hose](#) is the most popular for interviews — check out our advice on [how to wear pantyhose](#) if you're having problems such as runs. For non-interview days, tights are fine — we've talked about the [best opaque tights](#), [how to launder your tights](#), and [what color tights to wear with a navy suit](#).

Suit Separates or a Suiting Set?

Separates or a set? A number of suits are sold as a set, with one price (and one size) for both the jacket and the bottom. In general, suiting separates are better — you can buy multiple pieces, and in the size you need for each part. For example, there may be both a matching skirt and a pant, or sometimes even multiple jackets in different cuts. Just make sure you [dry clean all of the pieces together](#) so they wear the same.

Before You Wear Your Suit

Before you wear your suit... at the very least, be sure to [open any vents that are sewn shut](#) with an X (particularly on the back of the jacket or on the back of the skirt). Pockets may also be sewn shut, but you don't *have* to open these — a lot of times items seem to lay better if the pockets are closed (I rip open one blazer pocket so I have a place to stick business cards, but almost always leave pants pockets shut). [Tailoring your suit](#) can make a big difference (and may

be necessary if you're petite). We've talked about the [most common tailoring alterations](#) that women get, as well as specific topics such as how to tailor a [plus-sized blazer](#). Your [blazer doesn't need to button](#), at least not absolutely, but it should be close. [Buy a suit that fits you](#) — don't obsess over the size — and wear it with confidence.

Maintaining your suit: As noted above, you [shouldn't have to dry clean your suit very often](#), and you should dry clean all of the pieces together so they wear evenly. In the rare event that your [suit rips](#) after just a few wears, your first line of defense should be to call the company; after that try taking it to a tailor. When your suit starts to look shiny (or [dry cleaning doesn't take the smell away](#)), it's time to get a new suit.

Which suiting brands are best? [Suit quality differs from brand to brand](#), but in addition to quality it can be a matter of finding [which suits fit your shape](#). For example, Theory suits are loved by women with a straight figure — but they can be problematic for curvier women, who tend to prefer Ann Taylor or Tahari lines. Meanwhile, [petite women's suiting](#), [tall women's suiting](#), and [plus-sized workwear](#) and [blazers](#) all have their own challenges. Roughly, here are the different tiers:

Lowest price (under \$150 for a suit): Some of the stores you frequented as a teenager do have a surprising number of lower-priced suiting options, such as [The Limited](#) and [Express](#) — but while they may be more affordable, the quality may be lesser (and the cuts a bit more sexy) than the sometimes frumpier brands you can find at a sales rack at Smart Bargains or Overstock.com (or their brick-and-mortar equivalents, like [T.J.Maxx](#)), such as Kasper or Le Suit. [Macy's](#) has a great selection of suiting separates and sets that are made for Macy's by designers — their “Everyday Value” or “EDV” line includes AK Anne Klein, Calvin Klein, and Tahari by ASL; Nordstrom also sells those lines, as well as offers suits from their in-house brand, [Halogen](#) (and more expensive suits as well). [Chadwicks](#) can also be a source of inexpensive suits if you're really in a bind. Great deals can also be had at some of the brands' websites themselves. Here's our more recent discussion on [the best inexpensive women's suits](#).

Mid-level (\$200-\$400 for a suit): Many readers will swear that the quality has changed/is changing on these lines, but for the moment, I consider all of these brands to be the staple of many working women's wardrobes: [Ann Taylor](#), [Banana Republic](#), and [J.Crew](#). [Brooks Brothers](#) cuts can be a bit boxier, but they're also a great source for mid-level suits; [Talbots](#) has also recently started making less boxy cuts for suits.

Expensive: Theory suits are considered the gold standard by many (and sold at [Nordstrom](#), [Saks](#), and [Bloomingdale's](#)). [Hugo Boss](#) also has lovely suits (particularly the [Boss Black](#) line, also available at Saks); as well as the [Classiques Entier](#) line at [Nordstrom](#).

There are obviously other suiting brands out there, many of which I would put in the “power suit with personality” category, including everything from Rebecca Taylor and Nanette Lepore to Armani, St. John's, Chanel, and Akris Punto — this is the kind of thing that we tend to explore with our regular Wednesday feature, [Suit of the Week](#).

Readers, which are your favorite brands for suits? What do you look for when you're getting a suit tailored, or when you're trying to decide between two suits?

Also, please don't forget to check out other [Corporette shopping guides!](#)