

Fashion Rules!

It's oh so easy to play by the rules at work. Here are ten to live by...

No. 1

Always keep a dress shirt at the office. You never know when you're going to get caught in the rain or sweat on an unexpected walk in the heat of summer, or after an overnight stint in the airport and delayed flights, be faced with the dilemma of going home to change and risk missing the meeting or showing up in a rumpled shirt. A white dress shirt is best, as it should go with anything you may be wearing on the day you need it most. A spare tie will come in handy one day too.

No. 2

Even though athletes, rock stars, and rising film actors may show you otherwise, stick with the traditional two or three-button suits. Never button more than one button on a jacket, though do button when you'll be standing for a more than a few minutes or walking. It makes you look serious, and it takes twenty pounds off your silhouette.

No. 3

Show some cuff. That means never let your suit sleeves reach beyond your shirt sleeves. Experts disagree by how much. It can vary by the length of your sleeve and the cut of the jacket. But somewhere between one-quarter and one inch of shirt fabric should show. That sliver of fabric provides a much-needed contrast to the uniformity of the suit fabric. It shows you pay attention to the details. You know what you want and know how to get it, or at least know how to take good advice from the smart people.

No. 4

Go casual with grace. Nobody likes a guy who wears a suit to casual work events. There's a line between being bossily stylish and being uptight. Show some leadership and be one of the gang on occasion. It will be all the more memorable for its rarity, like your Karaoke rendition of "Mama Mia." Loosen up and pair some wool or cotton trousers with a sport coat, a sweater, or both, and lose the tie.

No. 5

Certain articles of casual clothing may rise to the occasion, taking on a higher level of style that allows you make do in an emergency or conform to a group of people. For example, you can dress up polo shirts, khaki shorts, blue jeans, white sneakers, and, for Texans, cowboy hats and boots. On the other hand, there are also articles that you can never dress up: sports jerseys, track pants, white tank-tops T-shirts, Birkenstocks, and flip-flops.

No. 6

If you're going to wear jeans to the office, make sure they're a dark wash, rip- and tear-free, and paired with a blazer and a beautifully tailored dress shirt. Metal studs, ornately stitched back pockets, and holes are often frowned upon.

No. 7

The only thing that belongs on the back of your chair is your back. Jackets should hang on a hanger. Keep a wooden hanger on the hook on the back of your office door or hanging from the wall of your cubicle. If the company doesn't provide a coat hook, buy one yourself. It's just that important.

No. 8

You can't go wrong with the traditional white dress shirt. However, it won't kill you to mix things up every once in a while. Pinstripe shirts are good. Windowpanes work well too.

No. 9

Chalk stripe suits say "heavy hitter" like few other clothing choices. Chalk is not the same as pinstripe; it has broader vertical lines woven into flannel with the soft, dusty look of tailor's chalk. Watch for it on a host of commentators during election season.

No. 10

Looking for your own personal style? Relax. Know yourself and know what you like. That will be your signature.