

oddity of dress. Just like a sloppily dressed employee would stick out like a sore thumb, an overdressed employee would also seem out of place. In the office, I go to focus on work (most of us) and our dress should not be a distraction; neither for us nor for others. Women instinctively dress up to attract attention and therefore, the number of sloppily dressed women is significantly lower than sloppily dressed men. But women need to understand that by looking out of the ordinary they may be causing undesirable ruffle in the ranks. This does not mean that women have to dress like plain Jane; just that elegance should be chosen over flamboyance.

Before diving into the nitty-gritty I'd say that it'd be more pertinent to understand the spirit of office dressing rather than learning the acceptable dresses by rote. Once you know 'why' to wear a certain outfit, the question of 'what should I wear?' will evaporate. Or at least become answerable.

Formal Business wear

It is imperative to understand that the corporate formal and informal are somewhat different in India than the strict definition of formal and informal dressing in social context in USA, UK and Europe. The inbreeding of various couture has led to certain acceptable practices which I'll attempt to elaborate below.

Let's start by an understanding of the formal business wear because it is the most stringent form of dressing allowing little flexibility; and hence its importance. Once you know what's formal, it'll be easier to understand informal and casual dressing, too.

Composition of a formal business suit

Starting bottoms up, you'd need to be in formal shoes, socks, a formal pant with belt, a formal shirt, a necktie, and a dinner jacket. Overcoats are worn only in very cold parts and an occasional scarf or muffler can be worn over the shoulder in social formal settings. All parts of this dress must be worn as per the relevant instructions in their relevant section. Hats are not worn in India.

Add-ons/ accoutrements: You may additionally wear cummerbund in social situations, cuff links or collar studs, and perhaps suspenders or braces, too. But a business suit without them is formal, too.



Footwear

The variety of shoes that are available in the market these days is nobody's business.

For a specific wear which only variety shoestrings



And yet, each shoe has been designed for a specific purpose. A smart man knows when to wear one. For formal corporate dressing, the acceptable is a leather shoe with laces.

To elaborate, there are varieties known as Oxford pattern or Brogue pattern and these are the most acceptable. The shoe is of ordinary leather (neither

suede nor patent**) and has 3-5 holes on each side to allow stringing the laces.

It is almost always either black (evergreen trend) or dark brown (old fashioned), though some variety in brown, like camel shade, is trendy and acceptable. It must not be a slip-on shoe, nor have Velcro to tie it. It should never cover your ankles. Please remember that brown or light brown shoes are worn with matching colored suits/trousers but black can be worn on anything except brown suit/trouser. The laces should be tied traditionally in a butterfly loop and not wound around the ankle.



While choosing a shoe to wear, it would be better if you know what type of ground / floor you will be expected to walk on. Leather soled shoes make a lot of tapping noise on certain floors (like marble) and a PVC/ soft sole would perhaps be better there. Having elaborated what can be worn it would be pertinent to stress that formal dressing does not provide leeway for any other type of shoes.

Coming to socks, I would like to point out that traditionally, the socks should be of the same color as that of the shoe; White socks with black shoes have been popularized by Americans and are now considered acceptable. The socks should be of a single solid colour and have no design or stripes at all. They should be long enough to cover the lower half of your shin and firm enough in elasticity not to slide down your shin just in case you need to run or jive a little bit. When you sit down and your trouser's lower end gets raised a little, the socks should be high enough not to let any skin be visible. Never wear torn socks.

*** Patent leather may be popular in west with a 'black tie' but not in India.*

Pants

Pants or trousers should be chosen with great care. This is one garment where the fitting is more important than its color, pattern and texture.

Test your trouser: A badly fitting trouser will tend to rise from the foot end when you sit, revealing your socks or even the shin's skin. A good one will not reveal anything more than your ankle, if at all. The behind of a badly fitted trouser tends to get caught in the crack of the butt making it unsightly from rear. And lastly, a badly fitting trouser wouldn't allow you to haunch/squat on your knees comfortably.



If your trouser has passed these three tests, let's move ahead to other fitting and wearing pattern points. The front of your formal trouser must have a zip for a fly and not buttons. The buttons tend to let the inter-button space open up when you sit revealing the innards. It should be adequately loose not to make your genitals appear like a perceptible lump in the loin area. If the trouser is tight, avoid wearing v-shaped underwear which bunches up the genitals. Lastly, the trouser should be worn roughly midway between your navel and the pubis.

Texture & fabric: Ideally, the fabric would be same as that of the dinner jacket, worsted being most popular. But worsted is warm and therefore not always suitable in India. Whichever fabric you choose, it should be of plain, dull finish, no self design and may have a matte finish if dinner jacket is the same.

Colour: Formal pants are usually black, dark brown, navy blue or steel grey. Other shades can be chosen if they do not look flashy but you will never go wrong with the ones mentioned here. Of course, you must remember the kind of shoes, belt, shirt, tie and dinner jacket you have to wear while choosing this colour.

Formation: Trousers must be simple with one to two pleats on each side of the fly, two front pockets with a vertical cut and a single rear pocket, (non-patch) variety over right hip. The foot end should preferably taper towards the bottom (regular cut or natural taper); these days parallels are being worn and they tend to be casual pants and not formal. A multi pocket pant, broad belt-loop pant, a pant with an inbuilt cloth/elastic belt and pants with patch pockets are not considered formal.

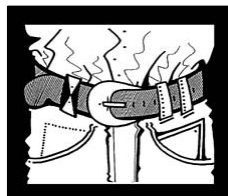
Folding of foot end: A single fold of foot end less than three finger breadth is acceptable, though not desirable. Prefer the one that is stitched in that formation rather than a manually folded one.

The crease: A formal pant is ironed laterally (and not antero-posteriorly). As a result the crease of the legs of the trouser should be in front and back. Apart from this, the point to note is that if your trouser is ironed improperly, there tends to be a doubling of the crease. This is unacceptable. The crease should be single throughout the length and razor sharp.

The Belt: Belt is perhaps the most ignored part of male dressing. Some experts considered it the curse of modern dressing and denounced its use with a tuxedo cummerbunds but in present must be worn.

A formal belt leather and colour, preferably of your shoes. than 2.5 inches

Ideally, it should fit snugly in the belt-loops of your formal trouser. (I risk this statement knowing well that no tailor worth his salt would stitch a formal trouser whose belt-loops can accommodate a rock-star belt). A very narrow belt is unmove up or down. has the same width buckle is perhaps the which determines or not. The buckle trusive and prefera-



or black-tie where were given preference day business suit, a belt

should be made of black or dark brown in bly matching the shade Its width should be less but this is controversial.

Slightly and tends to So try to find a belt that as your belt loops. The most important part whether a belt is formal should be simple, unobly of the same width as