

PERSONAL BRANDING

Keeping Cool on the Job Hunt

Temperatures are high; keep your anxiety low on interviews by dressing right and looking good.

By Nina Myers

YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY to a job interview. You're running late; you're stuck in traffic; and when you finally step out of the car, it's so hot you can feel the heat radiating off the pavement. You arrive feeling sweaty and unpolished, and you wind up *looking* sweaty and unpolished.

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Hot Times on the Job Hunt

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com

Summer in New York is a great season, and I had an unprecedented opportunity to explore it when I was between jobs from May to September.

Between my severance package and a variety of consulting jobs, I had the luxury of taking some time to assess my options. In the meantime, interviews, networking opportunities and client meetings gave me a wonderful

chance to traverse the city — something I'd never really done since relocating here for work in 2001.

My one regret: I wish I'd had this fashion package by Nina Myers to help me balance the need to dress for success with the realities of summer weather. The job hunt can get awfully hot and sweaty when summer arrives; keeping your cool in front of

folks who can decide your next career move is hard enough without having to worry about your sweaty shirt or wilting hairdo.

Use these practical, economical tips (and the photo gallery by Nina and photographer Karl Rozemeyer) to look good for any networking occasion. And please **write me** with tales of your summertime job search! ■

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What did you think of this package? Got a story of your own to tell? Have ideas for future coverage? Please write Editor-in-Chief Matthew Rothenberg at matthewr@theladders.com.

► KEEPING COOL

But it doesn't have to be this way, even on the hottest summer day. You probably already own everything you need; it's just a matter of equipping yourself with the right tools and walking into your interview with confidence.

In transit

Take off one article of clothing in transit. It will keep perspiration to a minimum and prevent you from appearing overheated. You'll also feel more comfortable and confident when you walk into the interview.

- *For men:*

Remove your jacket, but make sure you put it back on when you enter the building where you're interviewing. You don't want to risk running into a potential employer nearby looking anything but completely pulled together.

- *For women:*

If you're wearing heels, replace them with a pair of comfortable flats. Tired feet can lead to poor pos-

ture. Find a coffee shop or a park nearby where you can sit down and put on your heels before entering the building.

Take a breather, cool off

When the temperatures are high, allow yourself at least 15 minutes' cool-down time before every important event. Take a few moments to gather yourself in the lobby bathroom or at a restaurant across the street. You've already thought about what you're going to say, so devote this time to think about how you're going to look.

- *For men:*

Splash your face with cold water; fix your hair; check your fingernails for dirt; and make sure there's nothing caught in your teeth (smile).

Always keep a handkerchief in your back pocket so you can wipe your face if it begins to sweat on the elevator ride up to the interview.

- *For women:*

If your hair is pulled back, check for stray pieces; if it's down, comb it and, if necessary, apply a frizz-control product. Check to make sure your makeup is still intact.

Streamline your undergarments

Choose undergarments that will help you keep cool and not add to the heat.

- *For men:*

Don't wear an undershirt. It's an unnecessary layer that will turn up the heat when you need to stay cool. Your jacket will hide sweat stains anyway.

- *For women:*

Look for breathable underwear with a nylon/spandex blend which helps wick away moisture. This isn't sexy underwear. It's practical underwear.



Summer Networking Style: It's in the Details

Interviewing and networking in the summer requires a wardrobe that keeps you cool but professional. Dress down, not sloppy.

WHEN YOU'RE SHAKING HANDS and exchanging business cards this summer, the most important thing to remember is that there's a fine line between standing out and overdoing it. From the boardroom to a barbecue, your personal style should shine through in the details without overwhelming your entire wardrobe or showing up your interviewer or colleagues.

It's also important to stay cool and look cool. So keep the clothing light and to a minimum; let the accents carry the day. Whether it's a pair of cufflinks, a handsome briefcase, a beautiful scarf or the perfect pair of sunglasses, you will stand out because you nailed classic style with a modern twist.

Use this guide to stay classic and cool in every scenario of the job search from networking to the interview.

1. A formal interview

The good news is there's not much wiggle room when it comes to wardrobe for the formal interview. A suit is critical. Think about dressing 5 percent to 10 percent more formal than you would before your first day at a new job. You want to look classic, not trendy. You want the focus to be on your job performance, not your wardrobe.

- For men:*

Look for a two- or three-button wool suit in gray or navy. Do not wear black. A black suit looks like you're attend-

Wear lightweight, unlined fabrics.

Choose fabrics that not only keep you cool but keep their shapes and appearances under the heat.

- *For men:*

You should invest in an unlined wool suit for days when you have to dress up. It makes a jacket feel as light as wearing a second dress shirt.

- *For women:*

Moisture and heat are the perfect storm for fabrics like cotton, linen and silk. Look for separates with a touch of Lycra. Even if it's only 3 percent Lycra, it should keep the wrinkles at bay.

Be careful with scents

You must be conservative with perfume and cologne: Too much and you risk turning off your interviewer or, worse, offending his allergies. Allergic reactions to certain perfumes and colognes are more common than you'd think.

- *For men:*

Replace cologne with after-shave, which has a much milder scent that disappears quickly. Before any big interview, enlist a significant other or friend to do a scent test: You shouldn't be able to smell product of any kind — from hair gel to after-shave — from more than an arm's length away. If you can, it's too strong.

- *For women:*

It's OK to dab a small amount of perfume on your wrists or neck, but only if it's hours earlier. A refresher right before you walk in the door may overpower your interviewer's olfactory senses.

Tame the mane

In the summer, it's not enough to make sure your hair is neat, clean and professional; make sure your hair isn't making you melt or highlighting your fevered appearance.

- *For men:*

Shave. And get your hair cut several days before an interview. Any

less and you risk looking boyish and unserious.

Unless you work in a laid-back, creative field where personal style is applauded, don't grow out your hair. To your counterparts and superiors, you risk looking disrespectful and rebellious. At the very least, wait until you land the job before you begin growing it out again.

- *For women:*

Keep your hair off your face, if it's long. Keep your hair off your face, if it's short. Generally, keep your hair off your face. A low **chignon** looks smart and sophisticated.

Brush up and avoid chewing gum

Make sure your breath is fresh.

- *For men and women:*

Brush your teeth. If you don't have a toothbrush handy, buy a pack of breath strips, which are perfect because they dissolve immediately.

Never chew gum; you risk forgetting to take it out before the interview. ■

ing a funeral or driving a hearse. Wear a solid-white, light-gray or light-blue shirt, but keep in mind that white looks good against all complexions and makes your skin pop the most. Make sure half an inch of your cuff is visible. If it's not, your suit sleeves are too long. Your trousers should break slightly at the hem.

If you already own a suit but you're not sure about the fit, invest in a good tailor. He will be able to tell if your suit needs to be reworked or replaced. Never underestimate the importance of a properly fitted suit. The fit of the suit is everything. A slouchy suit looks sloppy.

Wear a silk tie: something solid, especially blue or yellow. Save red for your first day of work.

Carry a proper brown or black structured leather briefcase with handles. No backpacks. No messenger bags. No duffel bags. No bags on wheels. Ever.

- *For women:*

Keep it light in both fabric and color, but don't wear a white dress or suit. White is the least serious color and

looks too casual. The lightest you should go is cream. If the position is less corporate, you may want to try mixing separates, like a solid sleeveless dress with a tailored jacket in a brighter color or pattern. Look for a slim-notch lapel to keep it modern.

Don't be afraid to toss the suit and wear a sharp dress with a jacket. The benefit to wearing a sleeveless dress is that you can remove your jacket until right before your interview, so you'll stay cooler. To create shape, cinch a skinny or chunky black belt around the jacket.

A more classic skirt or pants suit paired with a pretty printed silk blouse is also a lovely combination.

Avoid statement jewelry; simple hoop earrings or pearls are perfect.

Avoid "It" bags for interviews, especially if they're made of exotic skin or covered in hardware. Your bag should be big enough to hold all the necessities. Try an elegant leather tote in a solid classic color like tan or black.

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Street Gallery

Fashion writer Nina Myers and photographer Karl Rozemeyer took to the streets of New York to find real professionals with a sense of summer style.



The Perfect Suit

What makes this three-button, notch-lapel suit perfect for summer? It's super lightweight, wool and it fits him beautifully. Bonus points for buttoning it properly (middle button is secured); half-an-inch of shirt cuff showing; and his brown leather belt is a subtly beautiful detail. Well done!

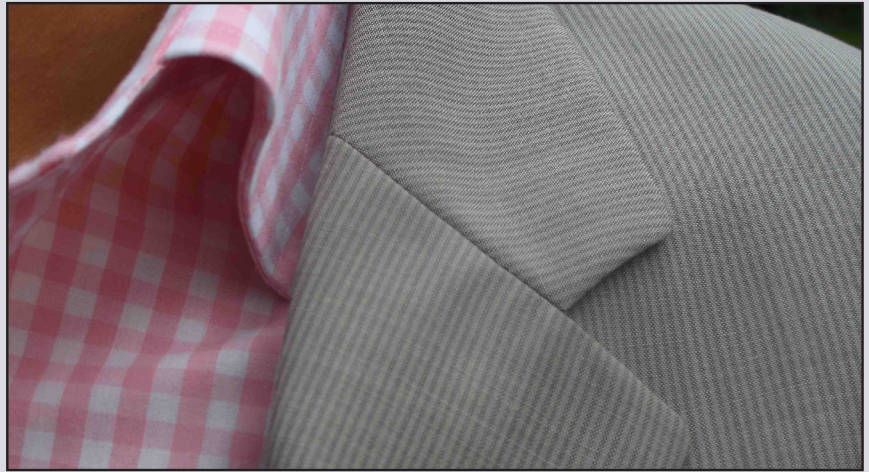


Networking Style Defined

This belted navy dress looks almost as structured as a suit. Her shoes, while pointy, have a very low heel, so they are nearly as comfortable as flats. Her chic, chain-link purse is small and easy to carry around a convention center, but large enough to hold business cards and a wallet. Her hair is pulled off her face so you can see her classic pearl earrings. She looks cool and confident.

The Ultimate Day-to-Evening Look

This woman's dress fits her perfectly, and the belt gives her a lovely shape. Her ruffled neckline is trendy but not overdone; it adds a point of interest, as do her sparkly chandelier earrings. Her sensible but glamorous gold metallic flats could easily transition from day to night, as could her black-and-white patterned bag, which is large enough to carry a pair of heels if she decides to change. Her makeup is minimal, and her hair is frizz-free and slightly pulled off her face so that her natural beauty shines through.



A Look for Every Occasion

This outfit is appropriate for many different events because each element is perfectly tailored, elegant and full of texture. The cotton jacket has a tonal pinstripe, and his silk pocket square (while colorful) is not distracting but adds a touch of personal flair. He could be on his way to a job fair or drinks with colleagues. If he replaces his shoes with tennis sneakers and throws on a polo shirt, he could just as easily be headed to a baseball game.

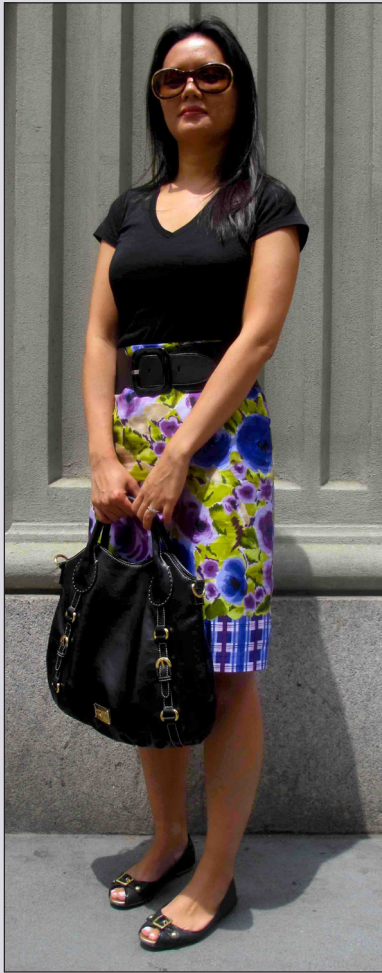
Two Summer Wardrobe Essentials: Perfect Khakis, Perfect Dress Shoes

What makes them so perfect? The khakis would look just as good dressed down with tennis sneakers or sandals, and the shoes would look equally great with a navy suit or blue jeans. Bottom line: You get your money's worth. Note the way the khakis break at the bottom? This is how every pair of trousers should fit.



How to Look Cool

This man's secret weapon is his two-button wool suit with a touch of linen. The linen keeps him extra cool but doesn't wrinkle. His crisp white shirt pairs perfectly with his light-blue silk tie. Spectacles are another nice detail, but only if you need them. Grooming note: His face is clean-shaven, and his hair is short. He looks approachable, sharp and professional.



Details, Details, Details

This woman's accessories are fantastic for so many different scenarios this summer. Closed-toe shoes would work better in an interview, but otherwise, these are all winners. She beats the heat by taking off her outer layer; but once she's back in the office, she puts on her tailored jacket or cardigan and immediately looks ultra professional. And the length of her skirt is perfect — it's neither too short nor too long.

She could replace the shoes with a pair of leather sandals or flip-flops, the bag for a canvas tote, and pair her lightweight, colorful skirt with a cream-colored tank top or T-shirt and be barbecue- or baseball-ready.



Get Noticed

Never underestimate the power of a beautiful watch. This vintage Rolex is chunky enough and has a large enough face that it stands out, but thin enough that his jacket cuff slides easily over it. Of course, it doesn't have to be a Rolex. Any watch with a stainless-steel or brown or black leather bracelet will do. If you're wearing a suit, make sure it isn't too sporty and fits the above requirements. ■

► DETAILS

2. A job fair

You'll want to dress similarly to your interview attire, but with a bit more personality to avoid getting lost in the crowd.

For men:

Since a future employer can see you from every angle, focus on the extra details. If you're wearing a suit, lose the tie in favor of a crisp white pocket square. If you know no one else will be wearing a suit, wear a pair of dark denim jeans or tan chinos with a tucked-in dress shirt (light pink softens your face under those harsh fluorescent lights) and a sport coat with some texture — pinstripe, windowpane, houndstooth or herringbone. Save your plaid suits for autumn.

Wear a solid brown or black leather belt with a square buckle. Your belt should match your shoes.

Newly shined brown shoes from chestnut to chocolate stand out the most. Look for round-toe shoes. (No square-toed shoes!)

A messenger bag is the most practical option and looks sophisticated as long as it's not bulky or made of nylon. Stick with canvas or leather.

For women:

It's not necessary to wear a suit to a networking event, but you want to be comfortable and chic. Solid-colored trousers or pencil skirts with a wool/Lycra blend help avoid wrinkles. Keep the colors classic — cream, tan, navy, black. Pair them with a patterned jack-

et to create a point of interest, or if you'd prefer a more classic look, wear a solid jacket with a floral, bow-front or ruffled blouse underneath, which are several of the season's trends.

You could also try a three-quarter-sleeve cotton pinstripe dress shirt to give the look some texture, tucked in, with a skinny belt, simple earrings and ballet flats.

As beautiful as heels can be, when you're walking around a 10,000-square-foot convention center exchanging business cards, it's hard to smile when your feet are aching. Look for one- or two-tone flats. (Black and tan is a nice combination.)

3. An informal networking event

Summer presents opportunities to network in casual locales like a dinner cruise or the roof deck of a potential employer's building. Such events present a special challenge because it's potentially hot outside, making it tempting to dress down or show more skin. You should still take extra care in your wardrobe; you never know whom you may end up shaking hands with.

For men:

On a dinner cruise, preppy and nautical styles often look best, as long as they're not overly campy (i.e. lobster-embroidered chinos) or exaggerated (a navy blazer with brass buttons). In either situation, it's okay to ditch the suit in favor of lightweight straight-leg denim (white is a nice alternative to blue jeans for summer) or khakis.

You could pair your trousers with a crisp, fitted polo in a solid color or a button-down, like a blue or dark-purple check, or a light-blue contrast-collar.

If you're on a boat, deck shoes without socks are appropriate; if you're on a roof deck, try a pair of classic brown leather loafers or cap-toe lace-ups.

For women:

The key to dressing for a cruise is that you want to look glamorous — you're on a boat! — while remaining sure-footed. Try to avoid heels, and if you're going to wear a dress or a skirt, make sure it's windproof as you don't want to risk the obvious.

Infuse some color and light into your look with a pretty silk scarf or colorful lightweight wrap, or a gorgeous pair of chandelier earrings. You could also try pairing a lightweight tunic with detailing on

the neckline with cream trousers and metallic flats.

If you're on a roof deck, women should try to dress as they would for an early-evening cocktail gathering (below).

4. Drinks after work

Your friend invites you out for a few drinks with a group of people who work in your industry. Your wardrobe should remain professional without making those around you feel like they're still at the office.

For men:

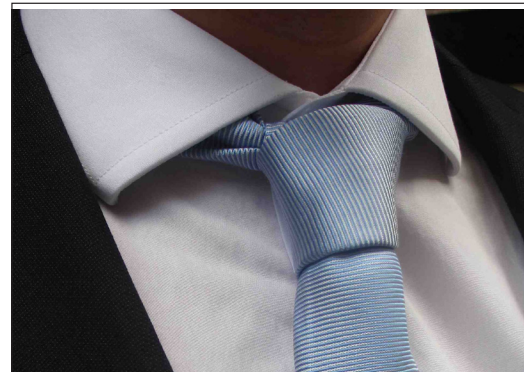
Show up wearing a suit, but take your jacket off soon after you arrive. If you work in a slightly more casual/creative field, wear dark jeans and oxfords with a button-down shirt tucked in and a belt.

Wear a handsome watch. Bars are often crowded, and people notice more what you're wearing from the waist up: A gorgeous brown leather belt with a square buckle, a classic-looking chronograph watch, a unique pocket square. A pinstripe shirt. Cufflinks. Even if the bar is dark, you're speaking close to people, and they will notice the details.

For women:

Go from day to evening with a few simple tricks that don't necessarily require changing. If you're wearing a suit, remove your jacket, add a belt, and replace your flats with heels. The most classic shoes are round or pointy and closed-toe in black, brown or cream. For a night out, you can try something strappier, like a metallic sandal.

Add a little color and liveliness with a gorgeous statement necklace — one of the major looks of the season. A statement necklace is more than just a simple strand of pearls or a pendant on a chain; it is a big, bold announcement, of-



The Summer Wardrobe List

Five things every man needs:

- An unlined wool suit jacket
- A handkerchief
- Breath strips
- A shoe shine
- A proper, structured leather briefcase with handles

Five things every woman needs:

- A medium-size canvas or leather tote bag
- A statement necklace
- Ballet flats
- Frizz-reducing hair product
- A structured, sleeveless, belted dress



ten filling your entire neckline with sequins, stones, glass or metal. It melds with whatever you're wearing, thus becoming the outfit. Everyone from Banana Republic to Burberry designed these, so they're not hard to find.

Keep the rest of your look minimal with solid colors and minimal jewelry. Top off the outfit with a pretty beaded clutch, which will be much less bulky in a cramped bar than your tote, but can still fit your business cards.

5. A baseball game

There's nothing more casual than America's favorite pastime. It is tempting to throw on a team T-shirt and a baseball cap, but if a colleague invites you to join her in her company's box seats, dress slightly more formally.

For men:

Cool comfort is key when you have to be "on" while spending the day under the hot sun or an evening in the humidity. Pair straight-leg chinos with a fitted polo (stick with white since it'll keep you coolest in the sun) and leather sandals. Throw on a pair of aviators to shield your eyes.

For women:

A cotton shirtdress, belted, with white tennis sneakers is a fun way to dress up the occasion while looking as relaxed as if you were wearing shorts and a T-shirt.

Keep your accessories unfussy. Stick with the basics: sunglasses, a sleek stainless-steel watch and a canvas tote.

6. A backyard barbecue

You've been invited to a friend's house for a midsummer barbeque, and a potential employer may be stopping by. You would look out of place if you dressed up, but you also don't want to look frumpy in his presence.

For men:

This is the trickiest situation possible because you're expected to behave formally but not appear formal. On a hot day, wear flat-front cotton khaki shorts that hit between the knee and mid-thigh. Anything longer looks young and sloppy. Steer clear of cargo shorts, which are bulky. A fitted polo shirt or a cotton or linen button-down is always clean and handsome.

Leather sandals or clean white tennis sneakers are the best footwear option. You can wear canvas or leather flip-flops, but never rubber ones.

Even though you're dressing down, don't forget the extra details — a pair of aviators and a chunky stainless-steel watch.

For women:

Eating hot dogs and hamburgers in the sun calls for comfort. A cotton or linen sundress (as long as it's not too lightweight or flimsy) that hits at the knee is a beautiful option. (Make sure to wear a nude slip underneath if there is any chance it's see-through in broad daylight.) Pair with leather sandals or wedges. Cotton shorts or skirts (denim is fine) are also appropriate, and you can pair them with a light cotton T-shirt or tank top, as long as they're not too skimpy.

Keep a lightweight cardigan or shawl on hand for when it cools down.

Aviator sunglasses pair nicely with shorts, while plastic frames in black or tortoiseshell feel more refined and would better complement a sundress. ■



Nina Myers is a New York-based fashion writer. She has worked at Esquire Magazine, where she was a men's fashion market editor, and at Niche Media, where she was fashion editor for nine regional luxury magazines, including Boston Commons, Gotham, Hamptons and LA Confidential.



Karl Rozemeyer is a freelance syndicated columnist, journalist and photographer who has worked as international editor for Premiere magazine in New York and the director of photography for Hachette Filipacchi magazines in Prague. He was born in Zimbabwe and was educated in Cape Town, South Africa.

Career Advice from TheLadders

- Lose the 'Frump Factor,' Win the Job
- Dress to Network — Every Encounter Counts
- Top 5 Web Sites to Update Your Look
- Style Day to Night — No Wardrobe Switch Required