

PRESENTING YOURSELF PROFESSIONALLY

Results from three different employer surveys were published in 2011 revealing that today's students are generally viewed by employers as lacking in professionalism skills (*Recruiting Trends Report 2011-12*, published annually by Michigan State University, *National Survey of Human Resources and Business Leaders*, York College Study – Professionalism in the Workplace 8/09, *Job Outlook 2011 Survey* National Association of Colleges and Employers - NACE). In fact, the York College study found that 37.3% of (employers) felt less than half of all new graduates exhibit professionalism in their first year.

According to the *American College Dictionary*, professionalism is exhibited by one of the "professional character, spirit or methods" or the "standing,

practice, or methods of a professional as distinguished from an amateur." Professionalism covers many facets, from appearance, to written & oral communication, to basic social niceties. Use this resource as your guide for taking stock of your own professionalism.

Appearance and Grooming

- It's critical to be clean/neat from head to toe.
- Piercings and Creative Hair: Yes, you have a perfect right to be who you are. Just remember, employers have just as much right to say that lip rings are not the image they are trying to project. You will have to decide if your personal statement is worth more than the job. Of course, there are some fields – fashion and music to name two – where no one would care about excessive piercings or creative hair.
- Tattoos/body art: if you have it, make sure it won't be visible. Same reason as above.
- Clean nails and hands. Nail polish, if you wear any, should be conservative, with no chips.
- If you wear glasses, make sure the lenses are clean.
- Don't overdo cologne or perfume. In fact, none can be a wise decision.
- Have a conservative haircut, which is neatly combed. No hair in your face.
- Check hair, face, teeth, and clothes before entering a room. Fresh breath is a must! No gum or mints in your mouth. Press your clothing. If you don't know how, the dry cleaner will take care of it for you!
- **Women:** Conservative jewelry and make-up.
- **Men:** Facial hair policies vary by geography, industry and organization. Basic advice: it should be clean, neat and trimmed.

Business Formal Attire

When in doubt, err on the side of being conservative and go business formal. Interview dress is usually business formal.

Business Formal for Men

- Wear a suit that is either gray, navy, or charcoal
- *Clean*, pressed white shirt (don't forget to tuck it in!). Consider taking shirts to the dry cleaner to have them starched – they will stay nice longer
- Keep ties conservative. Tie should not be too wide and should barely touch your belt. Tie-a-tie.net can show you how to tie it properly!
- Wear dark, over-the-calf socks that match your suit (No athletic socks with your nice suit!)
- Black leather belt
- Wear polished black leather shoes, no boots
- Don't wear too much jewelry

Business Formal for Women

- Dark, well-fitting suit (knee-length hem for suit skirts); suits with pants are ok too.
- Blouse – either with or without a collar is fine
- Polished 1-2" heels (no open toe, sling backs, stilettos or boots)
- Hosiery (a must) – should be flawless (no runs) and conservative in color. A shade that matches your skin tone is always a safe bet and bringing an extra pair is a good idea.
- Hair may be worn down or pulled back. Just make sure it stays out of your face.

Business Casual Attire

This is not synonymous with “sloppy”! Make sure all clothing is neatly pressed and clean. Also double-check clothing for signs of wear.

Business Casual for Men

- Not expected to wear ties
- Sport coat ok but not expected
- Stylish, solid colored pants
- Long-sleeved solid or striped shirt with a collar
- Socks that match your pants
- Matching belt and shoes
- Don't wear: Jeans, sneakers, sandals, t-shirts, baseball cap, pants with elastic cuffs, or sweatshirts

Business Casual for Women

- Dress pants or skirt
- Sweater and/or blouse. Blazers are also appropriate.
- Trouser socks or knee high stockings with pants. Tights or hosiery with skirts.
- Polished loafers, flats, low heels, or dress boots
- Don't wear: mini skirts, tight/low cut tops, sneakers, shorts, long or bright nails, or spike heels

Communication

Communication is employers #1 desirable skill! Be sure your own skills in these four areas of communication are top-notch:

- **Verbal:** Develop your vocabulary, cut out slang, specific acronyms, and youthful talk. Take turns when speaking, and don't hog the conversation
- **Non-verbal:** Attend to posture, eye contact, facial expressions and personal space/distance, remember to smile, and give the speaker your full attention to convey that “there is nothing more important than you.” This includes turning **off** your phone (vibrate does not count).
- **Written:** Be polite, short, concise, and error-free
- **Listening:** Stop talking, show interest, ask questions, and don't interrupt

Telephone Communication

The telephone is used a lot in the selection process including setting up interviews, phone interviews, and job offers. Make sure your telephone etiquette is top-rate!

- Tone of voice is 70% of initial impression; words spoken 30%. Speak with a smile in your voice (and on your face)
- Focus on the call; not on doing something else
- Don't eat or drink while on the phone
- When talking on the phone with a potential employer or for other business, do not put them on hold while you answer another phone call
- Have a notepad and writing utensil near by for taking notes
- Eliminate background noise – pets, TV, music, bathroom noises, children, and traffic
- Warn housemates of anticipated calls, to act appropriately (keeping the noise down) during phone interviews, or when taking messages
- Your answering machine or voice mail message should be brief, polite and professional
- Return calls promptly (within 24 hours)
- When leaving a message, speak slowly and clearly (articulate), provide your first and last name (spell last name), give your phone number including area code, purpose of call or an identifier, repeat name at end

Email Communication

Email is not an “etiquette-free” zone, nor is it instant messaging! It is a professional form of communication and should follow good writing guidelines

- Proofread for spelling and grammar. Don't rely solely on spell check.
- Avoid online conflict & email arguments. Many things can be misconstrued via email
- Avoid using emoticons (☺) in professional communications
- Online communication is not a replacement for verbal/personal contact
- AVOID USING ALL CAPS (or all lower-case) and don't overuse “!”
- Give people a chance to read and respond
- Keep your messages short and concise

- Think before you send (messages are sent immediately). Sometimes saving your message as a draft and rereading it later can be extremely beneficial
- Everything you write online is a reflection of your professionalism: you will be judged by the quality of your writing whether it is an email, online profile, blog entry, or comments on a Web site
- Use your Binghamton University email for official business. Avoid using email addresses such as ilovebeer80@hotmail.com for job applications and on your resume

Guidelines for use of Social Media

Social Media is a wonderful tool for creating a professional network and presence online. However, it is not all fun and games. If you are applying to jobs, you want to portray yourself as a professional online as well. If you are actively using Social Media for your job search (or not), be aware that anyone can read your posts, including your future boss.

- Do you “look” professional? A photo of you in a bathing suit may not be the best profile photo choice
- Watch your language. Write as if you are in a professional environment
- Potential employers can check your page including photos and comments. Illegal and destructive comments and behaviors can hurt your reputation and ultimately your candidacy
- When requesting to connect online, it is the same as in real life: introduce yourself first and be introduced by your network. First impressions are important online as well
- Be collegial, acknowledge and thank connections, comments, feedback, links, and retweets
- You may not want to engage with everyone. People make judgments by who and what groups you are associated with

Basic Social Etiquette

Social Functions

- Always be punctual
- If invited to a function bring no one, unless the invitation states "and guest"
- Don't smoke, chew gum or tobacco
- RSVP on an invitation stands for the French phrase "Repondez s'il vous plait," meaning "Reply, please." In other words:
 - Respond to indicate whether you will or will not attend
 - Don't show up without having responded
 - If you said yes and your plans change, let the host know you need to cancel
 - Don't be a no-show
- Avoid hanging out exclusively with your friends; mingle and make conversation
- Make attempts to meet as many people as possible
- The art of small talk is asking questions If alcohol is served and you are underage, don't drink! If alcohol is served and you are over 21, drink conservatively!
- Cocktail parties are not about the food! Don't hover around the hors d'oeuvres!
- If you are of legal drinking age, it is best to keep your head clear and don't drink
- Wear your nametag on your right chest area

First Impressions

- It takes 30 seconds for a person meeting you for the first time to form impressions about you, your character, and abilities. You never get a second chance to make a first impression!
- You're always “on stage”. Always be prepared to look and sound your best
- Good grooming is essential
- Smile and make eye contact

Introductions

In the business arena, the person of lesser importance, regardless of gender, is introduced to the person of greater importance, regardless of gender: “President Obama, I'd like to introduce (student name).” When being introduced:

- Stand up
- Look them in the eye
- Give a firm handshake

- Greet them - "How do you do?" or "How do you do, President Obama?"
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Smile!

Handshake

- Standard/expected in greetings, introductions, saying goodbye
- Firm handshake conveys confidence, assurance, interest and respect
- While it doesn't matter who extends the hand first; extending your hand first shows confidence
- Treat men and women with equal respect
- Look directly at the person and smile

Dining Etiquette

- 80% of second interviews involve a meal
- Long before you enter the restaurant, make sure you turn off your cell phone
- Practice proper posture; sit up straight with your arms close to your body
- When you are not eating, keep your hands on your lap or resting on the table (with wrists on the edge of the table). Elbows on the table are acceptable only between courses.
- Take responsibility for keeping up the conversation but stay away from controversial subjects, such as politics, religion, sexual matters, etc
- Order something easy to eat. Stay away from spaghetti, peas, expensive items and anything that sounds like a large quantity of food.
- Do not order alcoholic beverages, even if the interviewer does
- Ask for suggestions from others at the table
- Wait to eat until everyone has been served
- When eating a roll or bread, put a pat of butter on your plate, break small pieces of bread, and butter each piece as you go
- Don't salt your food before you taste it
- Only reach for items that are in front of you. Politely ask others to pass items out of reach.
- Bring food to your mouth—not your head to the plate
- Eat at the same pace as everyone else
- Place your napkin on chair seat if excusing yourself for any reason
- Take small bites at a time and never chew with your mouth open or talk with your mouth full. If asked a question while you are eating, finish chewing, swallow, then speak
- Throughout the meal, be sure to say "please" and "thank you." Your polite attitude will foster an overall positive impression.
- Eat your entire meal if possible. Don't ask for a doggie bag
- Indicate that you are finished with your meal by placing the knife and fork, on your plate, at the 4 o'clock position. Be sure to place the napkin on the right-hand side of your table setting.
- When dining as part of a job interview, generally the interviewer pays

Utensils

- Glasses and coffee cup on your right, bread plate on the left
- Start with silverware on the outside and work your way in
- If you drop a utensil, leave it and ask the waiter for another. **Fleishman Center has several books on etiquette available in Fleishman Center including:**
- Power Etiquette: What You Don't Know Can Kill Your Career
- 5 Steps to Professional Presence: How to Project Confidence, Competence, and Credibility at Work
- The Complete Professional: Solutions For Today's Workplace
- How to Work a Room: The Ultimate Guide to Savvy Socializing in Person and Online
- How to Gain The Professional Edge: Achieve The Personal and Professional Image You Want
- The Complete Idiot's Guide To Etiquette

* Refer to the Fleishman Center's [Effective Interviewing](#) (49.5 kb pdf) Quick Reference Guide for advice on appropriate interview behavior.