

17

All the rage: clothes and fashion

A Dressing for work

Many students, both male and female, would agree that they often look **scruffy**¹ in their T-shirts and jeans. However, those who go into the world of business have to make a rapid transition and learn about **dress codes**² in the workplace. Business **attire**³ needs to project a professional image, and clothing that **reveals**⁴ too much **cleavage**⁵ (for women), or your back, your chest or your **midriff**⁶ is not appropriate, even in a casual business setting. For women, see-through **fabrics**⁷ should be avoided, and skirts should not be too tight or too short, though nobody wants to look **frumpy**⁸. For men, trousers should not be too tight, or shirts too open. Women often need a good choice of **outfits**⁹ and men find a good range of **suits**¹⁰, ties and casual trousers and jackets **invaluable**¹¹. **Accessories**¹², e.g. jewellery, shoes and **cufflinks**¹³, can also enhance the professional look. Some offices have **dress-down days**¹⁴, often Fridays, when staff can wear more casual clothes. In other jobs, of course, people are required to wear **uniforms**, or **protective clothing** such as **overalls**¹⁵ and **safety helmets**¹⁶.

¹ untidy [noun: **scruff** = person who dresses in an untidy way] ² accepted way of dressing in a particular social group ³ clothing; *formal* ⁴ shows ⁵ space between a woman's breasts ⁶ part of the body between the chest and the waist ⁷ materials ⁸ old-fashioned and boring ⁹ set of clothes for a particular occasion ¹⁰ jacket and trousers in the same material ¹¹ extremely useful ¹² extra items added to clothing for useful or decorative purposes ¹³ decorative objects used to fasten the cuffs on men's shirts ¹⁴ days when people wear less formal clothes ¹⁵ (plural noun) piece of clothing covering all the body, usually worn over other clothing to protect it when working ¹⁶ hat to protect the head

Language help

Invaluable means extremely valuable. The opposite of *valuable* is *valueless* or *without value*.

B Words and expressions about clothes

Clothes can be described as **revealing**¹, **skimpy**², **baggy**³, **clingy**⁴, or **chic**⁵. Sometimes an invitation to a more formal party will ask people to dress in **smart-casual**⁶ clothes. To be **dolled (up) / dressed up / done up to the nines** means to be dressed in a very fashionable or very formal way. Some people choose to buy **designer (label) clothes** but most people prefer to buy clothes more cheaply **on the High Street**⁷. People who can afford to sometimes have clothes **made-to-measure**⁸, but more often people buy their clothes **off the peg/rack**⁹.

¹ showing a lot of flesh ² short, using little material ³ loose, e.g. a sweater ⁴ close-fitting ⁵ /'tʃi:k/ modern, stylish ⁶ clothes that are informal but clean, tidy and stylish ⁷ from ordinary, much less expensive shops ⁸ made especially for them ⁹ ready-made

C Being in fashion

These jackets are **all the rage**. [very fashionable] The woman was dressed in **the very latest fashion**. [an extremely fashionable way] Dresses like this are **the height of fashion**. [very fashionable] The magazine has **up-to-the-minute** fashion articles. [dealing with the most recent trends] The film has **set a new trend** for the silk top the star wore. [started a new fashion] A **trend-setter** is a person whose style is followed by others. High heels are **on trend** this year. [fashionable] Large handbags are this year's **must-have item**. [thing that everyone wants] If a fashion/trend **catches on**, it becomes popular. A **slave to fashion** is someone who is strongly influenced by fashion. [used in a disapproving way] Your new outfit really **suits** you. [looks good on you]

D Clothes in metaphors

to speak **off the cuff** [without having prepared anything] **to be hand in glove with someone** [to have a close working relationship with someone] to do something **on a shoestring** [spending as little as possible] **no frills** [simple and plain] **to put someone in a straitjacket** [restrict someone's freedom] **to draw a veil over** something [not to talk about something] **to have something up your sleeve** [to have a secret plan or idea]

Exercises

17.1 Answer these questions.

- 1 What do you mean if you call someone 'scruffy'?
- 2 What is the dress code in a workplace you are familiar with?
- 3 What kinds of clothes are not appropriate for a job interview?
- 4 What might be appropriate clothes to wear for a job interview for a man and for a woman?
- 5 What is your favourite outfit?
- 6 And what accessories would be required for this outfit?
- 7 What would you put on if you had a dress-down day at work?
- 8 What sorts of work require staff to wear a uniform?
- 9 What kind of jobs need protective clothing to be worn?
- 10 If a woman says she finds a particular outfit 'invaluable', does she mean it's very expensive, extremely useful or absolutely useless?

17.2 Fill the gaps with words or phrases from B or C opposite.

- 1 Wow, you're done up to! Where on earth are you going?
- 2 The sign outside the bar said: 'Dress code: - no jeans or trainers.'
- 3 I'm surprised to see girls wearing such dresses in this cold weather.
- 4 I can't afford clothes. I buy most of my outfits on the
- 5 Lucy is always dressed in the of fashion - she always looks very!
- 6 As soon as Amy gets home from work, she changes from her smart suit into tracksuit bottoms and a comfortable,, old jumper.
- 7 Very high heels remain trend this season.
- 8 These bracelets were last year's-have item.

17.3 Rewrite the underlined parts of these sentences using phrases from D opposite.

- 1 I'm no good at speaking if I haven't had time to prepare what I want to say.
- 2 Simon is bound to have some plan in readiness for tomorrow's meeting.
- 3 I think we should keep quiet about what happened on Monday, don't you?
- 4 Be careful what you say to Helen - she works very closely with the boss.
- 5 The new legislation means we are not able to act as we wish.
- 6 We'll still have a great party even if we have to do it as cheaply as possible.

17.4 Here are more metaphorical uses of clothes words. Explain the literal and metaphorical meanings of the underlined words and expressions. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- 1 We'll have to tighten our belts if you stop working full-time.
- 2 We wanted to leave but were hemmed in by the crowd and couldn't escape.
- 3 Phil's got so many books - his room is bursting at the seams.
- 4 The negotiations have been cloaked in secrecy ever since they began.
- 5 If she wins the prize again this year, it'll be a real feather in her cap.

17.5 Over to you

- What is all the rage in your country at the moment?
- When was the last time you got dressed up to the nines?
- What do you think about people who are a slave to fashion?
- What would you wear on a dress-down Friday at work?
- What sort of people start new fashion trends?
- What item of clothing would you most like to have made-to-measure?