

Brand Me

Personal Appearance

Objectives

- A** Describe the importance of personal appearance.
- B** Identify factors that influence personal appearance.
- C** Demonstrate procedures for maintaining an appropriate personal appearance.



1375 King Avenue, P.O. Box 12279, Columbus, Ohio 43212-0279

Ph: (614) 486-6708 Fax: (614) 486-1819

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Do you have an outfit that you love to wear? Maybe it's a super comfortable shirt or a sweater that highlights the color of your eyes. Have you recently updated your look with a new hairstyle to appear your best for an important event? How you look and what you wear create the physical image you present to others—your own personal brand. Plus, no matter how young or old you are, your appearance affects how you see yourself. And how you see yourself affects how you feel about yourself. By working to look your best, you can boost your self-concept and self-esteem. If you look good, you feel good!

What's in Your Personal Brand?

First Impressions

Allison, a high school sophomore, decided that she needed to get a summer job. So, a few weeks before summer vacation began, Allison developed a résumé, put together a list of references, and hit the pavement—dressed in a pair of jeans, a school T-shirt, and sneakers. She applied for work at several businesses and talked with a number of business managers. Unfortunately, even though she has many good qualities and skills, Allison couldn't seem to land a summer job—because she didn't present an effective personal brand.

What's a **personal brand**? It's the image that you present to the world. Some individuals dress like rockers or skateboarders. By dressing in certain ways, people can show they are interested in music or skateboarding, or even that they value freedom and individuality. If you are an athlete, you may like to wear team jerseys to show your love of sports. You might have a friend that loves fashion so she dresses in the latest trends and accessorizes her outfits. The way you dress says something about you. Whether you work to create a specific image or whether you just wear what you like, your appearance says something about you.

What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is instant language.

— *Miuccia Prada*

In the world of work, the image you present is important. It might not be appropriate to dress like a rocker or an athlete while working in a customer service position for a retail store. This is why you may not want to wear what you usually do when you apply for a job. It's important to create an image or "brand" by dressing in a way that shows maturity and self-confidence. Allison wasn't successful in her job search because she didn't create the right image. She wasn't dressed in a way that said "I am ready to work here, and I understand what is expected."

Employers aren't the only ones to judge your appearance; nearly everyone you meet does. Your **personal appearance**—the physical image that you present to others—influences how other individuals view you, even when you initially meet. Like it or not, you are frequently judged by others on the basis of first impressions. Sometimes out of necessity and sometimes out of habit, people may "size you up" quickly with very little information to go on. They are developing an impression of you and who you are. This phenomenon is discussed in the Business Insider video "The Science of First Impressions" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC5OiYrsW0U>.

By looking at you, people can tell, to some degree, how you see yourself and how you feel about what you see. You express these personal thoughts and feelings in the way you present yourself to others. Through your appearance, they form opinions about your personality, trustworthiness, educational level, and background. Often, they even draw conclusions about your career competence and ability to work and succeed based on how you look. If you do your best to look good, you are more likely to obtain favorable reactions from others—and, at the same time, improve your self-confidence, self-concept (how you see yourself), and self-esteem (how you *feel* about yourself).

To learn the importance of developing a confident self-concept, view the *Today* video "Behind the Science of Making a First Impression" at <https://www.today.com/video/behind-the-science-of-making-a-first-impression-1137287235984>.



▲ *When you dress well, it helps you form a good self-image and gain confidence.*

As we saw in Allison's situation, how you look often makes a difference in how well you do in job interviews. Interviewers have limited time to make decisions about individuals that they interview, and they rely heavily on their first impressions. Your appearance, including your clothing and the manner in which you carry yourself, is one of the most important factors that influences their perceptions. Often, interviewers feel that your appearance reflects not only your attitude but the skills you possess as well. For some tips, view the Love Chic Styling video "What To Wear to a Job Interview" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWr6rBWkZxA>.



▲ *Dressing well for an interview helps you make a good first impression and can set you apart from other job candidates.*

Appearance and Job Success

Even after you are hired, your appearance is critical to your success in the workplace. As an employee, your appearance reflects the image of the company. If you look and act like a professional, customers and vendors are likely to think more highly of your business than they would if you dressed and acted like a slob. Likewise, if you own your own company, your appearance can influence the attitudes and perceptions customers or clients have about either the products you sell or the services you provide.

Similarly, how you look and how you take care of yourself affect your actual job performance. By acting and looking like a professional who is serious about his/her job, you can set yourself apart from your coworkers in a positive manner. And, in doing so, you communicate to your superiors that you are serious about your job. As a result, you're more likely to be the recipient of pay raises and promotions. Learn more in the *Forbes* video "How To Dress for Success at Work" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHb9Xwq29ro>.



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Summary

Your personal appearance is determined by your physical image, both by how you look and by what you wear. You can enhance your self-confidence, your self-concept, and your self-esteem as you develop your personal appearance, or the "brand called you." Your personal appearance greatly impacts the first impressions others have of you. First impressions shape how others judge you and your personality, abilities, and competence. Your abilities to get a job, perform well, and advance in the workplace depend, in part, on how you look.

TOTAL RECALL

1. How does personal appearance impact self-esteem?
2. Explain the importance of first impressions.
3. How does your personal appearance affect you during a job interview?
4. Why is personal appearance important in the workplace?

▲ *Dressing well for work each day demonstrates confidence and professionalism that can help you get promoted.*

THE GRAY ZONE

Thin Wins (Or Does it?)

Because most companies want to project a positive image, they publish materials about themselves that contain very select images of people. Both in company publications and promotional materials, the individuals shown typically represent a very small portion of a company's actual workforce or customers. Company publications and advertisements often show people who are young, slender, and free from any physical handicaps. Indeed, we seldom see anyone in these publications who is overweight or in a wheelchair. The result? The frequent depiction of unusually attractive and thin individuals may affect your idea of what appropriate personal appearance is and, in turn, influence how you view yourself. Do companies have a responsibility to show more realistic, "average-looking" individuals in the materials they print? Have these organizations contributed to the increase in eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia? Would pictures of overweight individuals affect your attitude toward these organizations or your decision to use their products?

Lookin' Good, Feelin' Fine

If personal appearance is so important to how you feel about yourself and to how others see you, you may wonder what factors affect your appearance. How you look depends greatly on two things: 1) Your health and physical body, and 2) your clothing and dress.

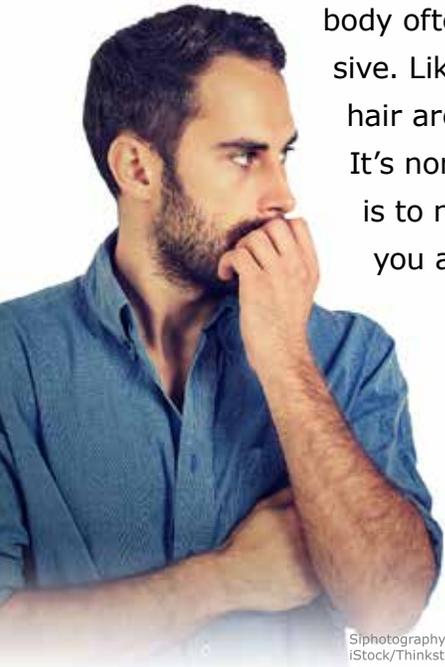


▲ *When you look good, you feel good which creates an energy that others notice.*

Self Matters: Health and Physical Body

You can do several easy things every day to take care of yourself and your body. This includes taking a daily shower, using deodorant, washing and styling your hair, and brushing and flossing your teeth. These habits and practices are called **hygiene**. By developing good, consistent hygiene habits, you can enhance your personal brand both on and off the job.

People also develop opinions of you from your **body language**, or nonverbal communication. Your body language can affect your image or brand dramatically. For instance, crossing your arms close to your body often indicates that you are upset or feel defensive. Likewise, biting your fingernails and twirling your hair are unspoken indications of your nervousness. It's normal to feel nervous sometimes, but the key is to not look it. You should carry yourself so that you appear calm, cool, and collected. Stand up



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straight, be aware of your nervous habits so you avoid them, and focus on the person with whom you are speaking—whether an interviewer, a supervisor, or a customer. And, let that person know you are interested in what s/he is saying by looking her/him in the eye. For some tips, view the *Forbes* video “Body Language That

Gets the Job” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV1cMmCKxmY>.

- ▲ *It's important to be self-aware so you don't engage in habits like biting your nails that can make you appear nervous.*

What Is a Healthy Diet?



With all of the conflicting reports and fad diets, it's best to consult your doctor or a nutritionist for specific diet advice best suited for your health and lifestyle goals. If you need general information, most experts agree on two things: fresh fruits and vegetables are important, and processed foods should be limited or avoided.

Monkey Business/Thinkstock

In addition to practicing good hygiene and monitoring your body language, you need to take care of your body so it's healthy and you feel well. If you're healthy, you can be a better, more productive employee.

Here's an example: While working as a sales representative for a large pharmaceutical company, Sam realized the importance of taking care of his health and physical well-being the hard way. His clients were primarily doctors, so it was important that he present a professional appearance. But Sam enjoyed playing the drums for a band that performed at local clubs several nights a week. Sometimes, the band played late into the night, and Sam got very little sleep. Because he was so tired, he started getting up later and later each morning and didn't bother to shower, comb his hair, or iron his clothing. Also, because he was so tired from his late nights, Sam started making mistakes at work and began showing up late for appointments. Eventually, doctors refused to meet with him, his sales decreased, and his supervisor reprimanded him for his poor work performance.

So, what can you do to get and stay healthy? Let's take a look at the basics:

Eat a balanced diet. Eating the right types and amounts of food can help you feel better, stay healthier, and maintain an appropriate weight. Humans need to consume enough of certain nutrients to live a healthy life. A balanced diet consists of appropriate amounts of foods from the basic food groups, including fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy, and grains. There are even certain foods, such as fish and eggs, that can stimulate the brain, increase creativity, and enhance your energy levels. Food's impact on mental ability is explored in the TED-Ed video "How the Food You Eat Affects Your Brain" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyQY8a-ng6g>.



▲ *A professional presents a good image by maintaining his/her health and energy levels.*

Avoid habit-forming substances. Use caution before using substances that are habit-forming. It's no secret that many studies have shown the ill effects of smoking, drinking, and inappropriate and/or illegal drug use. Use of these products can hinder your work performance and even affect your personal appearance. Keep in mind, too, that caffeinated products can also affect your health and should be used in moderation.



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▲ *Regular exercise gives you the strength and energy to deal with daily stress.*

Exercise regularly. You don't need to buy expensive equipment or pay costly fees to a health club to get exercise. Find something you enjoy (e.g., walking, bicycling) and do it regularly. When done right, exercise can strengthen your cardiovascular system, build your muscles, and relieve stress.

Get adequate rest. How much sleep you need depends on you. Some people need more or less than others. Listen to your body to determine the amount of sleep that is best for you. If you experience ongoing problems falling asleep, staying asleep, or feeling tired all the time, you may want to consult a doctor—these may be symptoms of other health problems that you need to address. The impact of sleep on health is discussed in the TED-Ed video “What Would Happen If You Didn't Sleep?” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqONk48I5vY>.

Take time for relaxation. To maintain a balanced life and good health, take time to unwind and relax. Find hobbies or other personal interests that give you pleasure—anything from sports to reading to crafts.

The Importance of Dressing Well

In addition to your physical health, how you dress affects your personal appearance. Of course, the clothing that you wear to work is dependent on factors such

Dressing well is a form of good manners.

—Tom Ford

as the nature of the work you do and your employer’s policies. For instance, if you work in a hospital or restaurant, you may be required to wear certain clothing or even a uniform. If you work outdoors and your job requires physical activity, it may be acceptable to wear shorts.

When your position requires you to interact with

customers and present the company’s image, your appearance is even more important. It’s common for people in sales positions to be held to a higher standard of dress because the image they present can impact sales and business relationships. Also, consider a lawyer representing a client in a courtroom setting. A conservative business suit is the preferred attire for attorneys. Imagine the impact and effectiveness of a lawyer wearing sweatpants and running shoes with messy hair and a sweaty face!

Over the past few years, the business environment has developed a more casual attitude regarding proper attire in the workplace. In the “old” days, office workers wore suits and/or conservative dresses. Today, however, many businesses have adopted a “**business casual**” policy and instituted “casual Fridays,” leaving many employees confused about what constitutes proper business attire.

Fashion designer Michael Kors gives some tips in the *GQ* video “Business Casual Doesn’t Mean ‘Sloppy’” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raX7HbTfsYc>.



▲ *If your job requires a uniform, it’s still important to present a neat and polished image.*

When in doubt about what to wear, *ask*. Ask your supervisor, ask other employees, or refer to the company's policy manual. Many company manuals define appropriate and inappropriate dress for your workplace. And, observe. See what your coworkers, supervisors, and managers are wearing to work on "regular" and "dress down" days. You might even consider dressing a step or two above your colleagues, even on casual days, to demonstrate your dedication to your job. If you want to be promoted, it's wise to dress for the job you want instead of the one you have. Ask yourself this question when you get dressed for work: "Would I feel embarrassed about what I am wearing if I had to meet with the company CEO today?"

While you probably can't afford to fill your closet with Armani or Calvin Klein yet, don't worry. Just select a few well-made, individual pieces that go with a variety of other items, and create several different outfit combinations. The same goes for shoes and accessories such as handbags, ties, and belts. Not everything you own has to come from your favorite designer. Some generic items or accessories can be purchased for much less. The key is to decide how you want to spend your money and where to spend it. Stylebook's article "Dress Like a Boss: How To Create a Capsule Wardrobe for Work" offers tips at http://stylebookapp.com/stories/work_capsule.html.

Keep in mind that unusual hairstyles and colors, body piercings, and tattoos are not always appropriate for the workplace. That may seem outdated or unfair to you, especially since society at large is more accepting of diversity, individuality, and personal expression. While some companies are very tolerant of tattoos or piercings, others remain committed to more traditional norms. If a company's success depends on projecting a particular image to its target market, it is more likely to have stricter guidelines concerning appearance. For some insight into current tattoo trends and attitudes, view the Skinfo article and infographic "Tattoos in the Workplace: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" at <https://www.skinfo.com/blog/tattoos-workplace-good-bad-ugly/#.Wphn3ejwaUk>.



Show Off Your Personal Brand First

If you have tattoos, it may be wise to wait until you have impressed others with your personal actions before exposing any inked skin. It's important to understand the power of your attitude and performance to create a strong personal brand. By being responsible, working hard, and treating others well, you may be able to overcome any biases and judgmental attitudes people may have. After you've developed a good image, it's safer to show your inked skin because your superior personal brand will speak for itself.



Some companies have absolutely no tolerance for obvious tattoos or piercings. Whether you agree with a company's strict policies or not, it's important to follow them. Since your employer is paying your salary to represent the company, you may need to compromise by "toning it down"—removing your piercings or covering your tattoos. Employers' legal rights to require and maintain standards for appearance are explained in the Lawyers.com video "Tattoos and Employment" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYrOIt7v6V8>.

It is also important to remember that your company often has other reasons for instituting certain dress codes. For example, if you work around a lot of heavy, dangerous equipment, you may need to remove your jewelry or wear specific types of clothing to protect you from serious injuries. Likewise, if you work in a fast-food restaurant, you may be required to wear a hat or hairnet to keep your hair from falling into the food.

Summary

How you look depends greatly on your health, physical body, and clothing. Your personal hygiene, body language, and eating habits impact your health and physical well-being. For optimal health, also avoid habit-forming substances, exercise regularly, get adequate rest, and take time for relaxation. The clothing you wear and the things you do with your body also influence how others see you. Avoid extremes in clothing and appearance—including body piercing, tattoos, and nontraditional hairstyles and colors—while at work.

TOTAL RECALL

1. What are two significant factors that affect personal appearance?
2. What is hygiene?
3. How can your body language affect your image?
4. What practices lead to good health?
5. Why is appropriate clothing important for job success?
6. How can you determine what clothing is appropriate for your job?
7. How can you build an affordable work wardrobe?
8. What types of physical adornments may be inappropriate for a workplace, and how can you compromise while at work?

Making the Most of Your Brand

Probably the most important thing to keep in mind is that you affect your appearance through your actions and by your choices. Remember, you can make a difference in how you look and feel, and, in turn, how others see you. *You define your brand.* As your brand evolves, you'll probably want to make adjustments to reflect the best you. When preparing for your work day, consider the following steps to make the most of your personal brand:

Develop a hygiene routine. Failing to practice good hygiene can negatively impact your health and can cause others to form a poor opinion of you. No matter what your job is or where you work, there are certain things that you must always do to maintain your personal appearance. These hygiene tasks include:

- Showering or bathing daily
- Washing your hair regularly, styling it neatly, and choosing a cut that complements your features
- Applying deodorant or antiperspirant prior to dressing
- Wearing freshly laundered clothing
- Washing your face morning and evening
- Brushing your teeth after meals and flossing daily
- Cleaning and trimming your fingernails
- Neatly trimming and grooming any facial hair
- Keeping exposed skin hydrated, smooth, and attractive



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Hygiene doesn't only affect your appearance; it can affect how you smell! Since you easily get used to your own smell, you may not notice if you develop body odor or bad breath. But if you smell bad, your coworkers probably will notice! This creates a very embarrassing situation for them and for you. The Get Course video "How To Tell Your Coworker That He Smells" explains how to handle a smelly coworker at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tYuwfKjCa8>.

Assess the situation and select the appropriate outfit and accessories. The situation will dictate how you should dress and present yourself to others. Are you going to the office? To a client’s business or a luncheon meeting? How about a job interview?

After assessing the situation and identifying the day’s activities, you can determine what to wear. But, keep in mind that even on “casual Fridays,” you shouldn’t wear the same outfit to work that you would for a sporting event or a night out with friends. Instead, make sure the outfit is appropriate for your work environment. In other words, avoid garments that are tight, revealing, baggy, or that bear an inappropriate message. Instead, opt for clothing that is more conservative, such as a nice pair of pants, a dress shirt, and a sweater or blazer.

Simplicity, good taste, and grooming are the three fundamentals of good dressing, and these do not cost money.

—Christian Dior



Clean shoes and neat accessories also help present a positive image.

User:ab9fe5bb_275/Stock/Thinkstock

Your accessories (e.g., jewelry, shoes, bag, etc.) are also important considerations. Small stud earrings are appropriate for work, but you should probably avoid wearing anything distracting or too eye-catching. The same applies to shoes. A bank manager would probably be laughed out of the office if he showed up wearing a business suit with flip flops on his feet. Finally, makeup should enhance your appearance, not detract from it. It’s best to use an understated look, so heavy application, dramatic colors, and unusual techniques should be avoided. If you don’t care for makeup, a good grooming routine is fine.

Evaluate the status of your clothes and accessories.

Are your clothes free from stains, odors, wrinkles, pet hair, and rips or tears? If not, wash, dry clean, iron, or fix them before wearing them to work. Are your shoes dirt- and scuff-free? If not, clean and polish your footwear. If you carry a personal tote or laptop bag, make sure it looks professional. Since you regularly carry these items, it's a good idea to invest in yourself and your appearance by buying high-quality, well-made products. By taking the time to care for your clothing and accessories, you will be amazed at how much better you feel about your appearance.

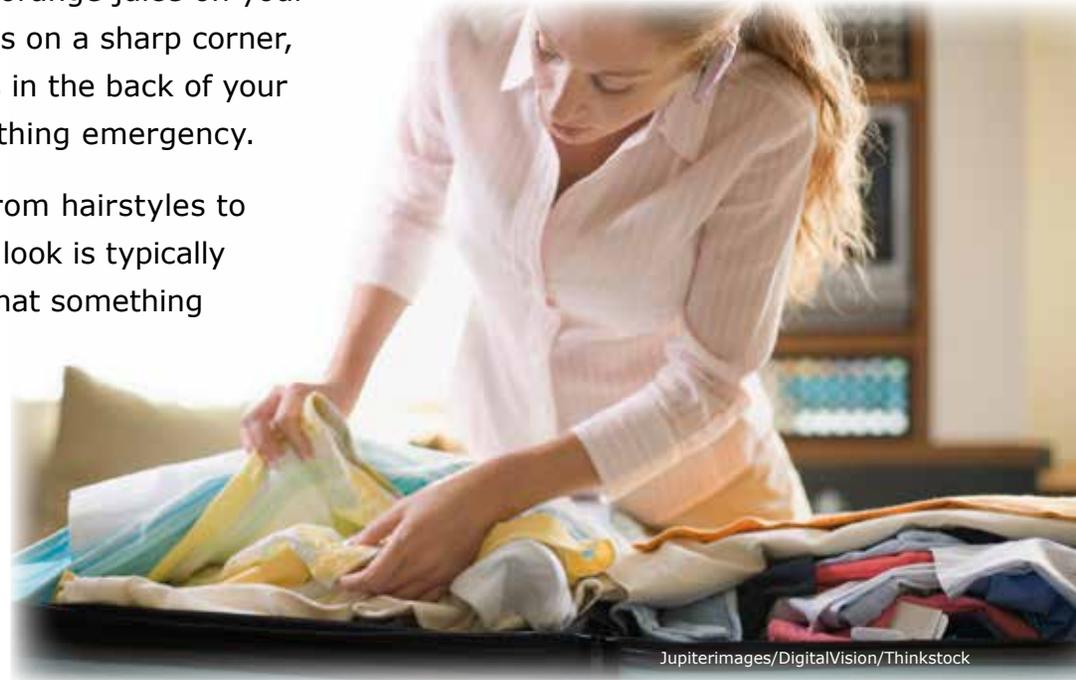
Conduct a final check. This requires one tool—a mirror. Before you go out, take a final look to make sure everything is in place. Start from the top of your head and move down. Make sure your clothing fits correctly. Garments that are too small or too large may appear unattractive or inappropriate. Make sure your hair doesn't have any flyaways, your makeup (if you wear it) doesn't have any unsightly smears, you don't see food between your teeth, no undergarments are showing, and your accessories are appropriate for the occasion.



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Establish a backup plan. Accidents happen. You might spill orange juice on your white shirt right before leaving for work. Or, your jacket catches on a sharp corner, ripping the seam. When you are selecting your outfit, keep this in the back of your mind. Select and prepare a backup outfit in the event of a clothing emergency.

Remember that anything inappropriate in your appearance—from hairstyles to clothing—brings negative attention. A modest, clean, attractive look is typically recommended for most work environments. If you're worried that something might be inappropriate, it probably is. Although it's important to be yourself, remember that how you look and act are important factors that influence the perceptions of others and their judgment of your skills and abilities. Like any brand product that is effectively marketed, your personal appearance is the way that you sell yourself to others. It will affect how they value you and your contributions on the job.



Jupiterimages/DigitalVision/Thinkstock

▲ *When you're traveling, your clothing choices are more limited so it's important to carefully plan a backup outfit.*

Summary

By following the guidelines for personal hygiene, grooming, and dress, you can make a difference in your personal appearance—and in how others view you. Take steps to make the most of your personal brand by developing a hygiene routine, assessing the situation, selecting appropriate clothing and accessories, evaluating the status of your clothing, conducting a final check, and establishing a backup plan. Like any effective marketing campaign, you want to be the product that sells itself. Developing and maintaining an appropriate personal appearance determines how well you present yourself to others and influences how much they value you.

TOTAL RECALL

1. What are five steps that you can incorporate into your daily routine that will help you make the most of your personal appearance?