



 Marla Tomazin

Marla's Style File

The Working Woman's Wardrobe: What You Should Wear to Work to Make the Right Impression (and Feel Great About Yourself, Too!)

If you're looking for a job, vying for a promotion, or just want to feel more confident at work, maybe it's time for you to consider your clothes. Read on for how the right ensemble can make all the difference for you at work right now.

By Marla Tomazin

It's 7:00 AM and you are standing in your closet staring at the same old clothes that you've been wearing to work for what feels like forever. As you look at boring suits, drab skirts, and the tattered, worn-out pumps you bought years ago, it occurs to you that your work wardrobe may be in need of a serious facelift. You know the cliché about clothes making the man (or, in your case, the busy career woman). And while you don't believe it literally, you can't help but wonder how much impact your clothes actually *do* have on your professional image. Do your boss, clients, and coworkers really notice what you wear? Is there a direct correlation between how you dress, how you feel, and how you are perceived? And even if you do need a wardrobe facelift, with a tight budget, can you afford it?

Yes, yes, and yes. Consider the following three simple facts:

1. Eighty-five percent of all communication is non-verbal. So if you're coming to work in clothes that are out-of-date, ill-fitting, or just plain drab, you're sending a message you probably don't want to send.
2. When you look good, you feel more confident. When you feel more confident, you do better work. When you do better work, people notice. It does pay off.
3. If you shop smart and know what to look for, you can look like you spent a fortune—without actually having to spend it!

Whether you've changed jobs and need a new look to fit your new professional atmosphere, you need to update an outdated work wardrobe, or if you just don't feel excited about your work clothes anymore, don't worry. Giving your work clothes a much-needed makeover is simpler than you think, and it doesn't have to blow your budget. Read on for some tips for freshening up your wardrobe.

Keep it classy. When choosing new pieces for your work wardrobe, remember to consider your age, body type, and career. Some of the biggest mistakes are made when wearing clothes that are too tight, too revealing, or too short for your age. If you are coming into work looking disheveled or dressed inappropriately (like wearing that skirt you've had since college that is a little bit on the short side!), it speaks volumes to your boss and co-workers about who you are and what you think about yourself. Think about the impression you want to leave with your boss or clients, and make sure that any wardrobe decisions consistently reflect the image you want to portray.

It all starts with a good foundation. Don't be afraid to invest in foundation pieces. You have to consider that you will be wearing these clothes more than once a week, and the money you spend will be well worth it. Select quality fabrics in a base color that works for you. Black is usually the easiest to find, but keep in mind that it does not flatter everyone. You may also want to consider pieces in navy, gray, chocolate, or a beige tone.

Don't forget about fabrics. We often get so caught up in the style, cut, or colors of the clothes we wear that we forget about the fabrics that they are made of! When it comes to selecting fabrics for your work wear, wool is definitely the most durable as well as being the easiest to maintain. And not all wool is made equally either: there are some lightweight wools out now that breathe and include a Lycra blend that provides a little stretch. For the warmer summer months, choose pieces in silk and cotton. And whatever you do, steer clear of buying fabrics that need a lot of dry cleaning. They will only add to your to-do list—and your budget!

Keep your closet stocked with staples. There are a few staples that every working woman should have in her wardrobe. For instance, your closet should include a blazer (or some type of jacket that can serve as a blazer), a skirt, and pants in a base color, like black or navy. Choose classic cuts and lines, and then you can build upon key pieces that complement each other and that suit your body type. You can also utilize accessories and other pieces to infuse your own sense of style into each look. For example, the skirt can be a straight pencil skirt or one with pleating or A-line to add ease, depending on what suits your personal style and shape.

Consider column dressing. Column dressing means wearing a top and pants or a skirt in the same base color—not only is it vital in extending your wardrobe, but it will also make you look taller and thinner. (And what woman doesn't want to look taller and thinner?) For business trips, the "column" will extend your looks and will allow you to pack lightly. Start all your work ensembles with a column and build up from there. Keep it interesting by adding a different color jacket, sweater, shoe, or belt. Or you can really make a statement with bold jewelry or a scarf.

Don't be afraid to play around with prints. Once you have some great foundation pieces to work with, play around with some more playful pieces to spice up your usual Monday-to-Friday wardrobe. Perhaps swap your classic black pencil skirt with one boasting a fun print. Or take that black blazer you wore as a suited look on Monday and pair it with a black-and-white polka dot silk skirt and a sleek layering top in black or white for a different look on Wednesday. In addition to doubling your wardrobe (and not your budget!), this technique will also help you to cut down

on packing for your business trips. You'll realize how different prints and colors can add freshness to your foundation pieces.

Make your work clothes go the extra mile. There are several ways to dress up work clothes for a business dinner, company function, or even a fun night out on the town. A camisole with lace or a sheer blouse can be worn under a blazer during the day, and then make the transition into evening. Long earrings or a necklace can dress up a suit, and open toe shoes can make any outfit look instantly sexier. A leather jacket is a great investment for the working woman—depending on your job, it can work with a skirt or pants at the office, and then be paired with jeans when you go out on the weekends as well.

A great pair of shoes (and the right handbag!) goes a long way. If you don't already own a quality pair of pumps, then this is a must-have for your work wardrobe to-do list. Invest in a classic pair in a heel height that works for you, so that you can get the maximum wear out of them. If you are looking to keep your more classic pieces current, then buying a new shoe or handbag for the season can make any outfit look instantly new and fresh. You should choose a handbag or briefcase that works well with your clothing, functions easily, and is not too heavy. And keep your shoes and your handbags in tip-top shape. This means taking shoes to a shoemaker for new heels, soles, polish, and nicks. Have broken buckles or handles replaced on bags, and give your leather a cleaning regularly. While these things may seem insignificant to you, they are subtle details that communicate how you take care of yourself to those with whom you come into contact.

Accessories are a working woman's best friend. The right belt, scarf, or jewelry can make all the difference in your overall presentation. Adding the right finishing touches to your clothing can make any outfit look new and exciting. You can make older pieces look instantly new, add personality to basic black ensembles, and make yourself a standout in an office full of otherwise boring outfits. Coordinate your accessories with the trends of the moment and keep the current season in mind as well!

A lot of women make the mistake of neglecting their work wardrobe and investing in other things. But consider this: you spend the majority of your life at work, and therefore most of your time is spent wearing your work clothes. At the end of the day, the way you feel about yourself in your clothes speaks volumes. Make sure you look great and feel good about yourself—and make the investment in clothes that help you accomplish this goal. I promise it will be worth it; people will start to notice—and you'll have the success stories to prove it!

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About Marla Tomazin:

Marla Tomazin, Certified Image Consultant, established her image consulting business in 1990 with the goal of helping clients identify an authentic image and develop its effective expression.

Through her successful career in the fashion and retail industries, Marla has gained invaluable expertise in retail buying, merchandising, sales, and marketing. She began with May Company in Denver after earning a B.S. in Marketing from the University of Denver. Marla moved to New York where she worked with several well-known Seventh Avenue design firms. As she developed her business skills, Marla made a serendipitous discovery—an innate sense of style and facility for working with fabrics and colors to maximum advantage.

The progression to Certified Image Consultant was a natural transition. Marla utilizes her abilities in evaluating body shape, movement, and coloring as well as synthesizing optimal cuts, lines, colors, and textures. This results in balance and proportion that accentuate attributes and conceal flaws. Her clients include women, men, and corporations seeking external revitalization that mirrors their internal development.

She has lectured at The Learning Annex on “How to Become an Image Consultant” and at The American Women’s Economic Development Corporation on “What Does Your Image Say About You?”

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