

TOOL 02

First Impression Kit

What to wear, what to carry, and how your first day will feel, hour by hour.

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Clean, neat, and easy to give instructions to

On your first day, people decide very quickly what kind of colleague you will be. You cannot control everything, but you can control how you arrive.

WHY IT WORKS

Research by psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov (Princeton, 2006) found that people form impressions of a face in about a tenth of a second, and that longer looks mostly confirm the first judgment. Career guides from Indeed and The Muse give the same advice for a first day: keep your look simple and polished until you know the dress code.

The goal is not to impress

Many new assistants try to look impressive on Day 1. That is the wrong target. You are not there to be admired. You are there to be **trusted with work**. The look that earns trust is quiet: clean, neat, and approachable. It says *I am organized, I take this seriously, and you can hand me a task right now*.

Clean

Pressed clothes, clean shoes, neat hair and nails, light or no fragrance.

Neat

Good fit, simple colors, a tidy bag, nothing that needs adjusting all day.

Easy to instruct

Notebook in hand, calm face, ready to listen. You look like someone who gets things done.

FROM 26 YEARS AT THE DESK

In every country I worked in, the dress codes were different, but one thing never changed: the people who were trusted fastest were the ones who looked clean and calm, not the ones who looked expensive. I always chose quiet jewelry, comfortable shoes and a bag I could open in front of anyone. Nothing about me should distract from the work.

What does the dress code really mean?

If nobody told you, find out before Day 1. If you cannot, dress one step above what you saw.

DRESS CODE	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS	SAFE FIRST-DAY CHOICE
Business formal	Suits, formal dresses, closed shoes	A dark suit or a dark dress with a blazer
Business professional	Tailored separates, blazers, smart shoes	Tailored trousers or skirt, a blouse, a blazer
Business casual	No jeans, no suits; smart and relaxed	Tailored trousers or a midi skirt, a blouse or fine knit, loafers or flats
Smart casual	Neat jeans may be fine; still polished	Dark tailored jeans or chinos, a neat top, a light blazer or cardigan

How to find out the dress code

- ☐ Ask your recruiter or HR contact in writing: *"Could you tell me the usual dress code for the team?"*
- ☐ Remember what people wore at your interview, or look at team photos on the company website or LinkedIn.
- ☐ When unsure, **dress one notch above** the office. It is easy to remove a blazer; it is hard to look more polished halfway through the day.
- ☐ In week one, watch what your boss and the other assistants wear, then adjust quietly.

FOR EVERY STYLE

Every level of dress code can be modest. A long skirt, a loose blouse, a cardigan or a headscarf all fit perfectly with these rules. What matters is the same for everyone: clean, pressed, well fitted and simple.

Head to toe, the night before

Tick each line when you lay your clothes out. If anything fails a check, change it tonight, not tomorrow morning.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Clothes are clean, pressed and free of lint or hairs | ☐ Shoes are clean, comfortable and already worn in |
| ☐ Sit test: nothing pulls, gaps or rides up when you sit | ☐ Plasters or foot padding if the shoes are new |
| ☐ Reach test: you can reach a high shelf comfortably | ☐ Jewelry is quiet: nothing that jangles on a keyboard |
| ☐ Simple, neutral colors; no slogans or big logos | ☐ Bag is tidy inside: you may open it in front of people |
| ☐ A layer you can add or remove (offices are often cold) | ☐ Fragrance is light or none |
| ☐ Nothing you need to keep adjusting all day | ☐ Hair neat, nails clean, glasses clean |
| | ☐ Phone on silent |

CALM MOMENT

Lay everything out, including your bag, then stop. Say to yourself: *"Tomorrow is ready. I do not need to think about it again tonight."* Closing the task on purpose helps your mind let it go.

The First Day Bag Checklist

Pack it the night before, so the morning is calm.

DOCUMENTS

- ☐ **Photo ID for HR.** In the US, the I-9 form needs a passport, or a driver's license plus your Social Security card. Check your HR email for the exact list.
- ☐ **Bank details for payroll:** account and routing numbers
- ☐ **Your offer letter** and any HR forms you were asked to fill in
- ☐ A plastic folder to keep papers flat

FOR WORK

- ☐ **Your own notebook** (you will write everything down)
- ☐ **Two pens** that you like (one always disappears)
- ☐ Phone and charger
- ☐ Your calendar or planner

FOR YOU

- ☐ **A small snack and a packed lunch**, or money for lunch
- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Mints and tissues
- ☐ Hand cream and lip balm
- ☐ Plasters for new shoes, or foot padding
- ☐ A spare cardigan or blazer: offices are often cold
- ☐ Stain pen
- ☐ Any medication you need
- ☐ Umbrella

FROM 26 YEARS AT THE DESK

Pack a snack, always. On my first day in every office, almost nobody took me to lunch. Not because people were unkind, but because everyone already has their routine. Ask where people eat, then be ready to look after yourself for a few days. You will slowly join in.

How the first day usually goes

Every office is different, but most first days follow this shape. Knowing it in advance takes away half the worry.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS	WHAT YOU DO
Night before	Clothes and bag ready	Read Day 0 of the plan. Practice your introduction once, out loud. Sleep early.
Arrival	Reception, security or HR	Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early. Wait calmly, phone away. Smile at everyone, including the receptionist and security.
First hour	Paperwork, desk, logins	Notebook open. Write every name, room and instruction. Ask where the restroom, kitchen and supplies are.
Late morning	Introductions, maybe a tour	Use your 30-second introduction. Listen more than you speak.
Lunch	Everyone has a routine	Ask where people usually eat. If nobody invites you, eat your packed lunch and enjoy the break.
Afternoon	Reading, shadowing, small tasks	Observe. Do not change anything yet. Note questions to ask later in one batch.
End of day	People leave at different times	Thank your boss or supervisor. Ask: <i>"What time should I arrive tomorrow?"</i> Write your notes.

FROM 26 YEARS AT THE DESK

I treated everyone the same on my first day, from the most senior person to the person who cleaned the office. Very often, the people with the smallest titles are the ones who know where everything is, and they remember how you treated them.

Lunch, body language, and being easy to work with

Lunch on Day 1

Do not expect to be taken to lunch. In many offices nobody arranges it, simply because everyone is busy with their own routine. That is not rejection. Ask a friendly question, such as *"Where do people usually go for lunch?"*, then look after yourself for a few days. A packed lunch also gives you a quiet break if the morning was overwhelming. You will slowly be invited to join in.

Body language that says "I'm ready"

- ☐ Stand and sit tall, with relaxed shoulders
- ☐ Make friendly eye contact and smile when you are introduced
- ☐ Offer a handshake if that is the custom there; a warm nod is fine if you prefer it or if others do not shake hands
- ☐ Keep your notebook open and your phone away
- ☐ Nod and take notes while someone explains; it shows you are listening

How to be easy to give instructions to

- ☐ **Repeat back:** *"So you'd like X by Thursday, in this format. Got it."*
- ☐ **Confirm in writing** if the task is complicated: *"As a next step, I'll do X, unless you advise otherwise."*
- ☐ **Batch your questions** instead of interrupting every ten minutes, unless it is urgent
- ☐ **Say when it's done.** A short "Done, it's in your inbox" builds trust faster than anything else