



Dress Code

Does what you wear really matter that much? We asked a group of young people, and here is an extract from their conversation:

- TARA:** I think it matters a lot. People judge us based on first appearance and how we dress is a big part of creating a good first impression. When I see someone walking down the street, I notice what they are wearing. How people dress says a lot about them.
- KEN:** That's partly because it's drilled into us from such an early age! When I was in high school, the teachers used to tell us our uniform was a symbol of the school's values and that it created a sense of unity and collective pride. I didn't really care about that, but on the flip side, I do think having a uniform helped me as I didn't have to worry about what to wear when I was getting ready, half asleep in the morning.
- EVA:** When I was at school, I didn't have to wear a uniform, but my school was still super strict about what we wore. They used the same 'collective pride' argument and said the dress code helped students focus on their classes rather than how they look. They also said it would help prepare us for the future because whether we like it or not, dress codes are everywhere.
- TARA:** I agree with that last point. I mean there are dress codes for most situations even if they aren't written, right? My appearance at work is important. If I don't keep to my company's dress code, I could lose my job.
- TOMAS:** That's crazy. I don't think there should be dress codes. It tells us that society values conformity, it says, 'Be like everyone else.' I like to express myself through my clothes and show some kind of individuality. How I dress is part of my identity. A dress code stifles our freedom and our ability to develop a sense of self.
- KEN:** Yes, but it does matter what we wear. It's about knowing what the expectations are, whether you're in an office or at a wedding or a funeral. We think about what to wear and how we look when we're out with friends, right? It's about knowing what's appropriate in a given situation — casual, formal, whatever. I mean, would you trust a doctor dressed in scruffy clothes and showing a lot of tattoos?
- TOMAS:** But who determines what's appropriate? I have a small tattoo on my arm. At a job interview last week, someone told me I'd have to cover it up if I wanted a job in sales. My tattoo has nothing to do with my ability to sell cars.
- EVA:** Yes, but you didn't get the job, did you, which may just prove the point. Our appearance, especially how we dress, is taken as a sign of respect; respect for ourselves, for our school, or employer. Like it or not, people judge us by how we dress and take care of our appearance.
- KEN:** I have to say, if I was interviewing two people for the same job and one of them came to the interview in jeans and a T-shirt and the other came in a suit, I know who I'd be more likely to hire.

VOCABULARY

Here are some words that will be useful in this unit. How many do you know? Work with a partner to figure out the meaning of any words that you don't know.

appearance	dress code	judge
appropriate	expectations	respect for
casual	freedom	scruffy
collective	identity	stifle
comply with	inappropriate	symbol
conformity	individuality	uniform

What other words and phrases do you know related to the topic?

VOCABULARY ACTIVITIES

- A. Fill in the blanks with words from the list above. Remember to use the correct word form.
- Some people feel _____ by strict dress codes. They want more _____ to wear whatever they choose.
 - Other people feel uniforms are _____ of unity.
 - Like it or not, other people often judge you by your _____.
 - It's _____ to wear jeans and a T-shirt to most job interviews.
 - Dress codes are everywhere. There are _____ about what is acceptable in a situation such as at an office or at a party, for example.
- B. Work with a partner. Make a list of adjectives you use to answer the following questions.
- Think about different activities you do. What are the expectations for how you dress in those situations?
 - What do you or people you know wear to express their individuality?



Quick Fact

Mexico — In elementary and middle school, students have to wear uniforms, but not in high school.

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Think about different situations and what is appropriate to wear in each of them. Fill in your ideas. Then work with a partner and compare your ideas.

