

Ever been in that situation where you show up at a function and you're dressed differently from everyone else? Embarrassing, isn't it? Try being the protocol officer who ill-advisedly told his or her commander that the Air Force equivalent to "Army Blue with four-in-hand" at an afternoon reception hosted by the Army was the mess dress uniform.

Specifying dress for a function should be a straightforward process. And yet it is one of the top causes for embarrassment or confusion at social and official events. In this chapter we'll try to give you a few useful hints and do's and don'ts on dress. Following these simple rules can keep you out of trouble in the clothing department!

Types of Dress

Until a few years ago, it was considered "good protocol" to use terms like "formal dress," and "informal" on invitations. These terms are still in use today, but from our perspective, are dangerous and could lead to trouble if you use them on your invitations. Following are types of dress we recommend for official and social functions from the most casual to the most formal. In terms of dress, here's "what the Captain really means to say":

Casual Dress.

This term means "comfortably unrestricted" and offers the broadest of possibilities for dress. Invitations for military equivalents for "casual dress" will state the uniform and in most cases this will be the "duty uniform." For Air Force personnel, this usually translates to light blue shirt w/without tie, but as easily could be BDU's or flight suits for many duty sections. If "uniformity" of dress is not important, specifying duty uniform for Air Force functions may be acceptable. For example, duty uniform is appropriate for folks attending a function like a commander's call (principals or personnel receiving recognition may wear Service Dress). The **bottom line** here, as always when specifying dress, is: If it is important everyone be in the same uniform, be specific! Explicitly call for "Long-Sleeve Blue Shirt w/tie" if that's what you want people to wear.

Be especially careful about calling for the "duty uniform" for functions where there's likely to be members from other services attending. For example, to a Navy officer, "duty uniform" means "Service Dress Uniform (White or Blue)," the Navy's equivalent to our Service Dress!

The casual civilian equivalent dress at **military official functions** is typically what they would ordinarily wear to work on a day-to-day basis. For civilian guests from outside the military community, appropriate attire could range from slacks and open neck shirt to business suit. (Expect most community dignitaries to show up in sports coat and tie or business suit unless you advise them otherwise)

At **civilian casual functions**, dress for men will normally be a short or long-sleeved open-neck shirt, perhaps a sweater or sports coat, but not tie. Sometimes even blue jeans are acceptable; if so, state up front! For ladies, any casual dress, slacks, pants suit, blouses, and long or short skirts are appropriate.

Sports Coat and Tie.

This is the next stage up the ladder towards more formal attire and would be appropriate for some icebreakers or dinner at the commander's quarters. For men, this means a sports jacket or blazer with color-coordinated slacks and tie. Women have the option of wearing an appropriate dress or a dressy slacks outfit. Don't use "coat and tie" unless you don't care if some men show up in business suits. If you want the less formal, specify "sports coat and tie."

Business Suit.

This form of dress most closely equates to "informal," and for men, should be a dark (subdued) suit with a tie. It can include three-piece suits as well. Women should wear business suit, or a dressy, street-length or "Sunday" dress.

The military counterpart to "business suit" is Service Dress for Air Force and its equivalent for the other services. The types of military functions where the Service Dress uniform is appropriate include: ceremonies, parades, reviews, official visits of civilian dignitaries, changes of command, and afternoon receptions. (Note: for afternoon receptions the other services have a slightly more formal uniform that is usually specified at receptions hosted by the Army, Navy or Marine Corps.)

Business suit is an appropriate form of dress to specify for official dinners at downtown restaurants, afternoon or early evening welcome/farewell receptions hosted by community leaders, and many special-event dinners.

Formal wear.

This generally breaks down into two categories ("black tie" and "white tie"), with the more formal "white tie" mainly applying to state-events in the Washington D.C. area or certain major foreign city capitols. Outside of Washington D.C., most of us only are concerned about what to wear at "black tie" events. In the Air Force, this is the Mess Dress Uniform and is appropriate attire for functions like dinings-in, dinings-out, some commander's holiday/New Year's receptions, and military weddings (if you're one of the participants), and various civilian "black tie" affairs like charity or holiday balls.

The civilian equivalent to our mess dress uniform is a dinner jacket or black tuxedo with black bow tie. Appropriate attire for the ladies would be long or short evening dress.

**"Many women suffer discomfort because
they often buy shoes to fit the occasion
instead of the feet."
Anonymous**

Frequently Asked Questions About Dress

Q: If in doubt, from whom should you seek advice as to what you should wear?

A: Some references will tell you not to ask anyone as they may be no better informed than you. Our view is that if there's doubt, contact the Hostess (or Host). Posing the question something like this will usually work: "I was planning on wearing a nice pants suit to your tea next Thursday. Will this be appropriate attire?" For official functions, call the protocol office issuing the invitation.

Q: When should I specify what the dress is?

A: If you have to ask the question, always! Be especially sensitive when developing itineraries for visiting dignitaries. Explicitly call attention to the uniform/civilian equivalent to be worn and reflect changes when they happen in the itinerary. (For example, Service Dress may be the uniform during the day, but dress for dinner could be business suit.) Again, be as specific as you can, and always explicitly include both military and civilian attire on invitations when you want the military in uniform at a function with civilian guests.

Q: What do I wear in place of the Air Force White Ceremonial Uniform to functions where my Navy counterparts are wearing Full Dress Uniforms and the Army the Army Blue or White Uniform:

A: With the phase-out of the White Ceremonial Uniform, it's appropriate to wear the Air Force Service Dress Uniform.

Q: What is the difference between a dinner dress and an evening dress?

A: A dinner dress usually covers the back. An evening dress is more elaborate with a lower cut back and shoulders exposed.

Q: Where do I go for answers if my situation's not covered here?

A: There are several excellent texts on the subject. We especially recommend Service Etiquette by Oretta D. Swartz. And Questions You Never Thought to Ask

Why are the Navy's bell-bottomed trousers flared at the feet?

They're worn large at the bottom in order to roll up easily above the knees for scrubbing decks. This feature was of great practical value when seamen went overboard in shallow water to land pulling boats.

Who wears aiguillettes?

Aides to the President of the United States and to sovereigns, royalty, and viceroys wear them on the right side, and aides to all other senior officials, officers, and dignitaries wear them on the left side. Naval aiguillettes are blue and gold, while those of the Marine Corps and the Army are red and gold. The Air Force aiguillette is silver.

Do you know the reasoning behind male and female buttoning?

Men's buttons were placed on the right side for better access to drawing their swords which were hung on the left side. It was more efficient to place the buttons on the right side so a threatened soldier could reach for his weapon with his fighting hand while his left unbuttoned his garment. Women, on the other hand, had their buttons on the left side

because women carried their children on their left hip and therefore preferred to nurse them at the left breast. (Or perhaps, it's because "With her 'protector' on the right, a lady's coat buttoned to the left so that both she and the gentleman could slip their free hands into their coat fronts.")

Speaking of buttons, what's the origin of those confounded ornamental buttons on the sleeves of some uniforms?

Several sources agree that the original purpose of ornamental buttons was to keep soldiers (or homesick midshipmen on their first cruise) from wiping their nose on the sleeves of their dress uniforms.

The first uniforms that could be called such in the present sense of the word were those fitted for the household troops of Louis XIV (seventeenth century). By 1700 almost all soldiers in Europe wore uniforms. Prior to the seventeenth century, soldiers conformed to the civilian dress of the time and were distinguished only by their military arms and equipment. The armies of the old Roman Empire did not wear a true uniform. They did, however, present a somewhat uniform appearance by virtue of having helmets, body armor, shields and weapons of a more or less standard design.

Did you know commissioned officers wore chevrons long before noncommissioned officers did?

Inverted gold chevrons were used by the British Army up until 1830. Their use in the U.S. Army appears to have come into vogue at West Point in 1817. Since 1832, only noncommissioned officers have worn chevrons, except at West Point.

Ever wondered where trouser cuffs came from?

Introduced about 75 years ago, the fashion came about out of the wearer's desire to keep his garments out of something messy. For the wrist cuff, this something was food. For the trouser cuff, the offending substance was probably mud. After long years of slogging around with soiled trouser legs, men finally got the bright idea to roll them up and out of the mud. It wasn't until just before World War I the improvisation became a fad and tailors began to sew cuffs in place.

The first "clothing allowance" probably went to recruits in 15th century England who were given an allowance for "coat money" (in addition to the "conduct money" to cover their travel to join their units).

The oldest uniforms still in existence are those worn by the Papal Guard of the Vatican (said to have been designed by Michelangelo) and those of the "Yeomen of the Guard" raised by Henry VII in 1485 (the "beefeaters" of the royal guard today).

Other Services' Uniform Equivalents

As indicated earlier, sometimes the toughest challenge for the protocol officer is to sort out the differences between the uniforms of the various services and determining how best to specifying military dress on an invitation if members from other services are

expected to attend. Following is a Uniform Comparison Chart that equates uniforms of the services (including equivalent civilian dress for men and women) for the various types of functions, from casual to formal. It was compiled from inputs from the headquarters of the services, and should help you in most situations. However, remember that uniforms change, and you should stay abreast of the latest service guidelines.

TABLE OF SERVICE EQUIVALENT UNIFORMS

EVENT	CIVILIAN ATTIRE		ARMY	NAVY	AIR FORCE	MARINES
	MEN	WOMEN				

CASUAL EVENT

Working in field or plant environment.	Sports Jacket (no tie) Open Collar, Sporty	Simple dress, or nice slacks, jeans	Battle dress Army Class B ⁽¹⁾	Aviation working green, winter working blue or khaki ⁽²⁾	BDU SSS/LSS ⁽³⁾ w/out tie	Utility
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BUSINESS EVENT

Business and informal social occasions.	Business suit Coat and tie	Very dressy dress/suit or cocktail dress Dressy dress/suit Afternoon dress/suit	Army Green ⁽⁴⁾	Service dress blue Service dress white Summer khaki or white, winter blue	Service dress SSS/LSS w/ or w/o tie	Service A ⁽⁵⁾ Service B ⁽⁶⁾ Service C ⁽⁷⁾
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PARADE

Parades/ceremonies and reviews.	Business Suit	Very dressy dress/suit or cocktail dress	Army Green Army Blue Army White	Full dress blue Full dress white	Service dress Service dress	Dress Blue
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SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Social functions of a general or official nature, private formal dinners, dinner dances, club affairs. ⁽⁸⁾	Black Tie Tuxedo or Dinner Jacket	Long dress Very fancy short dress, evening trousers with very dressy top	Army Blue Mess Army White Mess	Dinner dress blue Dinner dress white	Mess dress	Evening dress or mess dress
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OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS

Official formal evening functions, state occasions.	White tie	Long formal dress	Army Blue Mess/ Evening dress ⁽⁹⁾ / Army White Evening Mess Dress	Dinner dress blue	Mess dress
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NOTES

- (1) Green slacks and light green shirt with or without tie.
- (2) Olive green service uniform with tie. Working blues and khaki are variants of the informal uniform and can be either short or long sleeve.
- (3) SSS - Short sleeve shirt. LSS - Long sleeve shirt.
- (4) Army green service uniform is similar to the Air Force service dress. Army blue uniform is "formal" when worn with black bow tie and "informal" when worn with black 4-in-hand tie.
- (5) Service A - Blue jacket, trousers, and white shirt.
- (6) Service B - Same as A, except with ribbons.
- (7) Service C - Blue trousers and khaki shirt.
- (8) Note: For black tie functions, for all services a tie is mandatory. For white tie functions, a bow tie is mandatory for all services.
- (9) Army Blue Mess meets requirement of "black tie". Army Blue Evening Mess composed of blue mess jacket and pants, white formal dress shirt with wing collar, white vest, and white bow tie.