

# What Should I Wear To Court?

If it's your first time in court, you may have a lot of questions about the day including: when to turn up, what to bring, where to go, what to say and even what to wear.

If you are representing yourself, working out the complex rules of going to court can be tricky, and while clothing may seem trivial, turning up in the wrong attire may just compound your feelings of stress or discomfort.

And if you come across certain magistrates, inappropriate clothing may even earn you a lecture.

## **You're a grub!**

This is what happened in Victoria to 23-year-old Jai Russell Elliott who turned up to court wearing thongs, shorts and a singlet.

Elliott turned up to plead guilty to the charge of "assault or obstruct police and committing a public nuisance"; but before he got to the sentencing, the [magistrate gave him a lecture on his poor wardrobe choice](#), telling him that if he behaved like a "grub" he would be treated like one too.

These are not exactly the words you want to hear from a person who is about to decide what penalty you will be given.

Whether pleading guilty or not guilty, you want the court to concentrate on what you (or your lawyer) has to say, not your outfit.

Dressing inappropriately for court can give the magistrate or judge the impression that you do not respect the court, or don't take the process seriously. Some magistrates may take offence to defendants who do not dress appropriately or find it disrespectful.

If you intend, for example, to tell the magistrate about your genuine remorse and acceptance of responsibility, you do not want the magistrate forming the opposite opinion based on how you dress.

### **Appropriate dress**

So what should you wear if going to a District or [Local court in New South Wales?](#)

Court is a formal environment, but this doesn't mean you need to wear a tuxedo.

If you have a dark coloured suit, this is the time to wear it. If not, men should wear pants, a long sleeved shirt and a tie if you have one.

Women should wear pants, or a skirt that is not too short, and a shirt or conservative top. A dark coloured, plain dress is also acceptable.

If you don't have those things, wear clothing that is neat, clean and ironed.

Needless to say, you should not wear anything that could be considered provocative – for example, a t-shirt with marijuana leaves or profanity printed on it – and it is best to avoid visible tattoos and excessive piercings.

Keep bright colours to a minimum and don't show too much skin, and try not to wear anything that is ripped.

Remove your hat and sunglasses before entering the courtroom and make sure you aren't chewing gum, or carrying a newspaper, magazine, food or drinks.

### **Does clothing really make a difference?**

Your parents probably told you that it is what's inside that counts – but unfortunately, the reality is that people judge

others based on their outward appearance – and courts are no exception.

Psychologists have found that how you dress can significantly affect your outcome in given situations, and those who dress appropriately have a better chance of success.

Of course, what you wear to court should never be an indication of your guilt or innocence, but fair or not, how you look can have an impact on the outcome.

### **Should I wear my glasses?**

Glasses are often associated with intelligence or ‘geekiness’, but did you know that [studies have found them to have a marked impact on the outcome of criminal trials?](#)

They suggest that wearing glasses can have either a positive or negative effect on perceptions of the wearer, depending on the crime they are accused of. It was found that glasses may help a person accused of a violent crime, whereas they could have the opposite effect when it comes to white-collar crime.

This is because glasses – regardless of race or gender – give the impression of diminished forcefulness and increased sophistication. This explains why they may help a person appear less likely to commit a violent crime, but hurt a person accused of complex corporate fraud.

Studies have also found that a person’s attractiveness can influence jurors, and that an attractive person is more likely to receive a “softer” punishment than a less attractive individual for certain crimes. Conversely, it was found that attractiveness can be harmful if it assisted in the commission of the crime itself – for example, swindling someone – and can lead to harsher penalties.

So when you have your day in court, make sure you look tidy and act respectful in order to give yourself the best shot at

the outcome you want.