Nailing your first interview is about so much more than just the things you say or write on your resume. The first impression that you make takes place as you enter the room. It happens before you open your mouth and even say a word. It is not only about your choice of clothes but your presence. Your first impression often comes down to three basic things. Your handshake, your style of clothing, and your body language.

The key to nailing your handshake is to know your audience. It is crucial to use a firm grip and present yourself as a serious potential employee but the most effective handshake is often determined by the interviewer. You need to be careful not to crush the interviewers hand but also be sure not to present the proverbial “dead fish” handshake. It may feel strange but practice on your friends and family, and even strangers on the street, because getting the handshake right is a major head start in the career process. And who knows if that stranger may turn into a potential networking ally!

Your style is also determined by the company for which you hope to work. Long gone are the simple days when formal attire was the proper thing to do. A suit, a dress, a tie was the only reasonable choice. The job market is now dominated by new and innovative tech companies who are much more impressed by a hip and stylish look like a cardigan and khakis. Often times your potential employer will give you no indication of what to wear. Stressful right? It can be. How do you know what to do? Research, research, research. Look at the Company website, watch their videos, become a LinkedIn and Glassdoor ninja. Even look up people who work there on LinkedIn and see what they are wearing and if you can’t decide, it is always safe to go one step more formal.

Style is also determined by geography and industry. California and Massachusetts are more liberal than Texas for example. No judgement call, just the way it is. If you are interviewing in Hawaii chances are you would not need to wear a suit. NYC you probably would. Know your city and know the job you are applying for.

Finally, body language plays a major part in whether you’ll get that job. The office is not your family room and you need to be sure to act as such. Make sure that throughout the interview you maintain steady eye contact, keep good posture, and look interested in what the interviewer has to say. Getting your body language right will show that you are serious about the position and will do a great job without even having to say a word. Keep these three principles in mind-handshake, style and body language and you are one step further on your pathway to success.

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Intern 2017