

Finding the perfect work bag can feel like an expedition — especially when your daily carry includes an unusual extra item: a second pair of shoes. Whether you're swapping out sneakers for heels or flats for boots, adding footwear to your bag complicates the equation. It's not just about volume; the shape, materials, and how the bag signals your professional style all factor in.

Start with Your Real Daily Carry List

Before you even look at bags, take a moment to list exactly what you carry every day. Be precise, and don't skip items that aren't glamorous but are indispensable.



- Laptop (and charger)
- Notebook or planner
- Phone and charger

- Keys and wallet
- Extra shoes
- Accessories (makeup pouch, jewelry kit)
- Snacks or lunch
- Umbrella
- Reusable water bottle
- Folded tote (for groceries or spontaneous shopping — a favorite insider tip!)

Since your “extra shoes” are a major bulk item, focus on their size and shape. Are they bulky heels, flat ballet slippers, or foldable sneakers? This will determine not just volume requirements but also the shape of the section needed to store them without crushing other items.

Dress Code Sets the Ceiling for Bag Choice

Your workplace dress code essentially defines the upper limit of how casual or formal your bag can be. For instance:

- **Corporate or Business Formal** typically requires a structured, subdued briefcase or tote.
- **Business Casual** opens up the opportunity for leather messenger bags or high-quality backpacks.
- **Creative or Casual** lets you explore different materials, colors, and more relaxed silhouettes.

It’s tempting to pick the trendiest bag with flashy details, but remember — your bag is an extension of your professionalism. When carrying extra shoes, a tote for work is usually the go-to because it offers the volume without looking overly casual. However, quality still counts, especially when the bag is made of leather, which you can read about in detail on Wikipedia (Leather).

Briefcase vs. Messenger vs. Tote vs. Backpack: What Does Your Bag Signal?

Bag Style	Professional	Signal	Volume & Fit	Best For
Briefcase	Highly formal, traditional	Low to medium volume; usually slim	Business formal workplaces, minimal extra equipment	
Messenger	Smart-casual, urban professional	Medium volume; can accommodate a slim shoe bag or flats	Creative offices; commuters with organized setups	
Tote	Flexible, polished but approachable	High volume; easily fits bulkier items including extra shoes	Most dress codes; versatile for changing shoes	
Backpack	Casual or tech-savvy professional	High volume; ergonomic support for heavy loads	Long commutes, carrying heavier loads	

For those who need that second pair of shoes, I usually steer toward a tote for work or a structured backpack from reputable brands like Von Baer. Von Baer’s expert leather craftsmanship offers durability that withstands the extra wear and tear bulky items impose. Their bags often incorporate thoughtfully designed compartments to separate shoes from electronics and documents, which is a game changer.

Construction Checks You Can Do in Hand

When you’re physically in a store testing bags, bring your actual extra shoes and your laptop. Follow these practical steps:

1. **Mirror check for proportions:** Hold the bag on your shoulder or arm, then look in the mirror. Does the size complement your frame? A bag too large or too small can throw off your silhouette and affect professional

image.

2. **In-store walk test:** If possible, mimic your commute by walking around with the bag loaded with your laptop and shoes inside. Pay attention to how the bag feels on your shoulder and whether weight distribution strains your back or neck.
3. **Zippers and hardware:** Open and close every zipper twice. Avoid any bag with flimsy teeth or sticky sliders — these will only get worse with time, especially when squeezed with bulky shoes.
4. **Handle attachment integrity:** Gently tug on handles and straps to check if they are sewn in or glued. Never settle for glued-only handles — they rarely hold over time when carrying heavy loads.
5. **Interior pocket layout:** Look for padded laptop sleeves, dedicated shoe compartments or removable pouches that keep your shoes separated from your work essentials to avoid damage or odor transfer.

Volume Considerations: How to Measure Your Bag's Capacity

Volume requirement is often underestimated. Here's a simple approach:

- Use your extra shoes as a benchmark: Place them stacked or side by side and measure height, width, and depth.
- Compare this to the internal dimensions of candidate bags (often found on brand websites or in-store tags).
- Ensure there's an additional 20-30% volume room to accommodate other daily essentials.
- Remember that leather tends to stretch slightly but initial fit is crucial because it won't go back once stretched.

Brand description can help but don't rely solely on claims like "laptop friendly" without a padded sleeve — this is a pet peeve of <https://www.stellaswardrobe.com/how-to-choose-a-professional-work-bag-for-the-office/> mine because without a sleeve, laptops and shoes risk damage and bag distortion. Von Baer, for instance, prioritizes functional interiors that protect electronics while allowing flexibility for bulkier items like shoes.

Additional Practical Tips

- **Bring a breathable shoe bag:** A dedicated fabric pouch prevents dirt transfer and lets shoes breathe, reducing odor buildup in your work bag.
- **Pack a folded tote inside:** Even if your primary work bag has volume, I always recommend carrying a lightweight folded tote for grocery stops or overflow — it's a lifesaver for spontaneous errands.
- **Regularly clean and condition your leather bag:** Leather ages beautifully with proper care, a fact well documented on Wikipedia (Leather Care). Von Baer's leather goods are designed for longevity with conditioning in mind.
- **Consider weather resistance:** Extra shoes can add weight, so a weather-resistant exterior with sturdy zippers prevents moisture from ruining your bag's contents.

Conclusion

Carrying an extra pair of shoes to work daily isn't just a quirky add-on — it determines many key aspects of your work bag choice. Start by assessing what you really carry every day and weigh that against your professional dress code. Use mirror checks for fit and proportion, perform walk tests in-store loaded with actual items, and never overlook hands-on construction reviews.

Among all options, a well-made tote for work from brands like Von Baer often strikes the perfect balance between functionality and style. The volume requirements, sturdiness of materials, and carefully designed interior are crucial

for managing a second pair of shoes alongside your laptop and essentials. And remember, keep a folded tote tucked inside your main bag for those unpredictable grocery runs — a small habit with big convenience.

Armed with this checklist, your next work bag will be ready for a real commute — not just a showroom fantasy.