



Interview Tips

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I. How to prepare for a Job Interview

Make a good impression at your interview by doing a little homework beforehand.

Research the Company and the Position

The more you know about the company and the job you are applying for, the better you will appear in the interview. An interviewer will be impressed by your interest and motivation, and you will be able to explain what you can do for the company.

Find out as much key information as you can about the company, its products and its customers. If possible, talk to people who work at the company. There may be other sources of information on the Web, especially if the company is publicly traded.

Search for the following:

- Office locations
- Products and services
- Customers
- Competitors
- Philosophy
- History
- Recent news
- Financial info, including salary and stock

Prepare for the Actual Interview

- Practice your answers to Common Questions asked by the Hiring Authority. Likewise, prepare a list of Questions to ask the employer. Most interviews follow this pattern: First, you answer questions about your experience and qualifications, then you ask questions about the job.
- Rehearse your interview with a friend. You should be able to convey all pertinent information about yourself in 15 minutes. Tape yourself to check your diction, speed, and body language.
- Prepare your interview materials before you leave. Bring several copies of your resume, a list of references, and, if appropriate, any work samples. Make sure they are all up-to-date.
- Dress professionally and comfortably. You will be judged in some respects by what you wear. When in doubt, dress conservatively.

For women:

- A straight-forward business suit is best.
- Wear sensible pumps.
- Be moderate with make-up and perfume.
- Wear simple jewelry.
- Hair and fingernails should be well-groomed.

For men:

- A clean, ironed shirt and conservative tie are a must.
- A simple jacket or business suit is a good idea as well.
- Shoes should be polished.
- Face should be clean-shaven; facial hair should be neatly trimmed.
- Hair and fingernails should be well-groomed.
- Use cologne or after-shave sparingly.
- Bring pen and notepad to jot down any information you may need to remember.

II. Interview Types

There are different types of job interviews you may participate in during the hiring process. Here are the major ones and tips on how to handle them.

Stress Interview

Stress interviews are a deliberate attempt to see how you handle yourself. The interviewer may be sarcastic or argumentative, or may keep you waiting. Expect this to happen and, when it does, don't take it personally. Calmly answer each question as it comes. Ask for clarification if you need it and never rush into an answer. The interviewer may also lapse into silence at some point during the questioning. Recognize this as an attempt to unnerve you. Sit silently until the interviewer resumes the questions. If a minute goes by, ask if he or she needs clarification of your last comments.

One-On-One Interview

In a one-on-one interview, it has been established that you have the skills and education necessary for the position. The interviewer wants to see if you will fit in with the company, and how your skills will complement the rest of the department. Your goal in a one-on-one interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer and show him or her that your qualifications will benefit the company.

Screening Interview

A screening interview is meant to weed out unqualified candidates. Providing facts about your skills is more important than establishing rapport. Interviewers will work from an outline of points they want to cover, looking for inconsistencies in your resume and challenging your qualifications. Provide answers to their questions, and never volunteer any additional information. That information could work against you. One type of screening interview is the telephone interview.

Lunch Interview

The same rules apply in lunch interviews as in those held at the office. The setting may be more casual, but remember it is a business lunch and you are being watched carefully. Use the lunch interview to develop common ground with your interviewer. Follow his or her lead in both selection of food and in etiquette.

Committee Interview

Committee interviews are a common practice. You will face several members of the company who have a say in whether you are hired. When answering questions from several people, speak directly to the person asking the question; it is not necessary to answer to the group. In some committee interviews, you may be asked to demonstrate your problem-solving skills. The committee will outline a situation and ask you to formulate a plan that deals with the problem. You don't have to come up with the ultimate solution. The interviewers are looking for how you apply your knowledge and skills to a real-life situation.

II. Interview Types (Con't)

Group Interview

A group interview is usually designed to uncover the leadership potential of prospective managers and employees who will be dealing with the public. The front-runner candidates are gathered together in an informal, discussion-type interview. A subject is introduced and the interviewer will start off the discussion. The goal of the group interview is to see how you interact with others and how you use your knowledge and reasoning powers to win others over. If you do well in the group interview, you can expect to be asked back for a more extensive interview.

Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are merely screening interviews meant to eliminate poorly qualified candidates so that only a few are left for personal interviews. You might be called out of the blue, or a telephone call to check on your resume might turn into an interview. Your mission is to be invited for a personal face-to-face interview. Some tips for telephone interviews:

Anticipate the dialogue: Write a general script with answers to questions you might be asked. Focus on skills, experiences, and accomplishments. Practice until you are comfortable. Then replace the script with cue cards that you keep by the telephone.

Keep your notes handy: Have any key information, including your resume, notes about the company, and any cue cards you have prepared, next to the phone. You will sound prepared if you don't have to search for information. Make sure you also have a notepad and pen so you can jot down notes and any questions you would like to ask at the end of the interview.

Be prepared to think on your feet: If you are asked to participate in a role-playing situation, give short but concise answers. Accept any criticism with tact and grace.

Avoid salary issues: If you are asked how much money you would expect, try to avoid the issue by using a delaying statement or give a broad range with a \$15,000 spread. At this point, you do not know how much the job is worth.

Push for a face-to-face meeting: Sell yourself by closing with something like: "I am very interested in exploring the possibility of working in your company. I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you in person so we can both better evaluate each other. I am free either Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning. Which would be better for you?"

Try to reschedule surprise interviews: You will not be your best with a surprise interview. If you were called unexpectedly, try to set an appointment to call back by saying something like: "I have a scheduling conflict at this time. Can I call you back tomorrow after work, say 6 PM?"

III. Questions from the Employer

By rehearsing interview questions, you'll become more familiar with your own qualifications and will be well prepared to demonstrate how you can benefit an employer.

Some examples:

"Tell me about yourself."

Make a short, organized statement of your education and professional achievements and professional goals. Then, briefly describe your qualifications for the job and the contributions you could make to the organization.

"Why do you want to work here?" or "What about our company interests you?"

Few questions are more important than these, so it is important to answer them clearly and with enthusiasm. Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job, the company and the industry through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company. Unless you work in sales, your answer should never be simply: "money." The interviewer will wonder if you really care about the job.

"Why did you leave your last job?"

The interviewer may want to know if you had any problems on your last job. If you did not have any problems, simply give a reason, such as: relocated away from job; company went out of business; laid off; temporary job; no possibility of advancement; wanted a job better suited to your skills.

If you did have problems, be honest. Show that you can accept responsibility and learn from your mistakes. You should explain any problems you had (or still have) with an employer, but don't describe that employer in negative terms. Demonstrate that it was a learning experience that will not affect your future work.

"What are your best skills?"

If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills the company values. List them, then give examples where you have demonstrated these skills.

"What is your major weakness?"

Be positive; turn a weakness into a strength. For example, you might say: "I often worry too much over my work. Sometimes I work late to make sure the job is done well."

"Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?"

The ideal answer is one of flexibility. However, be honest. Give examples describing how you have worked in both situations.

III. Questions from the Employer (Con't)

"What are your career goals?" or "What are your future plans?"

The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company's goals are compatible. Let him know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance, and be specific as possible about how you will meet the goals you have set for yourself.

"What are your hobbies?" and "Do you play any sports?"

The interviewer may be looking for evidence of your job skills outside of your professional experience. For example, hobbies such as chess or bridge demonstrate analytical skills. Reading, music, and painting are creative hobbies. Individual sports show determination and stamina, while group sport activities may indicate you are comfortable working as part of a team.

Also, the interviewer might simply be curious as to whether you have a life outside of work. Employees who have creative or athletic outlets for their stress are often healthier, happier and more productive.

"What salary are you expecting?"

You probably don't want to answer this one directly. Instead, deflect the question back to the interviewer by saying something like: "I don't know. What are you planning on paying the best candidate?" Let the employer make the first offer.

However, it is still important to know what the current salary range is for the profession. Find salary surveys at the library or on the Internet, and check the classifieds to see what comparable jobs in your area are paying. This information can help you negotiate compensation once the employer makes an offer.

"What have I forgotten to ask?"

Use this as a chance to summarize your good characteristics and attributes and how they may be used to benefit the organization. Convince the interviewer that you understand the job requirements and that you can succeed.

IV. Here are some other job interview questions you might want to rehearse.

Your Qualifications

- What can you do for us that someone else can't do?
- What qualifications do you have that relate to the position?
- What new skills or capabilities have you developed recently?
- Give me an example from a previous job where you've shown initiative.
- What have been your greatest accomplishments recently?
- What is important to you in a job?
- What motivates you in your work?
- What have you been doing since your last job?
- What qualities do you find important in a coworker?

Your Career Goals

- What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- How will you judge yourself successful? How will you achieve success?
- What type of position are you interested in?
- How will this job fit in your career plans?
- What do you expect from this job?
- Do you have a location preference?
- Can you travel?
- What hours can you work?
- When could you start?

Your Work Experience

- What have you learned from your past jobs?
- What were your biggest responsibilities?
- What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?
- How does your previous experience relate to this position?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?
- Whom may we contact for references?

Your Education

- How do you think your education has prepared you for this position?
- What were your favorite classes/activities at school?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Do you plan to continue your education?

V. Asking Questions During Interview

Here are some guidelines for asking questions:

- Prepare five good questions. Understanding that you may not have time to ask them all. Ask questions concerning the job, the company, and the industry or profession. Your questions should indicate your interest in these subjects and that you have read and thought about them. For example, you might start, "I read in Business Week that ... I wonder if that factor is going to have an impact on your business."
- Don't ask questions that raise warning flags. For example, asking "Would I really have to work weekends?" implies that you are not available for weekend assignments. If you are available, rephrase your question. Also, avoid initiating questions about compensation (pay, vacations, etc.) or tuition reimbursements. You might seem more interested in paychecks or time-off than the actual job.
- Don't ask questions about only one topic. People who ask about only one topic are often perceived as one dimensional and not good candidates.
- Clarify. It's OK to ask a question to clarify something the interviewer said. Just make sure you are listening. Asking someone to clarify a specific point makes sense. Asking someone to re-explain an entire subject gives the impression that you have problems listening or comprehending. For example, you can preface a clarifying question by saying: "You mentioned that ABC Company does (blank) . Can you tell me how that works in practice?"

Specific Questions To Ask

A job interview is an opportunity for you to learn more about a potential employer. Indeed, what you learn from an interview may determine whether or not you want the job you're interviewing for. The following are examples of the types of questions you might ask at your job interview.

1. "Can you please tell me how your career has developed at XYZ Corp. Would someone entering the firm today have similar opportunities?"
2. "If I work hard and prove my value to the firm, where might I be in five years?"
3. "I read in your literature that your training program is comprised of three six-month rotations. Does the employee have any input into where he will go at the end of each rotation? How do you evaluate the employee's performance during the training period?"
4. "I read in Business Week that a major competitor of yours is increasing its market share in your main market. What plans does your firm have to regain its lost market share?"
5. "Can you describe for me what a work week is really like as a salesperson for XYZ Corp?"

V. Asking Questions During Interview (Con't)

6. "How many individuals complete your training program each year?"
7. "When does the training program begin?"
8. "What is the length and structure of the training program?"
9. "Do most trainees advance fairly rapidly through the program?"
10. "What career paths have others generally followed after completing the program?"
11. "How does the position and the department contribute to the overall company mission and philosophy?"
12. "What is a typical day (assignment) [for a position you are applying for] in your company?"
13. "What characteristics best describe individuals who are successful in this position?"
14. "Does the position offer exposure to other facets of your organization?"
15. "What other positions and/or departments will I interact with most?"
16. "To whom does this position report?"
17. "How much decision-making authority and autonomy are given to new employees?"
18. "How will my performance be evaluated?"
19. "How often are performance reviews given? By whom?"
20. "What are the opportunities for advancement?"
21. "Does your organization encourage its employees to pursue additional education?"
22. "How would you describe the organization's culture/environment?"
23. "What makes your organization different from its competitors?"
24. "What industry-wide trends are likely to affect your organization's strengths and weaknesses?"
25. "How would you describe you organization's personality and management style?"
26. "How is the work environment affected by the organization's management style?"