



INTERVIEW SKILLS

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Congratulations! The resume and/or job application you recently completed got you a job interview. Now what? How do you get ready for that all-important interview?

Your first interview may be part of a sequence or series of interviews. You might even find yourself being interviewed by a panel of interviewers, or as part of a group of other candidates who are vying for jobs. This flyer has been written, however, under the assumption that you will most typically be involved in a one-on-one, face-to-face interview, and that it is important for you to know the general structure of that kind of interview.

There are two keys to interview success: **preparation** and **practice**. Use this flyer, as well as *Interview Attire*, to help prepare for your job interview, and make note of the opportunities the Career Center provides to help you practice.

BREAKING DOWN THE TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

Most first interviews follow a relatively standard format consisting of three stages.

An understanding of these will help you improve your interview skills. Your goal? To present the image of an intelligent, competent, likeable, and confident job candidate who will easily fit into the work environment you wish to enter.

GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Right or wrong, the interviewer will form an impression of you in the first twenty seconds of the interview. You are totally in control of making it a good one. Here are some tips:

- Greet the interviewer with a smile. Wait until you are asked to be seated.
- Offer a firm, dry handshake: this will demonstrate your confidence.
- Address the interviewer respectfully by his/her last name.
- Establish eye contact and maintain good posture.
- Speak clearly. Be aware of your vocal tone and volume. Speak neither too quickly nor too slowly.

STAGE ONE, *The Introduction*:

This is the social stage of the interview when the candidate and the interviewer establish a rapport with one another. The interviewer will probably take the lead in this part of the interview by providing some background on the organization and the position. Here are some hints to keep in mind for this segment.

- Listen carefully.
- Be prepared to respond to "Tell me about yourself."
- Establish a positive and energetic presence.

Learn and Practice: Attend an interviewing workshop or view the interview PowerPoint on our website. To practice interviewing, use **Perfect Interview** and/or **Interview Stream** (part of our website's CareerExpress suite of programs); schedule an appointment for a mock interview.

STAGE TWO, *Information Exchange*:

Both you and the interviewer will gather information about each other. Remember, interviewing is a two-way process. You are determining whether or not this is the kind of organization for which you want to work, and the interviewer is trying to determine if you would be a quality employee who would fit in well with the "company culture." Here are some suggestions:

- Relax, be yourself, maintain good posture and positive body language, and be attentive to the interviewer.
- You must be prepared to answer questions in this portion of the interview. Provide details, examples and stories that will illustrate your strengths and help the employer remember you.
- Take time with your answers.
- Focus your answers on the needs of the employer.

- Don't be afraid to ask for a question to be re-stated: you want to make sure you understand the question.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions that will give you a good understanding of the requirements of the job.

STAGE THREE, the Close:

This is an opportunity for you to ask any additional questions you might have about the job, and to let the interviewer know how interested you are in the position.

- Recap your strengths as they relate to the position.
- Let the employer know you are capable and willing to perform the tasks involved.
- Show enthusiasm for the job! (if you are truly interested in it).
- Make sure you know the next step in the hiring process. Ask for your interviewer's business card.

FOLLOW UP, Thank the Interviewer:

In addition to being polite to everyone you meet on your interview day, sending a thank you letter, card or email is very important. It allows you to get your name, qualifications, and interest in the position across to the interviewer one more time. Send it immediately!

If you have not heard from the interviewer within the time frame that was mentioned in the interview, call or email to find out where you stand in the job competition.

SOME INTERVIEWING **Q'S AND A'S**

Q: A company wants to interview me over the phone. Any special tips on how to prepare for that?

A: Arrange to take the phone call in a quiet place with no distractions. Have your resume with you, along with the job description and any other helpful materials. Stand up while speaking – it makes your voice sound stronger, and try to avoid verbal ticks like “um,” “er,” and “like.”

Q: An employer wants to interview me on Skype. Any special tips on making sure I do well on Skype?

A: First, look the part. Dress appropriately, based on the nature of the job. Take care with your total appearance. Second, make sure that the interview takes place in a quiet setting with no interruptions and no clutter in the background. A neutral background with a well-organized desktop is best. Next, practice Skyping with friends and record it so you will have an idea of how

you come across on video. Take time to adjust the webcam and the lighting so you are shown to your best advantage. In the event that there is a technical blip, be a problem solver and try to remedy it. And, just like on the phone and in person, don't forget to be yourself and smile.

Q: I understand that some interviewers build a scenario of a problem, and then ask the candidate how he/she would resolve the issue. How can I respond to those kinds of questions?

A: It's difficult to prepare for those kinds of questions because there is never one “right” answer. The employer is just looking to see whether or not you can think analytically, assess all aspects of the situation, and make a common sense decision.

Q: What is a behavioral interview?

A: Behavioral interviews focus on your past performance. In fact, interviewers won't ask you questions – they will make a statement that they want you to respond to, with details, such as:

- Tell me about a time when you had to show leadership.
- Describe a time when you were faced with problems at work that tested your coping skills.
- Give me an example of a project you initiated and completed that involved creative thinking.

To prepare for this, consider the transferable skills and personal qualities that are required for the job. You must have an arsenal of stories, taken from your work and school life, that illustrate the skills and abilities you have used in the past. (If you have never encountered the situation the employer presents, ask if you can describe a related situation in which you used skills or behaviors that would be similar to the statement presented). Your stories should highlight your actions in the situation, and should be related in a concise manner – preferably under two minutes.

Q. I have been on interviews in which the interviewer engages in what I would call “small talk.” How do I prepare for that?

A: You shouldn't feel as though you have to prepare for small talk, which could include comments on the weather, the news or the local sports teams. This is an informal part of the interview, but employers may be checking out how engaged you are with the world and current events, and they prefer candidates who can speak about more than themselves.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND RELATED ADVICE

Determine what the interviewer is looking for in a candidate, and give those qualities back to him/her, bearing in mind how they relate to the position in question. In general, the employer is impressed with interviewees who can show these qualities:

- Strong communication skills
- Solid work ethic
- Flexibility
- Good attitude and positivity
- Professionalism

Here are general questions that are frequently asked during a first interview, and tips on how to respond to them.

Tell Me About Yourself: Talk about your major and how you became interested in it, your expected graduation date, and why you are interested in the position for which you are interviewing. From there you may want to discuss job experience and internships, as well as volunteer experiences and campus involvement. The interviewer is looking for communication skills and your recent history, not childhood stories.

What Do You Consider Your Most Significant Accomplishment? Take time to prepare this answer in advance. Describe in detail your situation and what the outcome or result was. Indicate what qualities were required to achieve this accomplishment and follow with a question like, "Is this something your organization might value?"

Why Do You Believe You Are Qualified For This Position? Choose two or three main factors about the job and about your past experience that are most relevant. Use examples from internships, paid and volunteer positions. Select technical, organizational, or planning skills you have that are tied to the position.

How Do You Handle Pressure? High achievers tend to perform well in high-pressure situations. If you perform well under stress, provide a good example with details, giving an overview of the situation.

Where Do You See Yourself Five Years From Now? You can mention some specific goals that include promotions within your field, or you may express that you would like an opportunity to explore your field further, but don't leave the impression that you want to be with a different employer within those five years. Also, don't indicate that you want an advanced degree unless you know that particular employer would

support your studies while being employed by them!

What Are Your Biggest Strengths? If you aren't prepared to answer this question, why would anyone hire you? Know your three or four key strengths (or "best stuff") as they relate to the job in question. (If you only have time to rehearse one interview answer, make it this one!)

What Do You Consider Your Most Significant Weakness? Do not reveal significant problems. Everyone has a weakness; however, it is best to describe how you are working on turning your weakness into a strength. You may choose to describe something that was once a problem and emphasize how you overcame it. An appropriate response would be, "To strengthen my communication skills, I have joined Toastmasters."

Deadlines, Frustrations, Difficult People And Silly Rules Can Make A Job Difficult. How Do You Handle These Types Of Situations? Most workplaces face these problems daily. Talk about techniques you use when dealing with these issues, most of which should relate to simply using common sense, being diplomatic and putting the issue in the right context.

Why Should We Hire You For This Position? This provides an opportunity for you to summarize your strengths based on the requirements of the position. Relate to specific attributes and accomplishments that you believe might set you apart from other interviewees. This is a way of 'branding' yourself as a special and memorable job candidate.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Federal and state law forbids employers from asking illegal questions in a job interview that would address such areas as age, sex, national origin, health, religion, disabilities, or marital status. Employers' questions must be related to the job you are seeking.

If asked an illegal question, you have three options. You could answer it, you can refuse to answer it, or you could examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, you could be asked, "What country are you from?" Rather than answer directly, you could respond "I am authorized to work in the United States."

OTHER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are your long-range career goals?

How would your last boss describe you?

Do you prefer working by yourself or with others?

What is most important to you: security, power, money, the work environment, or the type of work?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

We see that you don't have any direct experience doing this type of work. What makes you think you can perform well in this job?

Describe your ideal job.

Can you take criticism without feeling upset?

What types of people annoy you?

Do you have any objections to taking a psychological test or a drug test?

What new skills have you learned in the past year?

Why did you apply to work for this organization?

What can you do for us that someone else cannot?

Can you explain this gap in your employment history?

If you were hiring an individual for this position, what qualifications/qualities would you look for?

Why did you choose this field of work?

What academic subjects do you like most/least? Why?

Define what "success" means to you.

Do you plan to continue your education? Do you plan to go for an advanced degree?

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER:

The best candidates are those who ask thoughtful questions, and the best questions are those that come organically from the conversation. This shows you are listening!

What is the next step in the selection process?

To whom would I be reporting?

Would you describe an average day on the job?

Will you show me an organizational chart? Where would I fit in?

What projects or tasks would you like to see accomplished in the near future?

Is there a training program for new recruits and when does it begin and what is the length of the program? How many individuals go through the program each year?

Are advanced training programs available for those who demonstrate outstanding ability?

How often are performance reviews given?

How would you describe your organization's management style?

When can I expect to hear about the outcome of this interview? (**This is very important.** Don't leave until you have an answer to this question!)

More Interview Tips

- Do research on the organization you are interviewing with. Review their website thoroughly and research how they are regarded in their particular industry.
- Plan ahead and know how to get to the interview site. Find out where to park. You must never be late for an interview. If you arrive very early, walk around the block.
- Get proper rest the night before the interview.
- Eat and drink something on the day of the interview, but avoid caffeine and spicy foods that could make you uncomfortable.
- Prepare your outfit ahead of time and make sure it's unwrinkled and that your shoes are polished.
- Remember to bring: a portfolio or briefcase with extra resumes, a nice pen, your personal calendar, brush/comb, breath freshener, **a turned-off** cell phone.
- If appropriate, you may also bring some samples of your work as well as letters of recommendation.
- Do deep breathing exercises to release tension and clear your mind. Psych yourself up by visualizing a successful interview.

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