



INTERVIEW SKILLS

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

It is possible that you could be hired after this interview, but it is now more common for the first interview to 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 first be involved in a one-on-one, face-to-face interview, and that you must overcome this hurdle before you move on in the hiring process.

You've heard that the real estate mantra is "location – location – location"? Well, the interviewing mantra is "preparation – preparation – preparation." Use this flyer, as well as *Interview Attire*, to help yourself prepare for your job interview.

Preparing For an Interview – The Pre-Test

Yes No

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|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | 1. Have you “interviewed yourself” to determine your specific skills and personal characteristics? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Know thyself. Be able to discuss: 1) specific skills that you have learned through coursework, projects, internships or job situations (examples: financial analysis, data processing, customer service, communication skills and supervision of others); and 2) personal characteristics which would make you a valuable employee (examples: traits on which you have been complimented, e.g., dependability, working well with others, and being accurate and thorough in your work). |
| _____ | _____ | 2. Can you clearly state your career goals? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formulate specific and realistic career goals. Example: “Seeking entry-level programmer position with the eventual goal of progressing to systems analyst.” |
| _____ | _____ | 3. Can you name alternate job titles that companies/agencies use which fit your academic major and work experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research job titles and job descriptions in your field. Use career publications which describe various jobs as well as job search websites and the “Help Wanted” classified ads. |
| _____ | _____ | 4. Do you know the beginning salaries for the positions which you are targeting? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Career Center Library has national salary surveys and a “Cost of Living Index” for all areas of the country. |
| _____ | _____ | 5. Do you have a list of target companies/agencies and do you know how to research these companies and use the information obtained? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend a Job Search Strategies Workshop offered by the Career Center. Additional information and resources on researching employers can be found in the Career Center Library and JFK Library. |
| _____ | _____ | 6. Are you familiar with the organizational structure, services, programs and products of the company to which you are applying? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The company binders in the Career Center Library and company websites provide specific information on products, divisions of the company, and other information. You can also find company information, as well as information about the company’s industry and competition, from such sites as www.hoovers.com |
| _____ | _____ | 7. Do you know what CHOICES can do for you? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CHOICES is a computer-assisted career assessment program that focuses on interests, abilities, experiences and work-related values. It provides job titles and descriptions, employment outlook information as well as information on graduate programs. CHOICES can help you research salaries in your chosen field, and this knowledge can help you in your job interview. CHOICES is accessible from the Career Center Library. |

BREAKING DOWN THE 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, likeable, and confident and job candidate who will easily fit into the work environment.

STAGE ONE, *The Introduction:*

The interviewer gets an impression of you in the first twenty seconds of the interview. Make it a good impression! This is the social stage of the interview where 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 company and the position. Here are some hints to keep in mind for this segment.

- Greet the interviewer with a smile. Wait until you are asked to be seated.
- Offer a firm handshake: this will demonstrate your confidence.
- Ask if it is OK for you to take notes. If you are given permission to do so, these brief notes might trigger good questions for you to ask later.
- Address the interviewer respectfully by his/her last name.
- Try to be yourself and show interest in the company. You may want to comment on what you have learned about the company through your research.
- Speak clearly, and maintain eye contact.

Remember: Interviewing is a skill that can be learned. Attend a 'Take Control of Your Interview' workshop, or meet with a career counselor to discuss your responses before you begin interviewing. Mock interviews and practice with PerfectInterview are highly recommended as well. With practice, you will become more comfortable with interviewing.

STAGE TWO, *Information Exchange:*

This part of the interview allows both you and the interviewer to gather information about each other. Remember, interviewing is a two-way process. You are determining whether or not this is the kind of company for which you want to work, and the interviewer is trying to determine if you would be a good employee and fit in well with the company's work environment. 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 respond to questions in this portion of the interview. Provide details, examples and stories that will help the employer remember you.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a question to be re-stated: you want to make sure you understand the question.
- Ask a few probing questions that will give you a good understanding of the responsibilities of the job.
- Maintain eye contact.

STAGE THREE, *The Close:*

The final stage of the interview is an opportunity for you to ask any additional questions you might have about the position and to let the interviewer know how interested you are in the position.

At this point in the interview you will want to do the following:

- 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!
- State that you would fit into the organizational structure as it was outlined to you.
- Ask when a decision will be made. Make sure you have the interviewer's calling card.
- Maintain eye contact.

FOLLOW UP, *Thank the Interviewer:*

In addition to being polite, sending a thank-you letter is crucial to your marketing plan. 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.

More Preparation Tips

1. Plan ahead. Know where your interview will be held and find out where to park. You might even want to drive there ahead of time to determine best routes, time needed, etc.
2. Get proper rest the night before.
3. Eat and drink something on the day of the interview, but avoid caffeine and spicy foods that could make you uncomfortable.
4. Do deep breathing exercises to release tension and clear your mind.
5. You must never be late for an interview. If you arrive very early, walk around the block.

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 the following qualities, among others:

- Good communication skills
- Strong work ethic
- Flexibility
- Good attitude
- 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? This can help you score big! 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 company 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. Again, use examples from internships, Cooperative Education assignments, or paid and volunteer positions. Select technical, organizational, or planning skills that tie in to the position.

Have You Ever Accomplished Something You Didn't Think You Could? The interviewer is trying to determine your goal orientation, work ethic, personal commitment, and integrity. Provide a good example that demonstrates how you overcame numerous difficulties to succeed. Prove you are not a quitter and that you will "get going when the going gets tough."

How Do You Handle Pressure? Do You Like Or Dislike These Situations? 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.

What Are Your Career Goals? Where Do You See Yourself Five Years From Now? Be realistic! You may state some specific goals that include promotions within your field, or you may express that you would like an opportunity to explore your field and make decisions along the way.

What Do You Consider Your Most Significant Strength(s)? Be prepared. Know your three or four key strengths, or "best stuff." Be able to discuss each with a specific example. Select those attributes that are most compatible with the job. Be specific; don't use "management" or "good interpersonal skills." They are too vague. Instead, talk about planning, problem solving, organizational or communication skills.

What Do You Consider Your Most Significant Weakness? Do not reveal character flaws or 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 a situation 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 companies face these types of problems daily. If you cannot deal with petty frustrations, you will be seen as a problem. You may state your mild displeasure with these issues, but how you overcome them is most important. Diplomacy and common sense can often prevail even in difficult circumstances.

Why Should We Hire You For This Position? What Kind Of Contribution Would You Make? This provides an opportunity for you to summarize your strengths based on the requirements of the position. Relate to specific attributes and accomplishments. Let the interviewer know you are a team player and that you will fit into their organizational structure.

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, 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 you describe yourself and how would others 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?

Describe your ideal job.

Do you object to working overtime?

Can you take criticism without feeling upset?

What types of people annoy you?

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

Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?

Why did you apply to work for this company?

Why should I hire you? How would the company benefit from your services?

What qualifications do you have that make you feel that you will be successful in your field?

How could you contribute to the organization?

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

Why did you choose this field of work?

How has your education prepared you for a career?

What subjects do you like most/least? Why?

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

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATION CANDIDATES:

If you are among the many students pursuing a career in education, these are the types of questions you can expect:

What is your philosophy of education? Of discipline? What issues in education are of greatest concern to you? Why?

Describe the role of the teacher in the learning process.

What is the role of the teacher in the community?

How would you individualize instruction in your classroom?

Why do you want to teach?

What special abilities do you have that would benefit your students?

Do you grade on ability or effort? Why?

If you found out the slower learners in the class could not read the grade-level book, what would you do?

How do you develop lesson plans? What are the most important issues in planning and developing them?

How do you organize your classroom so that time on task is maximized?

Tell me about your student teaching experience.

How do you work with a student who is very anxious about reading (math, etc)?

Are you interested in working with students in some extracurricular activity?

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER:

The best candidates are those who ask thoughtful questions.

What is the next step in the interview 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 do you look for in candidates?

Who would be my boss and to whom does she/he report?

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

What are the most important qualifications for the position?

Do you promote from within?

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?

What is the next step in the selection process?

Finally, Ten Interview Don'ts

- Don't speak poorly of past employers.
- Don't project a cynical attitude.
- Don't try to be funny (although a genuine sense of humor is appreciated).
- Don't complain, whine or blame others.
- Don't appear needy and desperate for a job.
- Don't flirt with the interviewer.
- Don't be a "know-it-all."
- Don't be rude to the receptionist or office staff.
- Speak neither too softly nor too loudly.
- Don't ever show bad manners.