

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](#). 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 straightforward 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 (but don't take notes during the interview).

Job 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.

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?"

Making a Good Impression on Job Interviews

Here's what you should keep in mind the day of the interview and immediately afterward.

Before the Interview

- Be on time. Being on time (or early) is usually interpreted by the interviewer as evidence of your commitment, dependability, and professionalism.
- Be positive and try to make others feel comfortable. Show openness by leaning into a greeting with a firm handshake and smile. Don't make negative comments about current or former employers.

- Relax. Think of the interview as a conversation, not an interrogation. And remember, the interviewer is just as nervous about making a good impression on you.

During the Interview

- Show self-confidence. Make eye contact with the interviewer and answer his questions in a clear voice. Work to establish a rapport with the interviewer.
- Remember to listen. Communication is a two-way street. If you are talking too much, you will probably miss cues concerning what the interviewer feels is important.
- Reflect before answering a difficult question. If you are unsure how to answer a question, you might reply with another question. For example, if the interviewer asks you what salary you expect, try answering by saying "That is a good question. What are you planning to pay your best candidate?"
- When it is your turn, ask the questions you have prepared in advance. These should cover any information about the company and job position you could not find in your own research.
- Do not ask questions that raise red flags. Ask, "Is relocation a requirement?", and the interviewer may assume that you do not want to relocate at all. Too many questions about vacation may cause the interviewer to think you are more interested in taking time off than helping the company. Make sure the interviewer understands why you are asking these questions.
- Show you want the job. Display your initiative by talking about what functions you could perform that would benefit the organization, and by giving specific details of how you have helped past employers. You might also ask about specific details of the job position, such as functions, responsibilities, who you would work with, and who you would report to.
- Avoid negative body language. An interviewer wants to see how well you react under pressure. Avoid these signs of nervousness and tension:
 - Frequently touching your mouth
 - Faking a cough to think about the answer to a question

- Gnawing on your lip
- Tight or forced smiles
- Swinging your foot or leg
- Folding or crossing your arms
- Slouching
- Avoiding eye contact
- Picking at invisible bits of lint

After the Interview

- End the interview with a handshake and thank the interviewer for his or her time. Reiterate your interest in the position and your qualifications. Ask if you can telephone in a few days to check on the status of your application. If they offer to contact you, politely ask when you should expect the call.
- Send a "Thanks for the Interview" note. After the interview, send a brief thank-you note. Try to time it so it arrives before the hiring decision will be made. It will serve as a reminder to the interviewer concerning your appropriateness for the position, so feel free to mention any topics discussed during your interview. If the job contact was made through the Internet or e-mail, send an e-mail thank-you note immediately after the interview, then mail a second letter by post timed to arrive the week before the hiring decision will be made.
- Follow up with a phone call if you are not contacted within a week of when the interviewer indicated you would be.

Common Job Interview Questions

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 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.
- **"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.

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?

Asking Questions During a Job Interview

At most interviews, you will be invited to ask questions of your interviewer. This is an important opportunity for you to learn more about the employer, and for the interviewer to further evaluate you as a job candidate. It requires some advance preparation on your part.

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. [[EXAMPLES](#)]

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. [[EXAMPLES](#)]
- **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 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 at ABC Company does (blank) . . . Can you tell me how that works in practice?"

Common Job Interview Mistakes

Want to know what *not* to do at the job interview? Learn from the mistakes of others. Here's "18 Deadly Interview Mistakes Job Seekers Make," adapted from Drs. Caryl and Ron Krannich's [101 Dynamite Answers to Interview Questions](#).

1. Arrive late for the interview.

2. Indicate you are late because the directions you were given were not good.
3. Look disheveled and inappropriately dressed.
4. Slouch in your seat.
5. Don't maintain good eye-contact with the interviewer.
6. Do your company research at the interview by asking, *"What do you guys do here?"*
7. Don't make a connection between your skills and the needs of the employer.
8. Brag about how great you are, but neglect to cite evidence of your accomplishments.
9. Respond in an unfocused, disorganized, and rambling manner.
10. Remain low-key and display no enthusiasm for the job.
11. Answer most questions with simple "yes" and "no" answers.
12. Appear desperate for a job--any job.
13. Call the interviewer by his or her first name, or use the wrong name.
14. Give memorized responses, forgetting parts in the process.
15. Badmouth your current or former employer.
16. Ask *"How am I doing? Are you going to hire me?"*
17. Blurt out, *"I need to make at least \$35,000. I hope this job pays at least that much,"* near the beginning of the interview.
18. When asked *"Do you have any questions?"*, reply *"No."*

Establishing Rapport During a Job Interview

By establishing a rapport with your interviewer, you build "common ground" between the both of you. It is important to listen and be sensitive to the interviewer's style. This can make communication easier and the whole interview more comfortable.

Listen closely to the interviewer for cues on how you should act. Is he being formal or informal? How loudly is he speaking? What sort of information is he trying to solicit: general, professional, or personal? Once you've determined where the interviewer is 'coming from,' you can follow his or her lead.

Try to speak with the same rhythm and tone of voice. Make some friendly observations about your surroundings. If the interview is conversational, make small talk about your interests, hobbies, or what you did last weekend. Be positive and upbeat. All of these will help both of you relax and establish a connection.

It's important to appear open and friendly as well. Give the interviewer a firm handshake if he offers it, and remember to smile. Make sure you look attentive, with good posture and consistent eye-contact.