

Preparing for the Job Interview

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Preparing for the job interview

The job interview is one of the most important components of your job search. A successful interview is instrumental in securing a position. The interview is an opportunity for the employer to evaluate the match between your qualifications and goals and the employer's needs. It is also your best opportunity to evaluate the employer and the position. In order to present yourself and your qualifications effectively, careful and thorough planning is required prior to each interview.

Planning for the Interview

Most individuals approach an interview with apprehension and nervousness and may feel overwhelmed. However, planning ahead will help you to present yourself and your qualifications clearly to the employer. Consider the following areas when preparing:

- 1. Know Yourself:** It is difficult to articulate your skills, interests and goals to an interviewer if you don't know what they are yourself. You need to be able to present to the employer confidence in yourself, your qualifications, and a sense of career direction. In order to "sell" yourself effectively, complete a thorough self-assessment, reviewing your skills/abilities, background, values, experience, education, training, and career goals.
- 2. Know Your Field of Interest:** Employers will be interested to discover why you selected a particular career field to pursue. Research information about the field, industries, and positions. *This* may include future projections, major competitors, industry trends, and characteristics of individuals in the field.
- 3. Know the Employer:** Research the organization thoroughly to discover its products, services, location(s), previous and projected growth, and future prospects.
- 4. Know the Position for Which You Have Applied:** You need to have a clear description of the job and required skills so that you can articulate your understanding of the position, the demands
- 5.** involved, and how valuable you will be to the company.
- 6. Know the Interview Format Ahead of Time:** One of the most important ways to prepare for your interview is to ask about the interview format. Find out who you will meet with and how long the interview will be.
- 7. Prepare for and Anticipate Questions:** Read the job description thoroughly and anticipate questions that may be asked. Prepare answers beforehand by practicing aloud, with a friend, or by completing a mock interview. (See Appendix 1 for Commonly Asked Questions)
- 8. Make a List of Questions to Ask:** Asking questions shows a level of interest in the company and your preparedness for the interview. Don't ask questions that could be easily answered through your own research. (See Appendix 2 for Questions Applicants Might Ask)

During the interview

1. **Arrive Early:** Arrive 10 - 15 minutes before your scheduled interview time. Take into consideration traffic you might encounter and parking.
2. **Arrive Prepared:** You should bring with you extra copies of your resume, a list of at least 3 professional references, and a pen and paper. Some employers may also require you to bring your academic transcripts. All of these items should be organized in a folio.
3. **Make A Good First Impression:** When meeting someone for the first time, people often form opinions about others during the first 30 seconds. Your appearance, behavior, and attitude are important factors that contribute to that first impression.
 - **Appearance**
 - Dress professionally. Dress in modern style clothes, no flashy colors or styles. Err on the side of being overdressed.
 - Use make-up moderately.
 - Make sure your hair, mustache, and/or beard are well trimmed.
 - Don't overdo use of jewelry.
 - Shine your shoes, clean your fingernails, and clean your glasses.
 - Avoid strong perfumes, colognes, or aftershaves.
 - **Behavior**
 - Carry yourself proudly.
 - Use a firm handshake.
 - Maintain good eye contact.
 - Smile and be friendly to everybody.
 - Follow the interviewer's lead.
 - Do not overextend the interview
 - **Attitude**
 - Project confidence and enthusiasm.
 - Show sincerity and commitment.
 - Be optimistic.
4. **Give Thoughtful and Complete Answers:** When answering questions, avoid giving one-word answers. Provide examples of your qualifications whenever possible. If confused about the question, ask for clarification. Pausing to consider your answer is ok. (See Appendix 3 for Appropriate Pre- Employment Inquiries)

After the interview

1. **Write a Thank You:** Write a brief letter or note of thanks for the interview. Reiterate your interest in the position and briefly state why you are the best candidate.
2. **Evaluate Interview and Position:** Determine how well the interview went and if you should do anything differently next time. Evaluate whether the job/organization is a good fit for you.
3. **Follow Up:** If you don't hear from the interviewer in a week after you were told a decision would be made, call to inquire about their decision and to express your continued interest in the position.

Types of interviews

There are several types of interviews. The employer you interview with may use only one of these types, or all.

- 1. Screening Interview:** This is usually the first meeting you will have with a prospective employer, lasting 30-45 minutes. On-campus and job fair interviews are examples. The purpose is to reduce the number of candidates to a more manageable number by eliminating candidates who are not qualified.
- 2. Follow-up or Second Interview:** The purpose of this interview is to identify the finalists for the position. It is on-site at the employer's location and the candidate is interviewed by several people. More specific questions will be asked in order to reveal certain skills and characteristics that you possess to determine an appropriate match with the organization's needs.
- 3. Phone Interview:** This could replace a screening interview or follow up/second interview, especially if the employer is located a distance away. Make arrangements to be alone in your room or apartment for the interview. Have readily available a copy of your resume and questions to ask the employer. Evaluation is based on your responses, tone of voice, enthusiasm, ease of conversation, and adaptability to the circumstances.
- 4. Selection Interview:** This is the final interview. The position's supervisor or manager will usually be the primary interviewer; however, others may be involved as well.
- 5. Search Committee Interview:** During this type of interview, you are interviewed by a group of individuals, or a search committee, where you are required to respond to questions from each person. Maintain eye contact with each person in the room when answering questions. Remember that each person's impression counts. At the beginning, ask each person if she/he has a copy of your resume.
- 6. Group Interview:** During a group interview, you are interviewed with several other candidates. You may be asked to complete a group task, respond to certain scenarios, or to meet informally. The employer is looking for your ability to work in a group situation, the leadership style you exhibit, your flexibility and adaptability, and your decision-making style.
- 7. Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner Interview:** For this type of interview, the employer asks individuals with the organization to join you for a meal to get to know you in a more relaxed atmosphere. You are still in an interview situation and need to focus on the conversation and the questions asked.

Interview Styles

1. **Directive Interview:** The interviewer will direct the interview by the questions he/she asks you. You are expected to do most of the talking. You may feel as if questions are being "fired" at you constantly.
2. **Non-Directive Interview:** The interviewer does not provide direction for the interview. He/she may ask you what you would like to discuss and leave it to you to provide the direction of the interview.
3. **Stress Interview:** The interviewer will use a confrontational style to try to unsettle you in order to see how you respond. The interviewer is not looking for "the right answer", but the thought process you use and your ability to respond with a challenging and creative answer.
4. **Behavioral Interview:** The interviewer is seeking specific examples and responses that will give insight into personality traits and critical skills. Questions may focus on intellectual competence, leadership ability, team/personal skills, adjustment/flexibility, motivation, communication skills, administrative skills, and technical skills. An example question is: "Describe a situation when you have been stressed and how you dealt with it". (See Appendix 4 for more information about Behavioral Interviews)

24 worst job interview mistakes

1. Arriving late.
2. Arriving early. Don't arrive more than 15 minutes early.
3. Dressing wrong. Dressing too casually can ruin your chances. The safest choice for any interview is a tailored suit in a conservative color like black, navy, gray, or tan.
4. Dressing in a rush. If you select your clothes right before you leave, you won't have time to fix things such as a loose button. Neatness counts.
5. Smoking. Smoking makes you look nervous. Tobacco-breath should be avoided at all times.
6. Drinking. Even if others are ordering cocktails, avoid drinking alcohol.
7. Chewing gum.
8. Bringing along a friend or relative. Even being seen saying goodbye to your best friend or your spouse at the building door can make you look as if you didn't have the nerve to get there on your own. Being picked up afterward also reeks of dependency.
9. Not knowing about the organization or position.
10. Not preparing ahead of time and practicing questions.
11. Not admitting a flaw. To the question, "what is a weakness you have?", do not answer "none". Illustrate a weakness that you have turned into a strength and give specific steps you have taken to improve your weakness.
12. Not knowing your own strengths. You must be prepared to give strengths and to give specific examples illustrating your strengths.
13. Asking too many questions.
14. Not asking any questions. It makes you look uninterested in the position.

Appendix 1: Commonly Asked Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths?
3. What are your weaknesses?
4. What are your plans for the future?
5. Why should I hire you?
6. Why did you choose this major?
7. Why did you decide to attend school at Saint Mary's?
8. What courses did you like the most? The least? Why?
9. Tell me about your grades. Do you feel you have done the best work for which you are capable?
10. Describe your study habits.
11. How did you finance your education?
12. Do you feel you received a good general education?
13. How has your education prepared you for your career?
14. What extra-curricular activities are you involved in? What have you gained from these experiences?
15. Do you have plans for furthering your education?
16. If you could start college over, what would you do differently?
17. How would you describe your ideal job?
18. Why did you choose this career field?
19. What type of position are you looking for?
20. What kind of work interests you the most?
21. Tell me about the most satisfying job you ever held. The least satisfying.
22. Have you had any work experience related to this position?
23. What are your ideas on salary?
24. How much money do you hope to earn five years from now?
25. What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your field?
26. Describe a situation in which you were successful.
27. How would your best friend describe you? Professor?
28. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
29. Describe a problem you have had and how you dealt with it.
30. What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?

31. What kind of people do you enjoy working with?
32. What types of people rub you the wrong way?
33. What frustrates you or makes you angry?
34. Are you a leader or a follower?
35. How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?
36. Describe for me your most rewarding accomplishment.
37. What have you learned from your mistakes?
38. What kind of boss do you prefer?
39. Are you a team player?
40. Describe your supervisory experience.
41. What do you know about our organization?
42. Why do you want to work for our organization?
43. Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
44. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
45. How long would you expect to work here?
46. Are you willing to work overtime? Travel? Relocate?
47. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our organization is located?
48. When could you start work?
49. Is there anything else I should know about you?
50. Do you have any questions?

Appendix 2: Questions Applicants Might Ask

1. Are there any duties not stated in the job description that I should be aware of?
2. How would you describe a typical week/day in this position?
3. There are a lot of companies laying off right now. How has this company been able to maintain the workforce and continue to hire new employees? (You've done your research and know some of the reasons, but are interested in the insider point of view.)
4. I am very interested in pursuing this job, or possibly other job openings within your company. What is the next step in the hiring process? (It is best to find out what the hiring plan is so that you will know the sense of urgency and how to follow up.)
5. Could you tell me how this job has been performed in the past? What improvements would you like to see happen? (This is an opportunity to convince the interviewer that you have what he/she is looking for by giving a specific, similar past experience story.)
6. How would you describe the culture or spirit in this company? (One of the interviewer's concerns is whether you will fit into the company culture. You need more information to see if this would be a good environment and fit for you.)
7. What are the challenges I would face in this position over the next three months? (Your first 90 days on the job is a critical time for any new hire. You need to know what will be expected of you as you start your learning curve.)
8. How would you describe your management style and interaction with your staff? (You may need to read between the lines here. Make sure this manager's communication and style fit with your ideas and values.)
9. What training and orientation could I expect if I was hired?
10. What is your policy on continuing education? Are employees encouraged to take courses or graduate study and do employees participate in any professional associations or conferences?
11. Ideally, what qualities will it take to get this job done? (This is a chance for you to sell yourself, and tell once more why you are such an excellent fit for the position and the added-value you would bring to the company.)
12. How would my performance as an employee be evaluated?
13. May I ask what your background with the company is? (There's a big difference between showing an interest in someone and grilling them. Interviewers don't like being cross-examined. Ask friendly questions and be alert to clues regarding this person's satisfaction with the company.)

Ask questions if you need clarification. Clues are given and problems are alluded to during the interview – listen carefully and turn up your intuition. *When I responded to your question regarding my past experience handling stress, you commented that you have your share of that here. Could you tell me more about the stress level here?*

The types of questions you ask will be determined by the conversation and types of questions asked of you during the interview. Pay attention to the interviewer's body language to determine how many

questions to ask – relaxed and willing to talk, or in a hurry and running late? Lastly, make sure your questions are succinct and to the point, demonstrating your knowledge and interest.

Appendix 3: Appropriate Pre-Employment Inquiries

Subject	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Age	Are you over the age of 18? If hired, can you furnish proof of age?	What is your date of birth? How old are you?
Citizenship	If hired, can you provide papers that show you're legally able to work in the US?	In what country were you born?
Physical Condition/Disability	Can you perform all of the duties outlined in the job description?	Do you have any physical disabilities? Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist? Other questions on general medical condition.
Convictions/Arrests	Have you ever been convicted of any crime?	Have you ever been arrested? If so, when, where and disposition of case.
Ethnicity or National Origin	What languages can you read, speak, write fluently?	What is your native language?
Family/Marital Status	Are you able to travel?	Do you have any children or plan to? Are you married?
Height or Weight	Are you able to lift or do other physical requirements?	What is your weight/height?

If asked an inappropriate question, your response could be: "With all due respect, I don't feel that your question is relevant to the challenges and responsibilities of this position" or "I can't see how this question relates to the qualifications for the position or its responsibilities".

Appendix 4: Behavioral Interview

During the behavioral interview, questions are asked that are aimed at getting you to provide specific examples of how you have developed and utilized the required skill set for the job. This method is relied on to evaluate your experiences and behaviors and use them as indicators of your potential for success.

To answer the question completely, use the **STAR** formula as outlined below.

Situation or Task: Describe the situation you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. Describe a specific event or situation.

Action You Took: Describe the action you took. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did, not what the team did.

Results You Achieved: Describe what happened and what you accomplished. Wherever you can, quantify your results.

Sample Behavioral-Based Interview Questions

Customer Service:

1. Tell me about a time when you were dealing with a customer who was unhappy or dissatisfied with a product or service, etc. Describe the situation and your role in responding to the circumstances. What was the outcome?
2. Tell me about a time when you had to assist more than one customer simultaneously.

Teamwork:

1. Give me an example of a time when you worked as a member of a successful team. What were the characteristics of individual team members, and what contributed to the success of this team?
2. Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a supervisor or coworker on how to implement a task.

What did you do and what was the end result?

Time Management/Organization:

1. Give me an example of a time when you were given a significant amount of responsibility to get something done. What was the outcome?
2. Describe a situation in which you had several things to do in a limited time. How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
3. Describe a goal that you established for yourself. How did you go about achieving it?

Leadership:

1. Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
2. Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction.

Problem Solving Skills/Stress Management:

1. Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
2. What is your typical way of dealing with a conflict? Give me an example.
3. Tell me about the most challenging or difficult problem you have faced at work, in college or as a volunteer. What decisions did you make and/or what steps did you take to resolve the problem? What were the results?