

Interview Guide



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Introduction

The purpose of the cover letter and résumé is to get a job interview; the goal of the interview is to get the job. Your aim during an interview is to convince the employer that you are the best candidate by proving that you have the qualifications to perform the work as well as the personal skills to fit in the organization. Interviewers want answers to several main questions:

- Why are you interested in this job and the company?
- What can you do for us? Why should we hire you?
- What kind of person are you? Do you have the personal skills for this job?
- What distinguishes you from the other candidates?

Preparation

Proper preparation and practice will make interviewing less stressful. Before your meeting, become familiar with common interview questions, read the job description and research the company.

Questions and Answers

Review questions that an interviewer may ask and practice how you would reply. But avoid memorizing what you want to say; let it be a natural flow of words. To improve your communication skills practice role-playing before the interview. If you state that you have certain skills and abilities, be prepared to cite specific situations where you have used or demonstrated them.

Be able to articulate your accomplishments and what you have to offer. Prepare to answer the standard questions, questions specific to the job and questions about you. Questions may come from your résumé so be prepared to expand on your statements. Concentrate on what is being asked and respond appropriately. Remember that just as the questions you will be asked need to be job-related, so must all of your answers. Respond to “Tell me about yourself” and “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” strictly in terms of your qualifications for the job. Family history or personal likes and dislikes, for example, are almost always inappropriate responses to these questions.

Research the Organization

Employers are looking for someone with a real interest in their organization. Examine the company Web site and search for additional information on the Internet (recent news articles, market reports, competitors). Employers are expecting you to know what products and services they provide, who are their clients, the mission of the company, size, locations, etc. Also, be familiar with the industry: current trends, economic conditions, research and innovations.

SEC EDGAR Database (www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml), **Hoover's Online** (www.hoovers.com) and **Corporate Information** (www.corporateinformation.com) provide information on public companies.

Types of Interviews

Telephone

Telephone interviews are used to screen applicants before being asked in for a face-to-face selection interview. An employer will schedule a time and date for the phone interview so you will have time to prepare. Choose a quiet area, have a glass of water nearby (do not snack, chew gum or smoke), a copy of your résumé, cover letter, the job description, and any notes from your research. It is preferable to use a corded landline instead of a cell phone or cordless phone to avoid possible static on the connection or losing battery power before the interview is over. Standing while talking may help you project a strong voice. Let your telephone voice and manners demonstrate confidence as well as competence. Let the interviewer set the pace for the conversation. Thank the interviewer before saying goodbye.

Behavioral

The basic premise of behavioral interviewing is that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior, and that more recent behavior is a better predictor than older behavior. Interview questions are designed to elicit real-life examples to determine whether you possess these skills. Preparation should include preparing “stories” that specifically illustrate what you can do to solve a problem for an employer.

Responses to behavioral interview questions are usually best presented in a three-step format.

- Situation: What was the opportunity or problem?
- Action: What did you do in response to that opportunity or problem?
- Result/Outcome: What happened?

In all types of interviews, your responses will be more meaningful if you use the situation, action, result/outcome framework as a guide to presenting information.

Performance

In this type of interview you will be asked to perform tasks associated with a job in a limited amount of time. Mistakes are expected; the employer is looking for ways you handle yourself.

Stress

This type of interview was more popular years ago and is rarely encountered today. However, an interviewer may occasionally ask a question to intentionally try to upset you to see how you react under pressure. In this case, refuse to be intimidated, keep your emotions in check, and rely on your pre-interview preparation.

Interview Questions

Frequently Asked Questions

- Tell me about yourself
- What are your short and long term career goals?
- What skills, experience and training do you have that make you qualified for this job?
- What would your previous supervisor say about you?
- What jobs have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What motivates you?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Can you identify three character traits that make you successful?
- How do you make decisions?
- Are you a team player or do you prefer to work independently?
- Why are you thinking of leaving your current job?
- What five words describe you best?

Behavioral Based Questions

- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me an example of a time when tried to accomplish something but failed.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.

Questions to Ask

At the conclusion of an interview, you may be asked if you have any questions. Do not reply that you have no questions, that everything has been covered. Use this opportunity to let the interviewer know you are interested in the position and the company. Before the interview, write down three to five questions to ask.

- Who are the people with whom I will be working?
- Are there any advancement opportunities with this job?
- Why is this position available?

- Describe a typical day on the job?
- Can you describe your ideal candidate for this job? (Reply to the interviewer's response with how you match the ideal).
- What do you like about working here?
- What are the initial projects I would tackle?
- Is there anything else I can answer for you to make a hiring decision?
- When will you be making a decision on this position?
- What is the next step in your hiring process?
- When do you suggest I follow up with you?

Dress and Appearance

Dress as others do in the same occupation. *Clothes make a critical first impression ~ Make sure it's POSITIVE!*

- The best look is traditional and conservative.
- Women: Wear a simple tailored suit or dress.
- Men: Wear a clean, pressed suit, with a shirt and tie.
- Comfortable, clean and polished dress shoes.
- Dress up, not down. It is better to be over dressed than under dressed.
- Hair should be neatly groomed.
- Go lightly on colognes, after shaves, make-up and jewelry. (Remove facial piercing jewelry and avoid wearing more than one earring in each ear).

The Interview

Plan to take with you extra résumés, a list of references, paper pad and pen for notes, and your list of questions to ask. Bring a portfolio to organize your materials.

Establish the Relationship

- **Arrive a few minutes early and carry yourself with confidence**
- **Greet the interviewer by name with a smile and a firm handshake.** Smile. Look and sound happy to be there.
- **Always use the interviewer's title when speaking to them (Dr., Mr., or Ms.).** Some interviewers will ask you to use their first names, and under those circumstances it is acceptable to do so
- Do not sit until invited.
- Most interviews will start with informal chit chat. This is very important because it allows an interviewer to relax you and find out how well you relate to others socially.
- Relax – allow things to happen – follow the employers lead.

Build Rapport

- **Do not rely on your résumé to speak for you.** Interviewers respond favorably to someone who is enthusiastic and can carry his/her end of the conversation.
- **Control nervous tendencies.** You don't want to speak too fast, ramble and not come to the point, or be so concerned with what you are going to say that you do not listen carefully to the questions. Avoid distracting habits such as playing with hair or clothing, saying, "you know", or "um", and chewing gum.
- **Listen. Think. Talk. Listen. Think. Talk. Repeat.** It is okay to have a reflective pause before answering a question.
- **Never complain** about a former employer or colleague. You don't want to give the impression of being the kind of person who blames other people for your problems and mistakes.
- Try to **sound enthusiastic** and friendly. Speak in your normal tone of voice.

Never ask about:

- Salary during the first interview. Let the employer decide the right time to talk about salary.
- Vacation time
- Retirement
- *Don't ask what the employer can do for you; ask what you can do for the employer.*

Body Language

- **Good eye contact is critical;** it demonstrates qualities of self-confidence and real interest in the conversation.
- **Keep your hand in a relaxed position on your lap or on the arms of your chair. Legs together; feet on the floor.**
- **Body language** may also help you determine how you are coming across; good eye contact and smiles from the interviewer usually mean you are communicating well. Puzzled or bored looks may indicate that you need to respond with more details or enthusiasm.

Closing

- **Summarize** – take a few minutes to summarize your key points. If any problems or weaknesses came up, state why they will not keep you from doing a good job. Point out the strengths you have for this job and why you believe you can do it well.
- **Ask for the job** – if you are interested in the job, ASK FOR IT! Many employers hire one person over another just because one person really wants it.
- **Thank the interviewer by name.** "Thank you (Mr. /Ms. /Dr. Whomever) for your time today." Ask for his or her business card.
- **Tell the employer that you are interested in the position.**

- **Arrange a reason and a time to call back.** “I’m sure I’ll have questions. When would be the best time for me to get back to you?”
- **Say “Goodbye”.** After you’ve set a time and date to call back, thank the interviewer by name and say goodbye.
- If the interviewer does not indicate when they will contact you, ask for an estimate of a date when a decision might be made about the next interview.

After the Interview

After the Interview, ask yourself...

- What points did I make that seemed to interest the employer?
- Did I present my qualifications?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I too tense? Too aggressive? Not aggressive enough?
- What questions gave me a tough time? How can I improve my answers?

By reviewing your interview performance, you can make improvements.

Second Interviews

- More People
- Harder Questions
- Higher Expectations

Thank You Note

Write a thank you note or send an e-mail after your job interview. Send the thank you note as soon as possible, within 24 hours is ideal. Send notes or an e-mail to each individual if you interview with more than one person. Thank the person for their time and use the letter as a very brief follow up as to why you are interested in the position and your qualifications. Hand written notes may be sent if your handwriting is neat, if not; type the notes. Use good quality notepaper with matching envelopes. Address the note to the interviewer using their full name. A thank you note helps you stand out from the other candidates and will make a positive impression.

NOTES:

Career Services

Student Center

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Sugar Grove, IL 60554

Hours

*Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday
8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.*

Tuesday 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

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