

Interview Skills

Preparing For The Interview When an appointment is made for an interview, it is important for you to be fully prepared for it. Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

Research the company: Do your homework. Research the company beforehand so that you can showcase that knowledge during the interview. This will boost your credibility with the interviewer and will help you to formulate intelligent questions to ask him or her. Who are the organization's officers, administrators, etc.? Know something of their background, recent achievements. This research can be very valuable to you during the interview. It will not only increase your self-confidence, but will also impress the interviewer. He will regard you as a person who has sincere interest in the organization because you took time to find out something about it.

LOCATION : Know where you're going. Make sure to find out where the office is and how to get there. Do you know how long the trip will take? Do you have the name and phone number of the person you'll be meeting with? Do you know how easy it is to park? Save yourself time and unnecessary stress by figuring these things out before heading to the interview. Go early...have a coffee.. relax!

LOOK THE PART: Your clothing should be neat, pressed, and professional looking. As it can be difficult to know the culture of the office environment beforehand, err on the side of conservative. Even if everyone's wearing jeans when you arrive, you're still probably better off having shown up in a suit. However, don't be afraid to inject some personality into your look, and don't neglect the details: make sure to have a fresh haircut and clean, manicured nails. Why?

REHEARSE: Rehearse beforehand. Prior to your interview, prepare answers to common questions the interviewer is likely to ask, such as;

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why do you want to work here? Why should we hire you?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What is your five year plan?
- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your salary expectations?

Conduct a mock interview with a trusted friend as practice.

REFERENCES: Secure your references. Find at least three key people -- former supervisors, colleagues, or instructors -- who are willing to serve as your professional references. Be sure to secure their permission beforehand, and be certain that they will speak highly of you if contacted by a potential employer.

Arrive early. Be sure to arrive at least 15 minutes before the interview. Visit the restroom and check your appearance in the mirror. Announce yourself to the receptionist to let him or her know that you have arrived and that you have an appointment. Turn your cell phone off so it doesn't ring during your meeting.

WHAT TO BRING? Bring necessary documentation. Make a checklist of documents you will need for the interview and make sure you have them in your briefcase before leaving home. These documents may include extra copies of your résumé, a passport, driver's license, Social Security card, or portfolio of writing samples or other professional work. If you are a recent graduate, you should also bring along your college transcripts.

Role playing

Though it is imperative for you to know yourself and the organization with which you are interviewing, if you are unable to communicate your knowledge clearly and concisely, your interview will not be impressive. You must be able to express yourself to the interviewer.

The best way to improve your communication skills is to practice role-playing before the interview. Consider participating in a mock interview through the Career Center or ask a friend, your spouse, or roommate, to help simulate an interview. Make sure you are critiqued on the strength of your voice and eye contact.

Another suggestion for role-playing might be to get together with people who are also preparing for interviews. You could learn a lot by critiquing different approaches and this might also be a good way to boost each other's morale. Possibly video tape yourself to see how you appear.

A critical point to remember while practicing, is to avoid memorizing what you want to say. Whether you are talking about yourself or the organization, with which you are interviewing, let it be a natural flow of words. If you come across like you have a speech prepared, your interview will be less effective. Be yourself in a professional formal manner.

During the interview

You probably will be nervous during the interview. Concentrate on what is being asked and respond appropriately. Many people make their voices more monotone to sound professional. Don't! Use normal tone and don't speak too softly. Be yourself but professional.

We've all heard the expression, "You have only one chance to make a good first impression." How true that is! One of the main purposes of an interview is to present yourself to a potential employer in a manner that reflects a highly polished and professional image. It is important to keep in mind that the interview is not the time to be making a personal statement with the way you dress. Your goal should be to show that you respect the interviewer's values, tastes, and expectations relative to dress and personal manner. Although professional dress and appropriate style may vary slightly depending on job type, work environment and geographical region, there are several key points to keep in mind:

If you're in doubt about how to dress for an interview, it is best to err on the side of conservatism. It is much better to be overdressed than underdressed (or undressed).

Questions you will hear from an interviewer.

Salary:

One question you should be ready to answer is on the salary expected. On your resume it is proper not to mention salaries. You can even leave it open on your application form or write in negotiable. But in an interview, you might be asked to state a figure. Know what persons of your general qualifications are being offered as starting salaries in positions similar to the one for which you are interviewing.

Salary Negotiation: The Art of the Deal

By being well prepared and confident, you will easily be able to master the art of salary negotiation

While negotiation has become a common part of today's business, most of us are uncomfortable negotiating our salaries. But today's employer expects some type of negotiation, and we must be ready. The tips below prepare you for the art of negotiation.

Avoid the question of salary, until you have an offer: On job applications under salary requirements, put "open," "negotiable," or "competitive." If a salary requirement must be given, then give ranges (usually begin your range at 10% higher than your last salary and add \$10K to get your range).

If asked directly how much you would like to make, try to avoid providing a number, but answer in vague terms: "What would a person with my background and qualifications typically earn in this position with your company?" Or: "I'd rather discuss salary when we are both confident that I am a good match for the position."

Research your market value. Before you go into an interview, make sure you are armed with the most recent information on the salary ranges for the position that you want. Call directly into Human Resources and ask their salary ranges for the job you are seeking. It's also helpful to compare specific salary ranges from CareerBuilder.com job listings.

Do not take an offer on the spot. How valuable and in demand will you seem if you accept an offer the moment it's presented? Instead, either take home the written offer or take notes on the details of the offer. Tell the employer that you would like to go over everything very carefully, and set up a meeting for the next day.

Examine the entire compensation package. Be sure to consider insurance, stock options, RRSP plans, pension and profit sharing plans, salary progression, vacation days, paid holiday, and sick/personal days.

Enter negotiations with understanding of your skills and their worth. Know your strengths in your field. For example, say you were a keen negotiator for large corporate contracts that brought \$1 million in revenue to the company. Explain to potential employers how you generally brought x-times your annual salary package to the company in terms of corporate profitability within your first year.

Negotiation is expected. If you are going into sales and do not even try to negotiate, this could be the last test of your interview. If you will not negotiate your salary, how can you be expected to negotiate multi-million dollar contracts for the company? Even if you are not applying for a sales position, employers may be wary of a deal that is made too quickly.

Make sure the negotiation stays win-win. When a company offers you an exact figure, it is usually safe to expect that the number is its mid-range. This is not the time to play hardball; you will be working with these people if you accept the position. Use real-life examples rather than trumped-up negotiation tactics that sound like "ME, ME, ME!" Think team.

If you have an okay offer: "After looking over your offer fully, even though I'm sure it's very competitive, the actual salary figure is lower on a monthly basis by 10% than what I am currently making. Though the bonuses will help improve the situation, those are subject to change. Is there flexibility on the salary portion of the offer?"

If you have a good offer: "We are certainly very close. I was hoping for something more in the range of \$X to \$Y. How much room do we have for negotiation on the salary?"

If you have a low offer: "I really like you, the job seems to be a good match, and the goals of management and the company's organizational strategy all seem good. The only area that we need to talk about — and the only area holding me back — is the initial compensation offer. Quite frankly, the salary is less than I expected. I am truly interested in the position and from my research, \$X is the approximate level for the salary. The other companies I am speaking with are in that range. What can you do in this area?"

Examine alternatives. If efforts are exhausted in the salary negotiation, and the company has not offered a salary acceptable to you, but you still want the job, shift the conversation to the future. Discuss a 60-, 90-, or 120-day performance review, year-end bonus, or a lump-sum signing bonus.

SETTING GOALS : What do you see yourself doing five years from now? You should answer this by stating that you want to grow with the company and move up the ladder.

- Where do you want to be 5 years from now in your career?
- What are your long term career goals? 10 years
- What prompted you to take your current job?
- Why did you make a career change?
- Why do you want to leave your current position?

SOFT SKILLS : What work have you done in the past? You'd be surprised how many job applicants fumble when asked about prior employment. Don't be one of them! Refresh your memory prior to the interview by reviewing your resume, so, you can speak about your prior work history in detail and accurately. Have your resume with the dates on it in front of you. This way you will be able to copy the information rather than having to remember dates and other employment information.

What were your expectations for the job and to what extent were they met? The best way to respond is to discuss what you expected when you took the job and give examples of how the position worked out for you. If the job wasn't exactly what you expected, it's fine to mention that. However, you should focus on the job itself, not the company, your boss, or your co-workers (if they were a problem). Do be careful how you answer and don't focus too much on the negative. Instead, address the highlights of the job

What were your starting and final levels of compensation? Don't exaggerate or inflate your earnings. Many employers will check references and confirm your salary history prior to making a job offer. A discrepancy between what you reported and what the employer says could knock you out of contention for the job.

What were your responsibilities? The best way to respond is to describe your responsibilities in detail and to connect them to the job you are interviewing for. Try to tie your responsibilities in with those listed in the job description for the new position. That way, the employer will see that you have the qualifications necessary to do the job. Focus most on your responsibilities that are directly related to the new job's requirements.

It's also important to be **honest**. Don't embellish your job, because you don't know who the hiring manager will be checking with when they check your references.

What major challenges and problems did you face? How did you handle them? Be sure to include specific examples of how you handled a particular difficult situation. Discuss how you researched the issue and contributed to finding a solution. Examples of good responses include:

A long-term client was about to take their business to a competitor. I met with the customer and was able to change how we handled the account on a day-to-day basis, in order to keep the business.

Which was most / least rewarding? When interviewing, always be cognizant of the job you are interviewing for and tailor your response accordingly. Try to accentuate the positive, regardless of what question you have been asked, because you don't want to be construed as someone who is negative about work, in general.

What was the biggest accomplishment / failure in this position? The best way to respond is to give an example of something you accomplished that is directly related to the job you are interviewing for. Review your resume and review the job posting. Find the best match and use that to show how what you accomplished will be beneficial to the company you are interviewing with.

Why are you leaving your job? Regardless of why you left, don't speak badly about your previous employer. The interviewer may wonder if you will be bad-mouthing his company next time you're looking for work.

I found myself bored with the work and looking for more challenges. I am an excellent employee and I didn't want my unhappiness to have any impact on the job I was doing for my employer.

There isn't room for growth with my current employer and I'm ready to move on to a new challenge.

I'm looking for a bigger challenge and to grow my career and I couldn't job hunt part time while working. It didn't seem ethical to use my former employer's time.

I am seeking a position with a stable company with room for growth and opportunity for advancement.

Why were you fired? Now I have an opportunity to explore jobs that better suit my qualifications and interests. My research suggests that such an opportunity may be the one on your table. Would you like to hear more about my skills in working with new technology?

My competencies were not the right match for my previous employer's needs but it looks like they'd be a good fit in your organization. In addition to marketing and advertising, would skills in promotion be valued here?

The job wasn't working out so my boss and I agreed that it was time for me to move on to a position that would show a better return for both of us. So here I am, ready to work.

Other questions to expect in an interview

What are your long range career objectives?

How do you plan to achieve your career goals?

What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?

What do you expect to be earning in five years?

Why did you choose the occupation for which you are preparing?

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

How would you describe yourself?

How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?

Why should I hire you?

What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in this field?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?

In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
How do you work under pressure?
Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization?
What do you know about our organization?
What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
Are you seeking employment in an organization of a certain size? Why?
What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?

One of the last questions the interviewer will ask you is "Do you have any questions?" If you reply with a simple "No" you are telling the interviewer that you aren't really interested in the job or the company. You should always prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer before going to the interview.

Questions you should ask at the interview

Below are some possible questions you might want to ask during a job interview. Avoid asking about salary, vacation time, employee benefits, etc. until you have asked a number of other questions that demonstrate your interest in working for the company.

If you have done your pre-interviewing research, then you should have prepared some intelligent questions in advance. Some questions you might ask:

What kind of training do you provide? How long is the training period?
Why is this position available?
Is this a new position? How long has this position existed?
How many people have held this position in the last two years?
Who would be my supervisor?
Whom will I supervise?
With whom will I be working most closely?
What do you like about working for this company?
What are the current plans for expansion or cutbacks?
What projects and assignments will I be working on?
What happened to the person that held this position before? Was he promoted or fired?
What is this company's culture? (Ex: Is it rigid and formal or relaxed and flexible?)
What are the current problems facing the company (or my department)?
What is the philosophy of the company?
What do you consider to be the company's strengths and weaknesses?
What are the company's long and short term goals?
Describe the work environment.
What attracted you (the interviewer) to this organization?
Why do you enjoy working for this company?
Describe the typical responsibilities of the position.
What are the most challenging aspects of the position?
Describe the opportunities for training and professional development.
Will I receive any formal training?
Are there opportunities for advancement within the organization?
When can I expect to hear from you?

Ending the Job Interview: If you're interested in the position, let the interviewer know this by stating at the end of the interview: "I am very interested in this position".

After The Interview

Write a Follow-up Letter Ask for the interviewer's business card and write him/her a letter or follow-up e-mail. But make it more than a plain thank-you note. Tell him/her you are still interested in the position and go over some of your qualifications that were discussed in the interview so that his/her memory will be refreshed. Possibly include a couple of pertinent questions that you did not ask in the interview. If s/he answers you quickly, this might be an indication that s/he is interested in you.

Make Each Interview A Learning Experience As soon as possible after the interview, write down what you have learned. Ask yourself these questions:

- What points did I make that seemed to interest the employer?
- Did I present my qualifications well?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I too tense? Was I too aggressive? Not aggressive enough?
- What can I do to improve my next interview?

By reviewing your performance, you can make plans to improve your skills.

Skills Most Sought After by Employers

So, what are these critical employability skills that employers demand of job-seekers?

Communications Skills (listening, verbal, written). By far, the one skill mentioned most often by employers is the ability to listen, write, and speak effectively. Successful communication is critical in business.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

* Exceptional listener and communicator who effectively conveys information verbally and in writing.

Analytical/Research Skills. Deals with your ability to assess a situation, seek multiple perspectives, gather more information if necessary, and identify key issues that need to be addressed.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

* Highly analytical thinking with demonstrated talent for identifying, scrutinizing, improving, and streamlining complex work processes.

Computer/Technical Literacy. Almost all jobs now require some basic understanding of computer hardware and software, especially word processing, spreadsheets, and email.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Computer-literate performer with extensive software proficiency covering wide variety of applications.

Flexibility/Adaptability/Managing Multiple Priorities. Deals with your ability to manage multiple assignments and tasks, set priorities, and adapt to changing conditions and work assignments.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Flexible team player who thrives in environments requiring ability to effectively prioritize and juggle multiple concurrent projects.

Interpersonal Abilities. The ability to relate to your co-workers, inspire others to participate, and mitigate conflict with co-workers is essential given the amount of time spent at work each day.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Proven relationship-builder with unsurpassed interpersonal skills.

Leadership/Management Skills. While there is some debate about whether leadership is something people are born with, these skills deal with your ability to take charge and manage your co-workers.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Goal-driven leader who maintains a productive climate and confidently motivates, mobilizes, and coaches employees to meet high performance standards.

Multicultural Sensitivity/Awareness. There is possibly no bigger issue in the workplace than diversity, and job-seekers must demonstrate a sensitivity and awareness to other people and cultures.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Personable professional whose strengths include cultural sensitivity and an ability to build rapport with a diverse workforce in multicultural settings.

Planning/Organizing. Deals with your ability to design, plan, organize, and implement projects and tasks within an allotted timeframe. Also involves goal-setting.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Results-driven achiever with exemplary planning and organizational skills, along with a high degree of detail orientation.

Problem-Solving/Reasoning/Creativity. Involves the ability to find solutions to problems using your creativity, reasoning, and past experiences along with the available information and resources.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Innovative problem-solver who can generate workable solutions and resolve complaints.

Teamwork. Because so many jobs involve working in one or more work-groups, you must have the ability to work with others in a professional manner while attempting to achieve a common goal.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Resourceful team player who excels at building trusting relationships with customers and colleagues.

Personal Values Employers Seek in Employees

Of equal importance to skills are the values, personality traits, and personal characteristics that employers seek. Look for ways to weave examples of these characteristics into your resume, cover letters, and answers to interview questions.

Here is our list of the 10 most important categories of values.

Honesty/Integrity/Morality. Employers probably respect personal integrity more than any other value, especially in light of the many recent corporate scandals.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Seasoned professional whose honesty and integrity provide for effective leadership and optimal business relationships.

Adaptability/Flexibility. Deals with openness to new ideas and concepts, to working independently or as part of a team, and to carrying out multiple tasks or projects.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Highly adaptable, mobile, positive, resilient, patient risk-taker who is open to new ideas.

Dedication/Hard-Working/Work Ethic/Tenacity. Employers seek job-seekers who love what they do and will keep at it until they solve the problem and get the job done.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Productive worker with solid work ethic who exerts optimal effort in successfully completing tasks.

Dependability/Reliability/Responsibility. There's no question that all employers desire employees who will arrive to work every day - on time - and ready to work, and who will take responsibility for their actions.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Dependable, responsible contributor with committed to excellence and success.

Loyalty. Employers want employees who will have a strong devotion to the company -- even at times when the company is not necessarily loyal to its employees.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Loyal and dedicated manager with an excellent work record.

Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion. The job-seekers who get hired and the employees who get promoted are the ones with drive and passion -- and who demonstrate this enthusiasm through their words and actions.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

* Energetic performer consistently cited for unbridled passion for work, sunny disposition, and upbeat, positive attitude.

Professionalism. Deals with acting in a responsible and fair manner in all your personal and work activities, which is seen as a sign of maturity and self-confidence; avoid being petty.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

* Conscientious go-getter who is highly organized, dedicated, and committed to professionalism.

Self-Confidence. Look at it this way: if you don't believe in yourself, in your unique mix of skills, education, and abilities, why should a prospective employer? Be confident in yourself and what you can offer employers.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Confident, hard-working employee who is committed to achieving excellence.

Self-Motivated/Ability to Work With Little or No Supervision. While teamwork is always mentioned as an important skill, so is the ability to work independently, with minimal supervision.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- * Highly motivated self-starter who takes initiative with minimal supervision.

Willingness to Learn. No matter what your age, no matter how much experience you have, you should always be willing to learn a new skill or technique. Jobs are constantly changing and evolving, and you must show an openness to grow and learn with that change.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

* Enthusiastic, knowledge-hungry learner, eager to meet challenges and quickly assimilate new concepts.

- Communication
- Planning, Organization
- Interpersonal – shares goals, values, listening
- Team skills
- Personal management skills – positive attitude, behavior, confidence, respect, interest ,initiative, responsibility, adaptability, innovative, resourceful.
- Honest, accountability, professionalism, leadership
- Flexibility
- Dependable
- Loyal
- Technical –