

Interviewing with Confidence

The Art of Job Interviews

Interviewing is not just about getting a job, it's about getting the *right* job – making sure that you are as well suited for the job as the job/organization is for you. The interview is your opportunity to shine and to prove yourself the best candidate, so it's important to be prepared – you only have one chance to make a great impression and it's important that you be in top shape for this important meeting.

Interview Formats

Preparation is the key when it comes to successful interviews. When you are offered a job interview, be sure to ask:

- What is the interview format? (telephone, one-on-one, panel, group, other?)
- What is appropriate attire?
- With whom will I be interviewing? (names, job titles)

Knowing the answers to these questions not only provides important insight into the culture and decision making process of the organization, but also helps you prepare. The following are tips that will help you be successful in some of the most common interview formats.

Telephone

Format: Usually a screening interview used to screen the list of candidates down to a smaller number or for interviews over long distances.

Strategy: Demonstrate confidence in your voice, refer to your resume when answering, be brief, concise, and confident.

One on One

Format: Most often carried out by a person who does not need the input of anyone else (often your potential boss)

Strategy: Get to the point, answer questions succinctly, don't waste time. Convince the interviewer you're a good match, don't be intimidated.

Panel

Format: Perhaps most common (and most disliked!) format. Interviewers may represent different levels and a range of departments.

Strategy: Be formal and precise, but not intimidated. Questions may come at you from different perspectives -- tailor answers accordingly.

Group

Format: Several candidates interviewed for the same position at the same time. You may be asked to work together with other candidates to complete a task or project.

Strategy: This company is looking for competent, productive people and team players. Think: "First among equals."

Before the Interview

Do Your Research: Understand Their Needs

Taking the time to adequately research the organization, its people, and the job itself can help you understand the organization's current and future needs. Clarifying the employer's needs is the first step in understanding and "selling" the specific benefits that you bring to the organization.

Review Your Strengths and Qualifications

If you have been asked to interview for a job, it is likely that you have already met several requirements for the position. Review your resume and application materials against your research of the organization and the position. Write out your key qualifications for this position and list specific ways that your background and experience will allow you to satisfy the organization's needs.

People

- Interviewer(s)
- Your potential supervisor
- Other key managers/leadership

The Position

- Job description
- Informational interviews

The Department

- Mission/vision
- Goals
- Structure

Organization

- Mission/vision
- Strategic plan
- Annual reports
- Newsletters/press releases
- Organizational culture

Industry

- Competitors
- Current trends

Can Do

Communicate and demonstrate how I can satisfy the organization's needs.

Will Do

Show the appropriate level of interest in the position and the organization

Fit

Demonstrate that I am enthusiastic and have a strong work ethic

As a general rule, interviewers are looking for answers to three basic questions during the process: CAN you do the job? WILL you do the job? Do you FIT in?

Use your knowledge of the organization, the position, and your experience to identify your key selling points in each of these categories.

Coping with Pre-Interview Stress

A certain level of stress before an interview is normal and can have positive effects, helping us to prepare and improve performance during difficult times. Use positive stress (eustress) to motivate you to prepare, set out the clothes you will wear to your interview, prep a folio of information with copies of your resume, list of references, a notepad and a pen.

Recognize when stress has become counterproductive (distress), and use good stress reduction techniques to minimize negative impacts of stress including exercise, listening to relaxing music, yoga, meditation, planning and getting organized, etc.

Good nutrition and adequate sleep also work to our benefit in reducing negative stress. The week before the interview (and especially the day before), be sure to eat nutritious meals and get plenty of sleep. Do not skip meals on the day of your interview. Refrain from alcohol/drugs to cope with stress.

At the Interview

Don't...

- ramble
- forget your agenda -- remember your key points about your professional experience and expertise.
- talk negatively about a former employer or supervisor.
- ask about salary, benefits, or sick/vacation

Do...

- be sure you heard the question correctly.
- answer questions directly.
- use positive terms to describe your experience.
- be confident, smile!
- offer a firm handshake.

Non-Verbal Communication

Your body language can often convey a stronger message than your words. Effective use of non-verbals can help you stand out in an interview. Make a great first impression by adopting a confident posture, consistent eye contact, a warm smile, and a firm handshake.

- **Posture** – hold your head up, stand up straight, be confident, but not stiff
- **Eye Contact** – maintain eye contact with those who are speaking, but don't stare
- **Smile** – a smile conveys confidence and can put yourself and your interviewer(s) at ease.
- **Handshake** – handshake should be firm, not too light or “fishy,” don't be afraid to initiate.

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|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Avoiding eye contact | • Insecure, passive, nervous |
| Scratching the head | • Bewildered |
| Biting the lip | • Nervous, fearful, anxious |
| Tapping feet | • Nervous |
| Folding arms | • Defensive, disapproving |
| Raising eyebrows | • Disbelieving, surprised |
| Narrowing eyes | • Resentful, angry |
| Flaring nostrils | • Frustrated |
| Wringing hands | • Anxious, nervous |
| Shifting in seat | • Restless, bored, apprehensive |

Succeeding at Panel Interviews

- Introduce yourself to each of the interviewers, if needed, jot notes on a notepad to remember names, titles, etc.
- When responding, look primarily at the person who asked the question, but include the other panel members as well.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions, especially to get clarification on a question you are answering.
- Don't be intimidated by the formal design and specific time limits. This format is focused on giving equal treatment to all candidates, but on the surface it may sometimes feel unfriendly.
- Often candidates find it more difficult to “read” interviewers in this format, they may be busy writing notes and not responding with favorable body language. Remain positive, warm, and confident – this is not necessarily a bad sign.
- Thank each of the interviewers for their time, by name if possible.

Interview Questions to Expect

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you select your current field?
3. How is your education and/or previous experience applicable to this position?
4. What are your top three strengths? One weakness?
5. What is your immediate career goal?
6. What are your long-range career objectives?
7. How would you describe yourself? How would someone else describe you?
8. How do you work under pressure?
9. How do you deal with conflict?
10. What was the biggest obstacle you have had to overcome?
11. What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
12. In what kind of environment are you most comfortable?
13. Describe the kind of relationship that should exist between a supervisor and supervisee.
14. What skills have you developed that would prepare you for this job?
15. What two or three accomplishments are you particularly proud of?
16. Why should I hire you?

Answer Behavior-Based Questions with a Brief Story

Behavioral questions are based on the premise that past behavior is the best indicator of future performance. When answering these questions you must be specific and detailed in your responses. Use the acronym **St.A.R.** to help you develop concise stories that represent challenging situations that you were able to turn into something positive.

- **St: Situation** – describe the situation, a problem you faced, or a challenge
- **A: Action** – discuss the actions you took
- **R: Result** – describe the outcomes from your actions (quantify when possible), and explain what you learned.

Common Behavior-Based Questions: *Tell me about a time when you...*

1. Worked effectively under pressure.
2. Handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.
3. Were creative in solving a problem.
4. Were unable to complete a project on time.
5. Persuaded team members to do things your way.
6. Were forced to make an unpopular decision.
7. Had to adapt to a difficult situation.
8. Were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.
9. Were disappointed in your behavior.
10. Had to deal with an angry customer.
11. Delegated a project effectively.
12. Overcame a major challenge.
13. Prioritized the elements of a complicated project.
14. Made a bad decision.

40 Difficult Interview Questions

1. Describe a few situations in which your work was criticized.
2. Are you analytical? Creative? Give an example.
3. Can you delegate responsibility? Give an example.
4. Describe a typical day in your last position.
5. What strengths did you use in your last position that made you effective?
6. What have been the greatest failures or frustrations in your work life?
7. What did you do in your last position to be more effective?
8. Describe when you were forced to be relatively quick in decision making.
9. Describe when you used communication skills to get an important point across.
10. Describe when you spoke up to ensure others knew what you thought or felt.
11. Describe when you successfully motivated your co-workers or subordinates.
12. Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation you completed.
13. Describe how you 'read' a person and acted with respect to their personal needs or values.
14. What, specifically, have you done to be effective with personal organization and planning.
15. Describe the most creative work-related project you completed.
16. Describe when you positively influenced others' actions in a desired direction.
17. Do you like to work? Why?
18. What interests you most about this position? Least?
19. What do you want to be remembered for?
20. What other positions interested you?
21. What risks did you take in your last few positions and what were the results?
22. What do you do when you have trouble solving a problem?
23. Describe how you faced problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
24. Describe a past, important goal and your method of reaching it successfully.
25. Describe when you went above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
26. Describe a time you modified your actions in response to another person's needs.
27. Describe a problem you faced and how you resolved it.
28. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and a subordinate.
29. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
30. If you were an employer, what candidate qualities would you look for?
31. What kind of people do you like? Dislike?
32. What do you think of your previous supervisor?
33. What did your subordinates think of you?
34. What makes you angry?
35. What was your previous supervisor's title and functions?
36. How do you go about making important decisions?
37. What are some things your employer might have done to be more successful?
38. Describe, specifically, when you withheld comment or postponed a task to ensure an informed decision could be made.
39. Describe, specifically, when you conformed to a policy you disagreed with.
40. What, specifically, have you done, to contribute toward a teamwork environment?

Sensitive (“Illegal”) Questions

Illegal questions are those that could discriminate you on the basis of:



While questions concerning these topics are often called “illegal,” they are not necessarily illegal to ask; it’s only illegal to deny employment based on the answers to these questions. If asked questions based on these topics, your best bet is to answer the question in a way that allows you to present the information you want the interviewer to know.

Questions to Ask

- What are the main responsibilities of the position we are discussing?
- Who would be my key associates?
- To whom would I report?
- Whom would I supervise?
- What would be the extent of my authority in carrying out these responsibilities?
- Who held the position before and what happened?
- What are the capabilities of the subordinates who would report to me?
- What objectives do you have in mind that you would hope the person who is hired meets or surpasses?
- What can this position lead to?
- How would I best learn the practices, policies, and corporate expectations that will enable me to function successfully?
- What are the main issues that you see as needing attention in the position?
- What are you personally looking for in the successful candidate?
- What capabilities do you feel have the most importance?
- Am I telling you those things that are of the greatest help in making a decision?
- Am I being seriously considered for this position?
- What is the typical career path that an employee follows in the company?
- Does the company promote from within? From what areas?
- Why is the position open? Was/Is there an internal candidate?
- What qualities did the person who held this position previously have?
- Who sets the priorities for this position?
- How much authority will I have to carry out these responsibilities? What budget is available to me? Who has final approval for expenditures?
- How will my performance be evaluated? By whom?

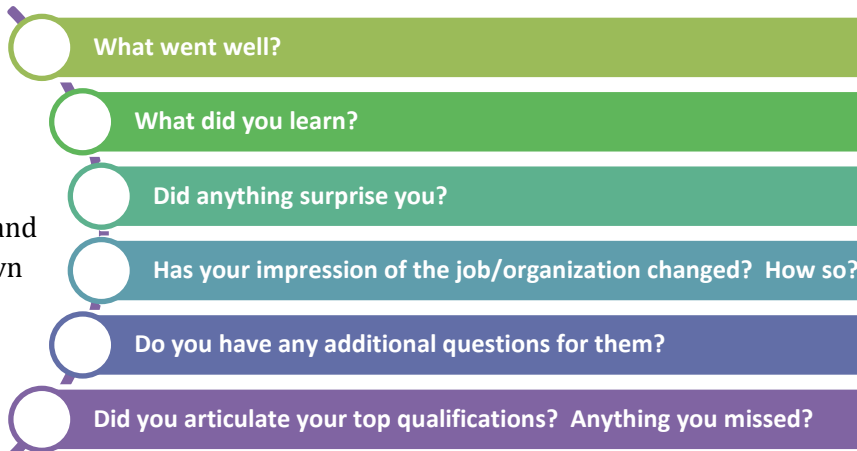
After the Interview

How did it go?

After the interview, take a moment to evaluate the interview meeting. Respond to the questions to the right and take notes. Consider not only your own performance, but also your evaluation of the job itself.

If you identify any remaining questions or “missed opportunities”

– these may be perfect items to include in a follow-up phone call or a thank you note.



Send a Thank You Note

A well-written thank you note should be sent within 24 hours of the interview and puts you at an advantage by showing that you are a considerate person and that you are truly interested in the job. Consider these tips in writing your thank you note:

- Remind the interviewer of your top qualifications.
- Include information you might have overlooked in the interview.
- Mention something specific that you learned or that impressed you about the organization, especially if you can tie it to your skills, goals, or ability to contribute.
- Thank you notes may be hand written or sent via email, but consider your audience and the hiring timeframe in making your decision. Email is quick and a good choice if a hiring decision is to be made very soon, although a more personal hand-written note may be a better option if there is more time.

It Ain't Over 'Till it's Over!

Waiting to hear from an employer on a job offer can be exciting, but also very uncomfortable. Unfortunately, the hiring process frequently takes longer than anticipated, as hiring has become an increasingly complex process often involving many people within an organization. *It's important not to assume the worst.*

- Maintain a positive, proactive attitude and work to keep lines of communication open between you and the hiring manager.
- Always ask what the next step in the hiring process is. Is it a second interview? When can you expect to hear back?
- If you haven't been contacted by the employer within the timeframe they expressed, it's okay to follow up with them. Politely explain that you are checking in to let them know you are still interested in the position and to see if they have an updated timeline for making their decision.