



Interview Skills

TIP SHEETS

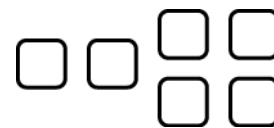
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and the bottom right of each page has a button that will get you back to the Table of Contents

WHAT IS A

Telephone Interview



Employers use telephone interviews to help them decide whom to invite for an in-person interview. It is important to make a great impression over the phone so that the employer will ask you to come in for an interview.

An employer may call any time after receiving your resume. Make sure you are prepared to do a telephone interview when you answer the phone. You will also want to keep items such as your resume, job postings, a pen and paper near your phone at all times.

Before the Telephone Interview

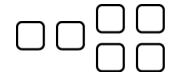
- Use a short and professional message on your answering machine or voicemail.
- Ask children not to answer the phone during the period you are job searching.
- Let the voicemail pick up if you are busy and it is not a good time to talk.
- Call back as soon as you are prepared for the telephone interview.
- Consider using a cell phone with voicemail during your job search to ensure employers have a way to reach you at all times.
- Practice doing telephone interviews by having a friend or family member call and ask you common interview questions.

During the Telephone Interview

- Use examples to explain your skills and experience.
- Avoid one-word answers.
- Express a positive attitude and your enthusiasm for the job.
- If you do not understand a question, do not be afraid to ask the interviewer to explain or repeat it.
- Take your time answering the questions; there is no need to rush.
- Do not ask about salary or benefits.
- If the employer asks you what salary you expect, provide a salary range.

After the Telephone Interview

- Fill out a Telephone Interview Log (see other side) after each interview.
- Ask when you can expect to hear from the employer.
- Send a thank-you letter after every telephone interview.



Telephone Interview Log

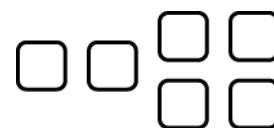
After each telephone interview, be sure to complete a Telephone Interview Log. The log will help you track important information that can help you succeed in the next step, the in-person interview.

Sample Telephone Interview Log

Date/Time of Interview	January 3, 2009 - 3 pm
Name of Company	Capital Marketing Ltd.
Name of Interviewer	Paul Bunyan
Contact Info.	E-mail: bunyanp@capital.ca / Phone: 905-111-2222
Position Applied For	Marketing Representative
Position Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree or diploma in Marketing or related post-secondary training • 2 years marketing experience • Intermediate computer skills • Strong organizational skills
My Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing diploma • 3 years' experience in the field at ABC Marketing Inc. • Microsoft Word, Excel and Access training through Sheridan College
Points Discussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He showed interest in the computer training I've taken to improve my skills- Interviewer knows one of my references, Sardeep W. (be sure to use!) • Seemed impressed with my volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity
Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be conducting face-to-face interviews next week • I will hear by Friday if they want to interview me • I will mention the Marketing Conference I attended last year in a thank-you letter to the employer
Reminders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember to tell them again about my training background. It seemed to impress the interviewer

WHAT IS AN

Employment Interview



After reviewing your resume, an employer may want to speak with you about your skills and experience. They may contact you to set up an **employment interview**.

In an employment interview, your goal is to impress the employer. You can do this by showing them that you have the skills and abilities needed to do the job.

The best way to be successful in an interview is to be prepared. Review common interview questions and practice answering them with friends or family or with an employment specialist.

Before the Interview

- Research information about the job, employer and industry.
- Write out examples of how your skills match the position.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer about the company or the job.
- Bring a pen and paper to take notes.
- Prepare a few copies of your resume, cover letter and references to give to the interviewers.

During the Interview

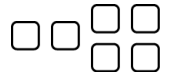
- Use examples to explain your skills when answering questions
- Avoid one-word answers.
- Express a positive attitude and your enthusiasm for the job.
- If you do not understand a question, do not be afraid to ask the interviewer to explain or repeat it.
- Do not ask about salary or benefits at the first interview.
If the employer asks you about your salary expectations, provide a salary range.
- Ask the interviewer questions you have prepared about the company or the job.

After the Interview

- Thank the interviewer and express your interest in the job.
- Contact your references to prepare them for a telephone call from the interviewer.
- Write and send a thank you letter within one day to each person who interviewed you.
- Follow up with the interviewer within a week to show continued interest.

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- Checklist Bar Keep good eye contact.
- Maintain positive body language
- Give a firm handshake
- Dress one step above what you would wear at that job
- Look clean, tidy and presentable
- Look clean, tidy and presentable
- Get a good night's sleep
- Plan how you will get there before the interview so you are not late
- Bring your resume references, questions to ask the interviewer and portfolio if needed



How to Answer Interview Questions

When you answer interview questions, use examples whenever you can. The best way to give your examples is by using the **SITUATION – ACTIONS – RESULT (SAR)** method. You can tell the interviewer short stories about your experience to help them better understand your skills and abilities.

Using the SAR method to answer questions is most useful if the interviewer asks a question that starts with: “Tell me about a time when...”, “Give me an example of...” or “Describe a situation when...”



SITUATION

It is important to be as clear as you can when describing the situation, so the interviewer has a good understanding of the circumstances. Some questions to consider when you think about how to describe a situation would be:

- What was the issue?
- Where did it happen?

ACTION

The interviewer needs to know how you handled the situation so that they can see how you will handle similar situations in the future. Some questions to think about when explaining your actions are:

- What did you do?
- How did you solve the problem?

RESULT

Always tell the interviewer the result. They want to know if your actions solved the problem. Some questions to consider when describing the result are:

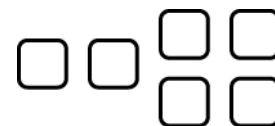
- How did the situation end?
- What was your role in the end result of the situation?

EXAMPLE

Q	Describe a time when you used good judgment and problem solving skills to solve a problem.	
A	SITUATION	I had a coworker who wasn't completing her work on time and sometimes arrived late for her shift which left only me to assist customers and answer phones.
	ACTION	I asked her if there was anything wrong and if there was anything I could help her with. She revealed that she was having some personal problems and couldn't seem to get caught up on several projects. I offered to help her get caught up on her work and expressed my sympathy for her situation.
	RESULT	She stopped coming in late and started keeping up with her work again. She let me know that it was nice to have someone at work who was willing to help.

WHAT ARE

Common Interview Questions & Answers



The following questions are commonly asked by employers during the job interview process. You could be asked any of these questions during a telephone interview or an in-person interview. In order to be well prepared, be sure to become familiar with each question, why employers ask that particular question, and how to answer the question.

Q Tell me about yourself.
The employer is interested in knowing about your past work experience, related education or training, and other strengths related to the position. The employer is not asking you to talk about your personal life.

A Sample Answer
“I have over 10 years’ experience as an Administrative Assistant. Some of my responsibilities have included completing financial reports, organizing schedules and meeting with board members. My strengths are time management, communication, and computer skills. I am an individual who thrives on a challenge and enjoys giving excellent customer service.”

Q What are your goals for the future?
The employer wants to know what you are going to be doing in the next few years, regarding employment or education. The employer wants to be sure your goals fit with the role and the company. Employers do not want to invest a lot of time and energy in training someone if they believe that person will be leaving soon. Be sure to give the impression that you are committed to the role and the company.

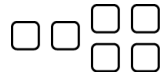
A Sample Answer
“My immediate goal is to get a job as a Sales Representative in a growth-oriented company such as yours. I look forward to establishing myself in the Sales Representative role, continuing to grow in my role and take on additional responsibilities over time.”

Q Why should I hire you?
The employer wants to know if you quit, were fired or were laid off from your last job. It is important to stay positive, regardless of how you left. Do not say anything negative about past employers and be sure to talk about what you learned while working there

A Sample Answer
“I have the skills, experience and education needed for this role including a background in sales, strong customer service skills and a diploma in marketing. My previous employers have all commented on my strong commitment to getting the job done. I would be an asset to your company because I am a hardworking team player who always gives 100%.”

Q Why do you want to work here?
The employer wants to know that you have thought about where you want to work. Show that you have researched the company and are convinced the company is a good fit for you.

A Sample Answer
“Based on the research I’ve completed, this company is an industry leader with exciting plans for the future. I also understand that the company has about 40 employees and I enjoy working in a place where I can get to know people on a first name basis. For these reasons, I would be excited about an opportunity to work here.”



Q Why do you want to work here?

The employer wants to know that you have thought about where you want to work. Show that you have researched the company and are convinced the company is a good fit for you.

A Sample Answer

A “Based on the research I’ve completed, this company is an industry leader with exciting plans for the future. I also understand that the company has about 40 employees and I enjoy working in a place where I can get to know people on a first name basis. For these reasons, I would be excited about an opportunity to work here.”

Q Why did you leave your last job?

The employer wants to know if you quit, were fired or were laid off from your last job. It is important to stay positive, regardless of how you left. Do not say anything negative about past employers and be sure to talk about what you learned while working there.

A Sample Answer

A If you quit:

“After five years with X YZ Company, I felt I had gained all the skills and experience possible from that role. I am now looking for a growth opportunity where I can take on more responsibility and add value to a company.”

If you were laid off:

“Unfortunately after several rounds of layoffs in my last company, my job was eliminated and I was laid off. I really enjoyed my time there because I was able to use my strong skills in customer service, sales and negotiation.”

If you were fired:

“Being let go was difficult, but it has given me an opportunity to explore jobs that better suit my skills and interests. I am confident that this position with your organization will benefit both of us.”

Q What are your salary expectations?

The employer wants to see if your salary expectations are different from how much the company is willing to offer. Try to avoid giving a specific salary amount by saying that you would be willing to accept the going rate for this type of position or by giving a salary range.

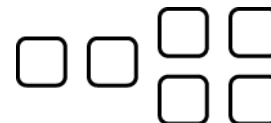
A Sample Answer

A “I am sure we can agree on a reasonable amount for the role. What range do you typically pay someone with my skills and background?”

In other cases, the employer will insist you give a specific dollar amount. Make sure you have completed research ahead of time on typical pay for similar positions in your area. Know the minimum amount of money you will be willing to accept and don’t say anything lower than that. To create a realistic salary range, start with the lowest amount of money you will accept and go upwards from there.

(Hourly Rate): “Having completed research and considered my background, I feel a fair salary range for the Warehouse position would be between \$16 and \$18 an hour.”

(Salary): “Considering my background in the field, I believe a fair salary range for the Food Services Manager would be between \$42,000 and \$45,000 a year”.



WHAT IS A

Behavioural Interview

Employers use behavioural-based interview questions to predict your future behaviour based on your past performance. With these types of questions, the employer is looking for a specific and relevant example of how you handled a situation. Your job is to prove you have the necessary skills and abilities by talking about your past experience.

Behavioural-based questions usually begin with the following phrases:

“Describe a time...”

“Give me an example of...”

“Tell me about a situation when...”

Prepare Before the Interview

- Collect 10 or more job postings and ads related to your current job goal.
- Determine employer needs by looking for common key words and phrases in the ads.
- Choose examples from your work, school and volunteer activities that most closely match these needs.
- Choose examples that include a variety of skills such as initiative, organization and customer service.
- Choose examples that are not too complicated.
- Choose examples with a positive outcome.
- Do not include negative comments about past supervisors, co-workers or companies.
- Write out your answers, describing the situation, your actions and the result.
- Keep your answers clear and to the point.
- Practice saying your answers out loud.

During the Interview

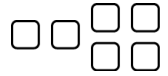
- Remember to be specific about the situation, the actions you took to resolve it, and the result.
- Be sure your answer is clear and to the point so you keep the interviewer’s attention.
- Talk about how you personally dealt with the situation instead of how your team handled it (use “I” instead of “we”).
- Always end your answer on a positive note.
- When asked about a difficult situation, tell the employer what you learned or what you are doing to improve.

THE S•A•R METHOD

A useful way to answer behavioural- based interview questions is the SAR method.

SAR stands for:

- Situation:** Identify the problem, challenge or opportunity you faced.
- Actions:** Describe each step you took to contribute to the result.
- Result:** State the satisfactory outcome of the situation.



Sample Behavioural Interview Questions

Customer Service Questions

- Tell us about a time when you had to go beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer.
- Describe the most difficult customer service experience you have ever had to handle.

Problem Solving Questions

- Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Describe a time when you anticipated a problem and implemented preventative measures.

Teamwork Questions

- Give us an example of a time when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Describe a time when a co-worker was not contributing as much as the rest of the team.
- Describe a time when you had to communicate a complex idea to a co-worker.

Planning/Organizing Questions

- Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time.
- Give us an example of a time when you had a deadline to meet that seemed next to impossible.
- Tell us about a situation when you needed to ask for support in order to achieve a goal.

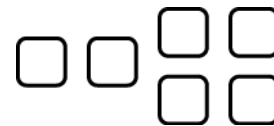
EXAMPLE:

Q Question: Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an angry customer.

A Answer: **Situation:** I was working as a Server in a busy restaurant when a customer became very upset, because he had to wait a long time for his meal.

Actions: I listened to his concern, apologized and advised the customer I would check on the order. I asked the kitchen to put a rush on his order. When I took it to the table, I offered the customer a free dessert, as was our policy.

Result: He was happy and left a comment card stating that he would return in the future because I had taken his complaint seriously.



Questions to ask an Interviewer

At the end of an interview, many employers will ask if you have any questions for them. For some employers your questions will leave a lasting impression. If you ask the right questions, you can show that you are truly interested in the job.

If a candidate at an interview doesn't have any questions, he or she may appear unprepared or uninterested. This isn't a good impression to leave with the employer.

Having a few good questions to ask can improve your chances of success at an interview.

Do's & Don'ts

Do...

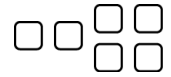
- Prepare 5–10 questions about the company or position before you go to your interview.
- Write down your questions before the interview and take them with you.
- Make sure the questions are relevant to the company or position.
- At the end of your interview, ask 2 or 3 questions that haven't already been answered.
- Appear very interested in getting the answers to your questions.
- Mention skills or experiences you have that the employer talked about when answering your questions.
- Be prepared to be asked about your salary expectations. It can be helpful to research the salary range for people working in your occupation.

Don't...

- Go to an interview without any questions.
- Ask questions that have already been answered on the company website, the job description or at the interview.
- Be too pushy, because this will give the impression you are trying to take over.
- Ask questions about salary, benefits, vacation or sick time. It is more appropriate to discuss these topics when a job offer has been made or when an employer brings this up.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ASKING QUESTIONS AT AN INTERVIEW?

- Learn about what it would be like to work at the company.
- Get an idea of what your role in the company would be.
- Show the employer you are interested in the position.
- Find out if this is the right position for you.



Questions that can help you understand what the employer is looking for:

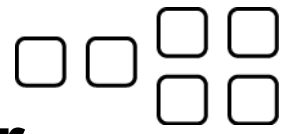
- What skills and qualities are needed to be successful in this position?
- Can you describe your ideal employee?
- What characteristics does your company value most in its employees?

Questions about the company:

- How would you describe the work environment here?
- How do you define success at your company?
- How is good performance measured and rewarded?
- What is the management style?
- What attracted you to this organization?

Questions about the position:

- What are your short term and long term expectations for new employees on the job?
- What is the number one priority for this position?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this department?
- What would a typical day in this position look like?
- Is this a new position?
- How did this position become available?
- When will you be making a decision regarding this position?



WHAT IS AN

Interview Thank-You Letter

After an interview it is important to send a thank-you letter to each interviewer. The letter can help you get hired by giving you one more chance to tell the interviewer why you are the best candidate.

It gives you another chance to mention your skills and qualifications that match the position.

Sending a thank-you letter helps you stand out from the crowd.

It shows the interviewer your strong interest in working for their company and your good manners.

Types of Thank-You Letters

1. Hand Written Card

- A personal touch, which can help you stand out. In today's computer age, everyone likes to get a hand-written thank-you note.
- Practice writing what you want to say on a scrap piece of paper first and later transfer what you've written to a blank note card.
- Can be written right after your interview and left with the receptionist or can be hand delivered later.

2. Business Style Letter

- A better choice if you do not have neat hand-writing.
- Choose good quality stationery that is simple and professional.
- Use business letter format
- Keep the contact information consistent. Use the same format and font as on your resume.
- Be sure to sign the letter.
- Hand-deliver within 24 hours of the interview to help you stand out.
- If you can't hand-deliver the letter, you can fax, mail or e-mail it.

3. E-mail

- Less formal – should be used if you know the employer will make a decision very quickly.
- Make sure you collect the e-mail addresses before leaving the company.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE LETTER:

1st Paragraph:

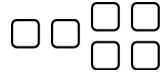
Thank the interviewer for the chance to be interviewed. Name the position and the date of your interview.

2nd Paragraph:

Remind the interviewer of any important information that makes you the best person for the job.

3rd Paragraph:

Tell the employer that you are interested in joining the company. Let them know you are



JOHN WORK

111 Main Street South
Anywhere, Ontario A1C 2D3

905-111-2222
johnwork@e-mailaccount.ca

June 14, 2009

Attention: Susan Hires, HR Manager

ABC Company
123 New Job Way Anywhere, Ontario A1B 2C3

Dear Ms. Hires:

Thank you for meeting with me on June 13, 2009, to discuss the Assembler position available at ABC Manufacturing.

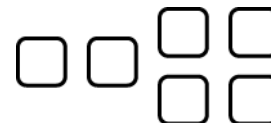
As I mentioned in the interview, I have 12 years' experience assembling parts in the automotive industry. I am able to work well in a fast paced environment while paying attention to detail. I recently completed WHMIS training and have also been a member of two Health and Safety committees at previous workplaces.

With my related experience and my ability to learn new things, I know I will be a great addition to your team. I look forward to hearing from you to discuss the next steps in the hiring process.

Yours sincerely,

John Work

John Work



WHAT IS A

Reference

A reference is a person an employer can contact to find out more about you. Doing reference checks can help an employer make a good hiring decision.

References are very important – many employers will not hire you without contacting your references first. Be sure to bring a copy of your reference list to every job interview.

Choosing Your References

Choosing Your References

- Make a list of all the places you have worked, volunteered, or gone to school.
- Next to each, list all the people you worked closely with, who would still remember you.

From this list:

- Choose people who have known you for at least one year.
- Choose people you worked with recently instead of people you worked with a long time ago.
- Choose people who you are confident will speak about you in a positive way.
- Choose people who can back-up the information in your cover letter and resume.

Preparing Your References

- Always check with your references first to make sure it is okay to use them.
- Provide each reference with a current resume to help them remember you.
- Remind your references about your work to prepare them to talk about you.
- Contact your reference after you give their name to a potential employer.
- Give them the name of the company, position and name of the person who might be contacting them.
- Do not put your references directly on your resume as this information is not needed until after the interview.
- By not providing reference names until after an interview, you can ensure they won't be contacted without you knowing.
- Type up your list of references to match your cover letter and resume (see other side).

HOW MANY REFERENCES?

Employers usually ask for 3 to 4 work-related references.

You may also wish to include up to 3 personal references.

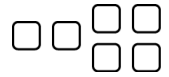
WHO CAN YOU CHOOSE?

Work-Related References:

Past or present supervisors, managers, board members, co-workers, customers or suppliers

Personal References:

Teachers, contacts at volunteer groups, clubs, associations, church leaders



Sample Reference List

Reference Format:

- Name, Job Title
- Company Name
- Company Street Address
- Work Phone Number
- Work E-mail Address
- Relationship to You

BETTY SMITH

1123 Main Street, Anywhere, ON L8P 1X2
bettys@e-mail.ca 905-333-3333

Work Related References

Jane Johnson, Production Supervisor XYZ Company
45 King Street, Anywhere, ON L8P 3X5
905-456-7891, extension 123 johnson_jane@xyzcompany.com
Direct Supervisor for 3 years at XYZ Company

Frank Beens, Manager
Acme Manufacturing Company
100 Ontario Street, Somewhere, ON F4F 4F4
905-555-9876 fbeens@acme.com
Manager for 2 years at Acme

Ken Parker, Chairman of the Board
The Helping Place
50 Altruism Avenue, Somewhere, ON L6C 4V5
905-789-1234 parker@thehelpingplace.ca
Chairman of the Board where I worked for 3 years

Personal References

Paula Brown, Professor McMaster University
1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, ON L8S 4L8
905-555-9140, ext. 55555 teacher@school.ca
Taught my Psychology courses in year 1 and 2