

CHAPTER 6: Interviews

The employer has contacted you for an interview—congratulations! This chapter will help you get organized before your interview, think about answers to common interview questions, and follow up with a thank-you letter after the interview.

The Big Picture

- Step 1: Before Your Interview: Who and Where
- Step 2: Clothing and Appearance
- Step 3: Practice Interview Questions
- Step 4: The Day of the Interview
- Step 5: After the Interview

Step 1: Before Your Interview: Who and Where

First, make sure that you know the time the interview is scheduled for, where the interview will take place, the name of the person who is going to be interviewing you, and whether you need to bring anything (such as work samples) to the interview.

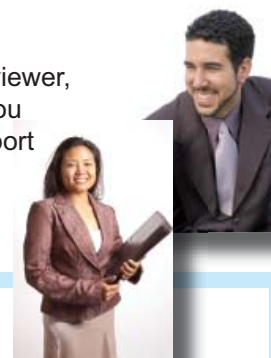
Then gather as much information as you can about the company. Refer back to your *Job Lead Worksheet* on [page 14](#), because you may have collected quite a bit of information about the company already. Helpful resources are the internet (check the company's website or look for news articles about the company), your local library, and your local chamber of commerce. Having this background information also makes it easier for you to think of questions to ask the employer during your interview.



A couple of days before your interview, go to the place where the interview will be. If you're driving, park your car and walk into the building to see how many minutes it will take you to get there. If you are using public transportation, it also is a good idea to figure out approximately how long it will take you to get to the interview. Be sure you know bus or train schedules in advance so you're not late. Knowing in advance where the interview will take place increases your confidence and decreases the possibility of arriving late, although it's a good idea to allow extra time for unexpected delays.

Step 2: Clothing and Appearance

As you know, your appearance says a lot about you. To make the best first impression on your interviewer, be clean, well-groomed, and dressed nicely. A good rule of thumb is to dress one step above what you would wear on the job, or at minimum in good, clean dress clothing. For men, this means a suit or sport coat, dress shirt, tie, dress slacks, dress socks, and dress shoes. For women, this means a suit or dress with long sleeves and a conservative neckline and hemline, nylons, and dress shoes. Dark or neutral colors are generally wise. Avoid wearing perfume and aftershave.



Clothing and Appearance Checklist

 Use these checklists to help you prepare for your interview.

Several days before the interview:

- ☐ Get a haircut
- ☐ Groom your hands and nails
- ☐ Shine your shoes
- ☐ If you have a beard or mustache, trim it so it looks neat
- ☐ Buy or borrow appropriate clothing
- ☐ Make sure your clothing is clean and pressed
- ☐ Lay your clothing out the night before so you're sure it's clean and all there
- ☐ Get a good night's sleep

Morning of the interview:

- ☐ Take a shower or bath
- ☐ Wash your hair
- ☐ Shave
- ☐ Use extra deodorant
- ☐ Don't use perfume or aftershave (some people are allergic)
- ☐ Cover visible piercings or tattoos
- ☐ Eat a light meal or snack before the interview
- ☐ Brush and floss your teeth
- ☐ Use mouthwash or breath mints
- ☐ Light makeup (women)

Bring with you:

- ☐ A small pad of paper and pen for taking notes
- ☐ Your handbag, briefcase, and/or portfolio
- ☐ A small mirror, brush, and/or comb
- ☐ Samples of your work
- ☐ Extra copies of your resume
- ☐ A copy of your application
- ☐ Your reference list
- ☐ For women, an extra pair of nylons

Step 3: Practice Interview Questions

Your goal, through your answers to the interview questions, is to convince the employer that you are the best person for the job. A good way to do this is by referring to the transferable skills you identified in Chapter 1. When you answer interview questions,

- Be honest and think quickly
- Speak clearly and maintain eye contact with the interviewer
- Explain what you can do for the employer and why you want the job

Also avoid saying negative things about previous employers, regardless of how awful it was. Negative comments about jobs you've had in the past will not impress interviewers.

The following are some common interview questions and suggestions you could expect an employer to ask you. Several days before your interview, you may wish to have a friend or family member ask you each question (a "mock interview") so you can practice what you would say. Be sure your answers are truthful.



Interview Questions Worksheet

- i** Pretend you are on an interview and the interviewer is asking you these questions. How would you answer them? Write your answers in the blank area below each question.

General interview questions about you and what you offer the company:

1. Tell me about yourself.

The interviewer is asking you to explain the main skills or knowledge that you offer the company. He or she is not asking for your life's story or details about your private life. Think of three to five things you would like to mention in your answer.

2. What do you know about our company?

The interviewer wants to know if you did any research on the company, including its history, culture, products, and any recent (positive) news. If you haven't learned anything about the company before your interview, the interviewer is going to think that you really don't care about working there. What have you learned about the company that you'd like to mention?

3. Why do you want to work for this company?

A related question is "What do you hope to gain from this work experience and why?" The interviewer wants to know what was appealing to you about the company and/or the job. This relates to the research you've done on the company.

4. Why should I hire you?

The interviewer wants to know why you're a better fit for the position than the other applicants are. Think of how your skills and experience make you the best, and how you can use both to benefit the company. Can you save them money and/or time? Why?

5. What are your strengths?

Related questions are "Tell me something you are extremely good at and why" and "What accomplishments are you most proud of?" The interviewer wants to know what makes you unique. What can you do that other people can't? Or can you do something better than other people can? What strengths will you mention? Why?

6. What are your weaknesses?

A related question is "Name something about yourself that you can improve on and how you would do it." This is a hard question, although interviewers like asking it to see what you'll say. Be ready for it by thinking of two examples of weaknesses (not character flaws), and then explain how those weaknesses can be seen as strengths.

Interview Questions Worksheet continued

7. What is one mistake you've made in your job and how did you correct it?

Every person has made at least one mistake at his or her job, and the interviewer is probably more interested in how you corrected the mistake than what it was. Pick a mistake you made and then emphasize what you did to fix the situation.

8. What hours are you available to work?

The interviewer is checking on your time commitments. If you are unable to work on a certain day or at a certain time, tell the employer. It's not necessary to say why. If asked when you can start work, be sure to say you'll need to give two weeks' notice to your current employer.

9. Why did you leave your last job?

Related questions are "Are you eligible for rehire?" and "Will your former employer give you a good reference?" The interviewer wants to know why you are looking to change jobs and/or whether you and your previous employer parted on good terms. When you answer this type of question, always try to stay positive about your current or former employer. If you had a conflict with your supervisor, you could say that there were differences in personality or philosophy between you and your supervisor. If you are asked about something you don't like in your current or previous position, choose one job duty you don't like and briefly and honestly explain why. If you were fired from a job and you are asked about it, tell the truth but be brief. How will you answer this question?

10. What do you expect as a starting salary?

A related question is "How much money would you like to earn?" The interviewer wants to see if you'll eliminate yourself from the running by overpricing yourself, or if you'll work for a very low salary. Do not mention a salary! You may turn the question back to the interviewer by asking what salary they had in mind for the position. What other ways could you answer this question?

11. Are you able to perform the job duties of this position with or without an accommodation?

The interviewer is asking in a legally acceptable way whether any disability that you may have would make you be unable to do the job. Ask for a copy of the job description before you answer this question to make sure that you are physically able to perform all job duties.

Questions about your education and training:

12. Tell me about your education and training background.

The interviewer is asking whether you have the education and training that the job requires. What in your education and training will you highlight?

13. Do you plan on continuing your education?

The employer may be asking this to see if you are planning to go back to school at some point, if you are open to more training or education, or even to see your feelings about school. How will you answer this question?

14. What was your favorite subject or activity in school? Why?

This question may be one for the interviewer to see what you think about school, or it may help the interviewer get a sense of you as a person. When you answer this question, think of school subjects you enjoyed, projects in school, extracurricular activities, or a class that you really liked because of the teacher. If your favorite subject or activity relates to the job, so much the better!

15. What is/was your least favorite subject or activity in school? Why?

This question is similar to questions about your weaknesses. When you answer it, try to stay away from negativity about the teacher, because the interviewer may wonder if you have a problem with authority.

Interview Questions Worksheet continued

Questions about how you get along with other people:

16. What's your formula, method, or philosophy for getting along successfully with other people?

The interviewer wants to know how you handle conflict. Think about a situation in which you've been in conflict with a co-worker and how you resolved the problem in a positive way.

17. Is there a teacher at school or an employee you really don't like and why?

A related question is "Give me an example of how you handled a conflict between you and a teacher or co-worker." This question is an insight into your personality for the interviewer, and not a way for you to get back at a teacher or co-worker. Handle this question very carefully and avoid naming the teacher or co-worker. How will you respond to this question?

Questions about your goals and dreams:

18. If you could be hired for any job in the world, what would it be and why?

A related question is "Describe your ideal job." The interviewer may ask this to get a sense of your work values and your goals. How would you answer this question?

19. What are your long-term career plans (five years or more from now)?

A related question is "What are your top five goals for the next two to three years?" The interviewer may ask this question to see whether you're thinking about staying in your current line of work, or to see if you're interested in pursuing additional training in your field. Review your responses to the questions about goals in Chapter 1 as you consider how you'll answer.

20. How do you define success?

This too is a question about your values. What in life is important to you?

When you're not at work:

21. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

The interviewer wants to get a more rounded picture of you as a person. What hobbies or leisure activities will you mention?

Can they ask that!?

Interviewers can ask all kinds of strange things, but you are not necessarily required to answer. For example, interviewers are able to ask what your religion is, but they can't use that information in a hiring decision. If you are asked this question, you may say that you are able to do the job regardless of your religion. You may also ignore the question or politely refuse to answer it.

Employers may ask for your driver's license number to check your driving record. Employers can also ask about your age in certain circumstances. If you will be driving a vehicle as part of your job duties or dealing with hot oil, grease, or hot liquids, they are required to ask your age. Otherwise it depends on how they intend to use the information.

Refer to [pages 54 and 55](#) for more information about illegal discrimination, or visit the websites of your state's Civil Rights Bureau, Equal Rights Commission, or the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, at www.eeoc.gov.

Step 4: The Day of the Interview

On the day of the interview,

- Go alone. It is not appropriate to bring children, relatives or friends with you.
- Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early.
- Be very courteous to receptionists or assistants—they often have enormous influence on hiring decisions.
- Review your resume and qualifications as you wait.
- Visualize the interview going well, take deep breaths, and relax.

Expect that the interviewer will have a prepared list of questions and may take notes as you answer the questions. Don't be concerned if the interviewer is writing things down. He or she may be taking notes simply in order to remember what you said.



During the interview

Most interviews start with introductions, handshakes, and casual conversation. Remember that the interviewer may be nervous too! This conversation helps everyone relax a bit. Be energetic and enthusiastic (after all, your hard work paid off and you got the interview), smile, and offer a firm handshake. It is fine for you to initiate the handshake. If you are meeting someone who is unable to shake hands due to not having a functional arm or hand or if he or she is wearing a cast, it's still polite for you to offer your right hand. Your handshake should be firm and solid, but not bone-crushing or too gentle.

If the interviewer walks out of his/her office to meet you, he/she will probably introduce himself/herself first. If you walk in to the interviewer's office to meet him/her, introduce yourself when you enter. Use your first and last name when you introduce yourself.

Do not chew gum during an interview. It's distracting to the interviewer and prevents you from speaking clearly when you answer questions. Also avoid swearing and using slang.



The interviewer will most likely direct you to a chair. Sit up straight in the chair, leaning forward occasionally. Look the potential employer straight in the eye, because good eye contact means that you are interested and confident in yourself. It is okay to smile and laugh during the interview, as long as you're not laughing uncontrollably.

The interviewer may give you a lot of detail about the job, or he/she may start by asking about you. Many times job interviews turn into conversations, and that's okay. Feel free to ask questions throughout the interview. Many interviewers will ask you questions from a structured list, because they want to make sure that all applicants are asked the same questions.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Near the end of the interview, the employer may ask directly if you have any questions about the job. It is very important that you have some questions to ask. It's helpful if you think of these questions in advance, using the information you learned when you researched the company. Keep in mind that while the interviewer is determining whether you're a good fit for the job, you are determining whether the job is a good fit for you.

Your questions should relate to the company or the job duties, but it's not appropriate to ask how much the job pays. Use the following questions to help you think about what you may want to ask your interviewer.

- When do you expect to fill the position?
- What is the next step in the interview process?
- What education and training does the company provide?
- Will I work alone or with other people?
- How often will I meet with my supervisor?
- What opportunities are there for advancement?
- What types of problems will I need to solve in this position?
- What are the job responsibilities of this position?
- Does your company plan to grow or expand in the next few years?
- May I see the area where I will be working?
- May I be introduced to one or two employees?
- Why is this a good place to work?
- Do you have any company literature I could take with me?
- Is there a probation period?
- How are the employees evaluated?
- What tools, safety gear, or uniforms are required? Do I purchase them, or does the company supply them? How much do they cost?

Discussing Salary

As mentioned in the practice interview questions, one question that employers use to screen out job applicants is "How much money would you like to earn?" If you are asked this question, keep your answer as general as possible, because employers won't consider you if your amount is too high. If you are pressed for a dollar amount, you could say, "I'd like to earn approximately the average salary for someone with my experience."

End of Interview

At the end of the interview, it is appropriate to shake the interviewer's hand again and thank him/her for taking the time to interview you, and say goodbye. It is also a good idea to tell the employer that you are interested in the position. Ask for the interviewer's business card if he or she hasn't given it to you yet.

Other types of interviews

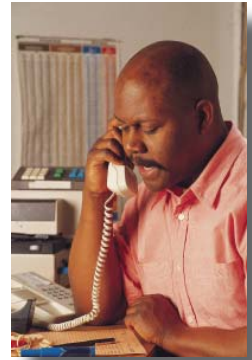
Group interview

The group interview is between you and two or more interviewers. Group interviews are a good way for several people at the company to get to know you in a short amount of time. The interview may take place in an office or a conference room, depending on the number of interviewers. The interviewers may take turns asking questions, so as you answer, keep eye contact with the interviewer who asked the question.

Telephone interview

A telephone interview is when one or more interviewers asks you questions over the phone. Employers like phone interviews because they're inexpensive and can be used to quickly screen out candidates. Because of this, your first interview for a job may be over the phone. If you do well in the phone interview, you may be invited for an in-person interview. Just like a face-to-face interview, a phone interview will be scheduled for a specific day and time.


Treat phone interviews the same as face-to-face interviews, although it may help you to stand rather than sit as you talk. Smiling while you answer questions is also a good idea. Use your voice to show your confidence and enthusiasm for the job. Keep your resume and information about the job close at hand so you can refer to it, and also be sure that you have a quiet place to take the call. Use a good-quality phone, not one that could cut out or accidentally hang up on your interviewer. Be sure to thank the interviewer(s) for the interview and say goodbye at the end of the call.



Step 5: After the Interview

When you get home, write down the name and title of your interviewer and what happened during the interview, using the following "after the interview" worksheet. Then write and send a thank-you letter to your interviewer and anyone else you spoke with during your interview (receptionists and administrative assistants included). To get you started, use the worksheet on [page 48](#). Type your thank-you letter on a computer or word processor. Be sure to spell correctly all names and titles. Thank the interviewer for the time he/she took to interview you, re-emphasize your skills, talents, and abilities, and include anything you may have forgotten to add during the interview or in your resume that might help get you the job.

After the Interview Worksheet

 You may photocopy this page if you'd like and attach it to your *Job Lead Worksheet* on [page 14](#).

Company Name _____

Job Title _____

Interview Date ____/____/____ Time ____AM PM

Interviewer's Name _____

Interviewer's Phone # (____) - ____ - ____

Names of other personnel you met (include titles)

Were you comfortable with the Interview? Why?

What went well during the interview? What questions were easy to answer? _____

What could have gone better? What questions did the interviewer ask that you had difficulty answering? _____

New information about the job? Possibilities for advancement? _____

List information you want to remember to include in your thank-you letter _____

What challenges is the company facing in the next year?

Would you take the job if it were offered? Why? _____

Benefits provided? Which? _____


FOLLOW UP NEEDED

Follow up Thank-You Letter, Date Sent ____/____/____

Follow up phone call needed, Date ____/____/____

Result of phone call

Thank-You Letter Worksheet

 Fill in the blanks, type the letter, sign it, and mail.

Your Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____ , _____

TYPING: LEAVE 1 BLANK LINES

Date _____ 20____

TYPING: LEAVE 3 BLANK LINES

Mr./Ms. _____ (full name of person who interviewed you)

That person's job title _____

Name of company _____

Street Address _____

City _____, State _____ Zip _____

TYPING: LEAVE 1 BLANK LINE

Dear Mr. / Ms. _____ :

TYPING: LEAVE 1 BLANK LINE

Thank you for speaking with me on _____ about the _____ position. I believe my skills

in _____ would be a good fit in this position. I am very interested in working

list skills you talked about in the interview

for _____ and look forward to hearing from you. If you have any further questions, please

name of company

contact me at _____ . Thank you again for your time and consideration.

your phone number

TYPING: LEAVE 1 BLANK LINE

Sincerely,

TYPING: LEAVE 3 BLANK LINES

Your signature

Your Typed Name _____

Sample Thank-You Letter

1221 Cedar Drive
Weyauwega, WI 55555

December 21, 2005

Ms. Sophie Virtanen
Service Manager
Greater Metro Auto Dealer
7738 Brooks Street
Washington Island, WI 53200

Thank you for speaking with me on December 18th about the Auto Technician position. I believe my skills in auto maintenance and repair would be a good fit in this position. I am very interested in working for the Greater Metro Auto Dealer and look forward to hearing from you. If you have any further questions, please contact me at (920) 555-1234 or e-mail me at crodriguez@emailaddress.mail. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Christine L. Rodriguez
Christine L. Rodriguez



If several weeks have passed and you haven't heard anything from the employer, you may wish to call the company's human resources department or your interviewer to see where they are in the hiring process. It could be slowed for a variety of reasons—lack of funding, the hiring manager may be on vacation, or the company may still be looking for candidates.

Politely ask if there is anything else the company may need from you, and when they expect to make a hiring decision. In the meantime, continue to apply for jobs and go on interviews.



If you got the Job!

Congratulations! Your job search journey is just about done. Refer to Chapter 7 for information on paperwork, procedures and policies, and more.



If you didn't get the job...

If you are told or receive a letter stating you didn't get the job, you may be feeling a lot of really negative emotions—everything from anger, to shame, to guilt, to resignation. Try to remember that the employer is not rejecting you as a person, but that someone else was a better fit for the position. It's even possible that an internal candidate (someone already working at the company but in a different position) was in line to get the job from the beginning.

If you are comfortable contacting the company, you may call or send a letter or e-mail message. In a polite and friendly way, ask why you did not get the position.

Was it because

- You need more experience
- You need more education
- The interview didn't go well
- Your cover letter needs improvement
- Your resume needs improvement
- You didn't pass the credit or background check
- Your reference(s) didn't give a good recommendation
- The company was looking for someone with more drive, ambition, or energy
- The company was looking for someone with more poise/polish
- The company needed someone right away and you were not available for 3-4 weeks
- Or was it due to some other reason?

Regardless of the reason, do not argue with the employer about why you were not selected. You may state that you are disappointed that you didn't get the position, and that you are still interested in working for the company. Keep in mind that this company and the people you met there are now within your network, and they may be a source of job leads in the future. Don't burn bridges!

Take the feedback you received from the employer and use it to improve your job-seeking skills. You may also rate yourself based on how the interview went and your interviewer's reactions to your resume and cover letter.

If you believe you were not hired due to your gender, race, disability, or other type of prohibited discrimination, contact your state's Civil Rights Bureau, Equal Rights Commission, or the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission at www.eeoc.gov.



The time will come when you are a better fit for a job than everyone else is. Keep applying for jobs—the right one for you is out there!