

CHECKLIST: ARE YOU READY FOR AN INTERVIEW ?

WEEKS BEFORE THE INTERVIEW (EVEN BEFORE YOU HAVE AN OFFER!)

1

- Check your professional outfit. Make sure it's clean and fits comfortably. Need to get a new outfit? Take a look at these videos to be sure you know how to build a professional ensemble ([masculine/feminine](#)). **Why?** This subconsciously signifies several things to a potential employer: that you value the opportunity to apply to their organization; you took the time to prepare for this event; you know how to dress professionally if you needed to for their company; and, depending on if you did it right, that you have the ability to pay attention to detail.

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- You may know exactly how to dress professionally and even have an outfit ready to go, hanging in the closet. If not, you're going to want to start this process at least 10 days before the event. **Why?** For one, it might take a few days to locate an outfit that fits nicely. Secondly, you will want to wear the outfit ahead of time to be sure it doesn't make you feel excessively

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uncomfortable. Remember to iron the outfit and remove small particles from it (a lint roller is great for this task) **Hair:** If a haircut is needed to spruce up your look, you'll want to get that 5-7 days before the event. This will give it enough time to grow to the point that you don't look like you rushed over to the event straight from the barbershop or hair stylist; yet it will still look fabulous! While we're on this topic, it is good to consider that the absolute safest bet at the career fair is to remove any facial hair. That giant fluffy beard or wacky creative mustache probably looks great – but not for meeting strangers who are evaluating you more than you may think on how you look... for the first time. If a clean-shaven face is not possible, be sure it is trimmed and neat looking. There can be some industry-specific exceptions to the clean-shaven rule – like some forestry jobs - so know the culture of the environment you are interested in to make the right decisions for you.

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- Let's say you have a professional outfit, but you haven't worn it in a while... Try it on at least a week in advance! That way, if it doesn't fit nicely anymore or you realize it still has that grease stain on it that won't ever come out, or that it's of a style/color that would've most recently been considered professional in 1991, you can make arrangements to buy a new one. To save some cash, consider visiting Goodwill, Savers, or another thrift store. They often have professional clothing for about 10% of what it would cost brand new (heads-up: taking this approach could take several weeks of planning ahead and several trips to check inventory since they are not guaranteed to have what you need in your size). Although this approach takes more advance planning, it will be so much less expensive than buying brand new!

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- In some cases, unique or specialized attire would be the correct choice for the interview. For example, your interview is based in an industrial or remote outdoor setting. If you aren't sure, research what setting your interview will be in (you can even ask the potential employer) and get to know the culture of the career path/industry you are applying to. These two actions will help you make the best decision about if your interview will be an exception to this recommendation.

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- Get to know what [types of questions](#) are most likely to be asked at an interview. This is a strong approach since it is impossible to know and/or prepare for every question that could be asked.

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- Get to know what [types of interviews](#) you could encounter and strategies for success in each of them.

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- Practice! Participate in at least 3 mock interviews to polish these important skills. Make an appointment with [your career facilitator for help](#) with setting this up. This can be done before you know you have an interview, but is also very effective if you know the organization you'll be interviewing with and have a copy of the position description. Why? You can prepare your specific answers to questions like, "Why do you want to work for this organization?"

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and “Tell us how your skills and experience make a good match for this position.”

AS SOON AS YOU KNOW YOU WILL HAVE AN INTERVIEW

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- Research the organization. Hopefully, you’ve done some of this already (when you were crafting the customized resume and cover letter for them). Now is the time to be sure you know their goals and values. You can and should even research news articles that feature the company. Quarterly and annual company reports are also a way to stay current with their projects/priorities. All of this will also help you show how interested in the organization you are and may lead to interesting side conversations during the interview.

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- Prepare an interview folio with a notepad to use. This is a great technique to help you look and be more prepared. See below for what to write and store in it. Don’t have one? There might be one you can borrow from [your career development office](#) - just ask!

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- Create 5-8 [questions for the interviewer](#) at the end of your meeting based on the research you did about the company and the job description. You will write these in the notebook in your interview folio. You’ll want to ask questions that help you get a better idea of the position fit for you. In doing

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this, you'll also show them you're not just looking for a random job - you're really interested in them and want to be sure it's a good fit for you, too.

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- Do not ask questions about salary and other benefits or questions that can easily produce an answer by looking their website. However, be prepared to answer questions about salary and benefits as interviewers sometimes ask. This seems like a double standard - but it's the reality! Research ahead of time about the area's [cost of living](#) and [regional salaries](#). Be prepared to answer if the interviewer asks you what salary range or minimum salary you'd be looking for. If you don't have a solid number, you can say "I'd expect to be compensated competitively based on this industry, position level, and region".

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- Ultimately, you are looking to ask questions that show you've researched the organization and that you can think critically about the challenges they might have in addition to the questions you might have to confirm this organization would be a good fit for *you*. Write these in the notebook in your interview folio. Among the other questions you will ask, this is the place where you can ask what their expected timeline will be for making hiring decisions for the position. Knowing this will help immensely after the interview.

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- Visit the location in advance to figure out parking rules and traffic patterns. This will help ensure that you are not late or frazzled when you arrive for your interview.

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- Dissect the job description, if there is one. This is the document that contains the skills and abilities the organization is looking for. Think about examples in your life that demonstrate which of these skills you are good at. Look at the skills listed that you do not think you are good at. During the interview, you may have the opportunity to talk about the actions you are taking to improve/learn these. The important part is to think about all this ahead of time so your responses will sound a lot less like you're making them up on the spot.

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- Also in your interview folio, write down a list of experiences that you can use to answer typical [behavior based questions](#) during the interview - just a short phrase to trigger your memory. It's not necessary to write down all the details since you don't want to tempt yourself to read verbatim from the notebook during the interview. It is a good idea to write these down because you never know when your mind will go blank in an interview. Plus, you want to think in advance about which experiences to highlight and how to emphasize them so you are not just relaying the 'first thing that comes to your head' when they ask a question.

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- Bring copies of your resume – printed on resume paper. Store these in your folio, too (that folio is really coming in handy, isn't it?).

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- You may want to consider bringing samples of your work. The interviewer may or may not want to/be able to review it, but having it on hand could make you stand out (in a good way!). Only consider bringing work that is complete and 100% professional looking.

ON THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

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- Take only the absolute essentials in with you into the interview. Your folio (with your questions and list of experiences) is a must. Bring the samples of your work - if you decided to bring them. If possible, leave everything else in the car or at home; including your purse (if you have one) and your cell phone. If you must bring your cell phone into an interview, turn it off. Don't just silence it - POWER IT DOWN. There should not be anything important enough to interrupt this event. Cell phone noise - even vibration - even if you never answer it - can be a reason for an interviewer to disqualify you from the hiring process.

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- Be sure to arrive early. To the interview itself – not just to the location. This means you should have 10-15 minutes to spare as you check in and that when you do check in, you're 100% ready to go. This includes use of the restroom before you check in etc.

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- Remember to be friendly with everyone there - especially support staff and other candidates, if there are any present at the time. It is easy to think that you're only being critiqued based on the interview questions or that you're only being evaluated by the interviewer(s). This is often not the case! More often than not, how you were observed interacting with others while on site - or any other info the team can observe about you outside of the interview will weigh heavily on their evaluation. Although an extreme example, [this story](#) illustrates the idea perfectly.

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- During the interview, use all the skills you practiced in your mock interviews to show you are enthusiastic and have what they are looking for. BUT - remember - this is as much about you finding a good fit as them. Observe the surroundings. Do people seem happy? There is no need to call out or verbalize any of your thoughts regarding this during your interview, but be a keen observer of the surroundings and try to imagine if you can picture yourself there and being professionally fulfilled. This will be a factor later in the process if you get an offer from them.

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- Get contact information of those who are interviewing you. In some cases, they will tell you they don't give that out. If this happens, no big deal. You can then ask for the contact info of an HR representative or someone else in the company that you can send a thank you note to and follow up with. This step is crucial because if you don't get contact info at this stage it could be

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impossible or very awkward to get it later. Some committees disqualify candidates if they don't send a thank you/follow up note.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

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- Follow up. Within 24 hours of the interview, write a thank you email that thanks the interviewer(s) for their time; point out a part of the interview you really enjoyed or follow up on some information you weren't able to give them at that time; and emphasizes your continued interest in the position. It doesn't have to be long... 3-5 sentences will do. If you have their physical address, you can also send a thank you notecard. This is not necessary, but some people do it in addition to the email because it is acceptable and they want to take every chance to leave a positive impression on the hiring team.

AFTER THAT

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- Well, you wait. This can be the toughest part of the whole process, but there are some things you can do. If you know what their expected timeframe is for making a decision and have their contact information, you can reach out again at the end of that period. Your communication should be brief and positive; basically just checking in to see if their timeline has changed at all

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and, again, expressing your continued interest in the position. If you have another offer but this opportunity is your first choice, tell them that in a non-threatening way, again, emphasizing your continued interest in and enthusiasm for this position. If they give you an adjusted timeline, contact them again at the end of that second period in very much the same way you did before. If they still don't have any information, let them get back to you whenever they are ready. In the vast majority of cases, attempting to make additional contacts after the second follow up could make you seem desperate. It's not exciting, but at this stage you'll just have to remain optimistic while you pursue other opportunities.

IF YOU GET REJECTED

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- Do not despair! This is actually a HUGE opportunity! Here's what you should do at this point: write another thank you note (you can only do this if you have the contact info), again, thanking them for their time and consideration of you as a candidate. Add that you'd be enthusiastic about future opportunities with the organization and would be interested in knowing what would make you a stronger candidate in the future. This shows that you are willing to continually improve yourself. If they respond, you will have excellent feedback on what you can do to improve in future interviews.

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- Another potential benefit of doing this is... let's assume you were the number three candidate during this process overall. They offer the position

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to candidate number one; who might turn down the offer or end up leaving after a few weeks on the job (this happens sometimes!). It is possible that an organization would go back to its original list and skip over candidate number two because of the second thank you note you sent. It's worth that extra effort to send another thank you after a rejection!

