



INTERVIEW PREPARATION



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An interviewer has just one objective: to decide whether or not to make you a job offer. People who actually get hired are not only the best qualified, but often are the ones who know the most about how to get hired. Quality of experience, training, and education count; and the more you know about the anatomy of the employment process, the easier it will be to obtain the job you are seeking.

Interview Styles:

There are five common interview styles typically used by employers and recruiters. If possible, find out what type of interview will be conducted from your contact person. If you are working with a recruiter they should be able to provide you with the interview methods of their clients. The most common interview types are:

- Unstructured Interviews
- Structured Interviews
- Situational Interviews
- Comprehensive Structured Interviews
- Behavioral Interviews

Unstructured Interviews:

Generally, unstructured interviews involve a procedure where different questions may be asked of different applicants. They are simple and informal with no strict guidelines. The employer might ask you questions about your interests, educational background, previous work experience and any other subject that they feel is important in their organization or to the job. Some common questions are:

- What is your proudest accomplishment?
- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you leave your last job/why do you want to leave your current job?
- What are your major strengths?
- What are your major weaknesses?
- What are your career goals?
- How are you best managed?
- How do you go about building a team?
- What qualities have you liked or disliked in your bosses? Why?
- When and why have you fired people?
- Have you made any mistakes during your career? If so, what were they? How did you fix them?
- What is the most adverse situation with which you have had to deal in your personal or professional life? How did you deal with it? What was the outcome?

Structured Interviews:

In structured interviews, the interviewer has a clear agenda and follows it persistently. Companies use this rigid format to ensure uniformity between interviews and to easily compare the results. Since structured interviews follows a strict set of standardized questions, other issues unrelated but important to the main topic may not arise during the interview. Therefore the questions asked in the interview tend to be relatively open-ended.



Make sure to utilize every question to your advantage and say as much as you can about your achievements and abilities, without going off topic. Often the set of questions are related specifically to the job.

Some sample questions the interviewer may ask a candidate for a management position are:

- How would you describe your management style?
- How many people did/do you supervise in your present/previous position?
- How do you think your subordinates perceive(d) you? How does their perception compare with the way you perceive yourself?
- What would you look for when hiring people?
- What experiences have you had in leadership positions?
- What is your management philosophy?
- How do you motivate your staff?
- How do you set priorities?

Situational Interviews:

In situational interviews candidates are interviewed about what actions they would take in various job-related situations. These types of questions are designed to draw out more of your analytical and problem-solving skills, as well as give the interviewer a sense of how you handle problems with short notice and minimal preparation. The key to preparation and success in situational interviews is simply to review your past work experiences and review the steps you took to resolve problems and make corrections. It would be a good idea to have short stories of some of these past experiences so you can show that you have practice in handling similar situations. It is also important to do your research and have a firm understanding of the position for which you are interviewing. Knowing the responsibilities and potential challenges of the job will help you anticipate some of the questions.

Examples of situational questions are

- How would you handle an angry customer who was promised delivery of the product on a certain date, but because of manufacturing delays, the company was not able to deliver on a timely basis? The customer is demanding some kind of compensation for the unexpected delay.
- How do you handle a disgruntled employee in your department who has made a habit of arriving late to work and causing minor disruptions during the day, as well as a declining morale among the rest of the staff?
- You are an assistant manager put into a department to supervise staff who is experienced. One of the staff is extremely resentful (as he/she was turned down for the role) and is being unhelpful and obstructive. How would you handle the situation?
- A work colleague has told you in confidence that she suspects another colleague of stealing. What would your actions be?

Comprehensive Structured Interviews:

In comprehensive structured interviews candidates are asked questions pertaining to how they would handle job-related situation, job knowledge, worker requirements, and how the candidate would perform various job simulations.



Comprehensive structured questions are often relatively universal and aren't job-specific. For example, the interviewer could ask:

- Explain the concept of present value and provide an example of a business application.
- Human resources technicians are required to administer pre-employment written exams and read exam instructions to the candidates. Please read these exam proctor instructions to us as if you were reading them to a large candidate group.
- Please describe your previous work experience preparing detailed financial reports.
- The word "communication" means different things to different persons at different times. Tell me what this word means to you by giving me an example of a time when you were able to demonstrate this skill constructively.

Behavioral Interviews:

Behavioral interviewing is becoming increasingly popular and frequently used. It is based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to determine and evaluate past behavior. This type of interview is different and takes special preparation and skill to perform well. First, an employer determines a profile of desired behaviors. Some behaviors and characteristics employers may attempt to measure include customer service, teamwork, initiative, planning and organization, stress and tolerance, etc.

Next, the interviewer asks an open-ended question designed to stimulate recollection of a situation that would lead to a desired behavior. The candidate is asked to give an overview of the situation, including his/her role, other players involved, key events, and the outcome. The interviewer may ask follow-up questions like, "What did you do?" or "What did you say?" For example, for flexibility, the interviewer might ask: "Describe a situation that required several things to be done at the same time. What was your action? What was the result?"

The acronym "STAR" provides a guide for formulating answers to behavioral questions.

- S-** Describe the situation in which you were involved
- T-** Describe the task to be performed
- A-** What was your approach to the problem?
- R-** What were the results of your actions?

In the behavioral interview, make sure the answers you give are honest, concise, and reflect positively on you (even if the event did not have a positive outcome). Remember that you are selling yourself, and the interview is the first place to demonstrate what you are worth to a company.

Some common characteristics of behavioral interviews are:

- The behavioral interviewer will ask you to provide details and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about events and actions
- The behavioral interview will focus on your actual past action, not what you "should" or "would" have done. Some interviewers, however, will follow-up with questions such as, "Looking back on this experience, what would you have done differently?"



- The behavioral interviewer is interactive with you and will continue probing with follow-up questions or refocusing in order to get the information needed
- The behavioral interview may be longer than a traditional one and the interviewer will likely be taking copious notes

Often behavioral questions will begin with “tell me about a time when” or something similar, referring to a past event. Some typical behavioral interview questions might include:

- Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker or supervisor and what you did about it.
- Tell me about a time when you accomplished something that you did not first think you could do.
- Tell me about a time when you used a systematic approach to analyze a problem and consider alternate solutions.
- Tell me about a time when you needed to follow procedures that you didn't agree with.
- Describe a high-pressure situation you had to handle at work. Tell me what happened, who was involved, and what you did in terms of problem solving.
- Many situations at work will require fast thinking and speed in making decisions. Give me an example of a situation in which you were especially skillful in making a decision quickly.
- Tell me about a time when you showed high enthusiasm and energy in order to create positive motivation in others. Give me a specific example.
- Getting the job done may necessitate unusual persistence or dedication to results especially when faced with obstacles or distractions. Tell me about a time in which you were able to be very persistent in order to reach goals. Be specific.

Other Interviews:

Panel Interviews:

The panel interview is often attractive to companies that rely heavily on team cooperation. Employers want to gain the insights of various people when interviewing candidates. They want to know if a candidate's skills balance the needs of the company and whether or not the candidate can get along with other workers. Candidates should use this opportunity to gain as much information about the company as they can. Each interviewer has a different function in the company and has their own perspective about the company.

Follow-up Interviews:

Companies bring candidates back for second and sometimes third or fourth follow-up interviews. There are a number of reasons for this. Sometimes they just want to confirm that you are their ideal candidate. Sometimes they are having a difficult time deciding between a short-list of candidates. Other times, other decision-makers in the company want to gain a sense of who the candidate is before a hiring decision is made. Whatever the case, don't go into the interview thinking you've got the job “in the bag”. Treat it as formally as any other interview and prepare just as thoroughly.



Dos and Don'ts:

Do:

1. **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 formulate intelligent questions to ask him/her. For sample interview questions click [here](#).
2. **Know where you're going.** Make sure to find out where the office is and how to get there. Save yourself time and unnecessary stress by knowing how long the trip will take, the name and phone number of the person you will be meeting, and the parking situation. Visit www.mapquest.com to get quick and easy directions.
3. **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, always err on the side of conservative.
4. **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?" and "Tell me about yourself." For sample interview questions and suggestions click [here](#).
5. **Secure your references.** Find at least three key people 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.
6. **Arrive early.** Be sure to arrive at least 15 minutes before the interview. Let the receptionist know that you have arrived and that you have an appointment. Turn your cell phone off so it does not ring during your meeting.
7. **Bring necessary documentation.** Make a checklist of documents that you will need for the interview, and make sure that you have them in your briefcase before leaving home. If you are a recent graduate, you may want to bring your college transcripts. Also, bring any pamphlets or portfolios of large projects you have worked on in the past. This is particularly useful if you are applying for a job in the creative department.
8. **Sell yourself.** The interview is your chance to shine, so now is not the time to be overly humble. Develop a 25-second sales pitch that includes your strengths, your abilities, and what sets you uniquely apart from other applicants.
9. **Be aware of informal interviews.** This type of interview is casual and relaxed. It is intended to get the candidate talking and friendly. The candidate may reveal more information than they might otherwise. As you know, too much information too soon can eliminate you from the candidate pool.
10. **Ask questions.** Based on your earlier research, ask how the responsibilities of the open position relate to the company's goals and plans for the future. Interviewers are often favorably impressed by candidates who show that they are knowledgeable about the organization. Don't know what kind of questions to ask? Click [here](#) to find out



11. **Follow up.** After the interview, don't forget to send a note or friendly email thanking the interviewer for his or her time and consideration, as well as restating your interest and commitment to the position. If you don't hear anything after one week, call to politely inquire when they will be making a final decision.

Don't:

1. **Take the interview as just a formality.** Even if all of the preliminaries have gone well, don't be arrogant and start imagining how you'll start spending your new salary. The biggest error you can make is to assume that, because you've gotten this far, the job is in the bag.
2. **Dress down.** How you present yourself during your initial meeting with a potential employer is very important, and your physical appearance can speak volumes to someone who is meeting you for the first time. Even if you know that the firm allows employees to wear jeans, a business suit is your best and safest bet.
3. **Forget to show why you're the best choice.** Be familiar with the job description of the position for which you're interviewing so that you can illustrate how your experience, abilities, and strengths are in line with the company's needs. Make it clear to potential employers why they should hire you specifically.
4. **Be too modest.** Failing to talk yourself up during an interview is one of the most self-defeating mistakes that you can make. Don't be afraid to talk up everything that you've accomplished, whether in school or in previous companies. However, if you worked on a project in a group, do not take all the credit for the accomplishments. Employers want to see that you are a "we" player, not an "I" player.
5. **Talk too much.** Be careful not to talk over the interviewer. This meeting should be a two-way conversation, and many interviewees cover up their nervousness by blathering.
6. **Focus on the funds.** Don't talk money too soon into the interview. To focus on your salary requirements and previous salary history right off the bat may cause you to reveal too much. While the topic of salary will certainly come up, follow the interviewer's lead. He or she may be saving that topic for a later conversation.
7. **Trash talk.** Even if you hated your former boss or felt that you were treated unfairly by your previous employer, a job interview is not the place to launch into a litany of complaints. If you were laid off or fired from a previous position, be prepared with an explanation that puts a positive spin on the circumstances.
8. **Neglect to ask questions.** Employers appreciate a candidate who can ask several intelligent questions. Prepare at least 3 or 4 questions in advance to ask the interviewer. Not having questions to ask can reveal a lack of preparation.
9. **Lack enthusiasm.** This is your first and sometimes only chance to showcase your personality. Don't walk in announcing your bad day. Be polite and upbeat. Show your enthusiasm for both the job and the opportunity to interview for it.



10. **Sit down until invited.** Be polite: don't fidget or slouch in the chair and certainly do not swear (even mildly).
11. **Go over the top.** Stay calm and stick to the facts. Although you should avoid yes and no answers, you don't want to go on a tangent about something unrelated to the interview. Be concise with your answers but provide examples to prove your achievements.

Interview Preparation

Get Information:

Find out about the employer and the job – you could ask the employer if they have an information pack or speak to people you know who work or have worked for the company.

Try to find out the answer to the following questions:

- What do they do/make/sell?
- Who are their customers?
- What sort of organization are they?
- What financial information can you get about turnover, profits, etc.?
- What exactly will the job involve?
- What sort of person do you think they want?
- How can you best fit your skills to match the job?

Plan for the Interview:

Think about the interview itself:

- Who will be interviewing? If it is your prospective manager, the interview may be more detailed
- Will there be a test to take? Find out before the interview and ask for an example of the things you'll be asked to do

Prepare for Questions:

Thorough preparation will give you the confidence to do your best at an interview. Here are some traditional questions that interviewers often ask.

1. ***Why do you want to work here?***

Mention:

- Good reputation of the firm
- Any other positive information you have about the firm, e.g. their training record
- It will give you a chance to do work which interests you

2. ***Why did you leave your last job?***

Mention:

- Briefly and honestly explain the reasons why your last job ended. If there is anything positive to say, say it



- Point out that you have learnt from the experience and state what you have done to “fix” the problem (if there was one)
3. ***Have you done this kind of work before?***
Mention:
- If yes – tell them the skills you have and how you can use them to better the company
 - If no – quickly describe other work experience which will help you learn the job quickly. Emphasize your interest and enthusiasm to learn
4. ***What did you do in your last job?***
Mention:
- Skills and duties relevant to the new job
 - Machines/equipment used
 - Your responsibilities
 - People you dealt with
 - How long you were there
 - If you were promoted
5. ***How long have you been out of work? How do you spend your time?***
Mention:
- Job search activity
 - Voluntary work
 - Further education or study
 - Hobbies
6. ***Why have you had a) so many jobs? b) only one job?***
Mention:
- a) You wanted to widen your experience in different types of work/firms. Many of the jobs were temporary, and you would rather be in work than out of work
 - b) You had several different jobs within your last employment. You enjoy the opportunity to develop and they have a good record in training and development
7. ***How do you get along with people?***
Mention:
- How you have previously worked as part of a team
 - Your ability to get along with people at all levels
 - Give examples
8. ***What makes a good team member?***
Mention:
- Good communication
 - Adaptability
 - Flexibility
 - Co-operation
 - Sense of humour
9. ***How do you cope with pressure?***
Mention:
- The pressure in previous jobs using recent examples, e.g. how you coped with a changed deadline, completed a rush order or dealt with staff shortages
10. ***What are your weaknesses?***
Mention:



- Parts of your last job that you found testing but explain how you overcame these problems
 - Be fairly brief but honest, e.g. "I can sometimes be a little too enthusiastic"
 - Note: Employers value people who can admit their mistakes rather than blaming their failings on others
11. ***Where do you see yourself going? What would you like to be doing in five years time?***
Mention:
- You would ideally like to be working for the same company but to have developed within it
12. ***What wage do you expect to earn?***
Beware!
- If you pitch your bid too high, you could price yourself out
 - If you pitch too low, you could lose out
 - Before going to the interview find out about wage levels in the company and compare them with your current needs and the position you are up for
 - If the wage level is negotiable, be prepared to negotiate
13. ***When would you be available to start?***
As soon as possible! Do not put any barriers in the way

Questions You Might Ask the Interviewer:

- Why is the job vacant?
- Why did the last person leave?
- Who would I report to? What are their backgrounds and responsibilities?
- Are there any direct/functional reports in this position?
- What training will I do, if any?
- What would my first job be?
- How soon will I hear about the result of my application?
- How would I be paid?
- What is the opportunity for growth both within the role and within the company?
- Who will I work most closely with? What are their backgrounds and responsibilities?
- What are the company's plans for growth in the future?
- How do you think the economy will affect company plans in the marketplace?
- Of all the people who have held this position, what were the main qualities of the most successful person?
- Can you describe the corporate culture and the type of individual that best fits into this culture?
- Does the company provide opportunities for continuous learning?
- What are the primary challenges I would be facing in this role?
- Are there any immediate initiatives that I would be responsible for that I can prepare for in advance?
- What are the short term and long term expectations for this role?



What Common Characteristics Do All Employers Want?

Keep these traits in mind when you are writing your resume and cover letter, as well as during your interview discussion. No matter what job you are applying for, there are certain universal qualities that employers look for in an ideal candidate.

Employers like:

- People who listen
- People who answer questions with examples
- People who are brief in the right places
- People who come prepared
- People who appear confident

Employers also look at people who can:

- Cut costs
- Maintain competitive advantage
- Make things look better
- Get things done more quickly
- Avoid potential problems
- Organize well
- Expedite the workflow
- Make the boss look good
- Use old things in a new way
- Provide more information
- Cut down time
- Open more territories
- Provide a tax advantage
- Cut staff costs
- Reduce inventories
- Get government support
- Develop staff performance
- Turn round a bad situation
- Introduce new systems
- Improve teamwork and relationships
- Reduce risks
- Meet deadlines easily
- Increase sales/profits/turnover

Self-Evaluation:

After the interview, it is a good idea to think about how it went. Ask yourself

- What went well?
- What went badly?
- Where there any questions you found difficult and why?

Did you:

- Arrive on time?
- Dress appropriately?
- Greet the interviewer politely?
- Sit well and avoid fidgeting?
- Answer the questions fully enough?
- Sell yourself and stress why you are the best person for the job?
- Describe your previous duties well?
- Thank the interviewer for taking the time to see you?

Make an effort to learn as much as you can from each interview. Aim to become more prepared and confident in the future by looking for areas to improve, as well as developing your stronger areas of performance. This way you will increase your chances of getting that job.