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How to Prepare for the Job Interview

INTERVIEWS ARE NOT ALWAYS EASY for everyone, but there are things you can do to make them more successful. Some people complain about sitting through dozens, if not hundreds, of interviews without ever getting a single job offer. But there are ways to significantly improve your chances of making a good impression. Plenty of people are denied positions that they would otherwise be completely capable of performing because they just do not interview very well. On the other hand, people who may not possess all of the necessary qualifications to perform well in the position, succeed in the interview stage and are able to rise to the occasion, meet their employer's expectations, and develop their new careers in paths they might not have found imaginable. The key to success is to never go into an interview unprepared. It will be immediately clear to your interviewer that you are just not motivated enough to work for them.

Your interview will be your best shot at proving yourself capable of taking on a new position. You'll have the chance to elaborate what's already in your resume and demonstrate how you're a good fit for the organization. Remember, an interview is an opportunity to sell yourself and explain why they should invest in your success. There are certain things you need to be able to demonstrate that you just can't show on a resume, like a sense of personal responsibility, verbal communication skills, and the ability to get along well with others. If you haven't needed to interview in a long time, it may seem daunting to put yourself back on the market, but follow these steps and tips below to increase your likelihood of success and snagging that job you always wanted

This handy guide to conducting interviews consists of six parts: **1.) Researching the Company and Position, 2.) Preparing for the Interview, 3.) Conducting the Interview, 4.) Concluding the Interview 4.) General Interview Don'ts, and 5.) Common Interview Questions and How to Answer Them**

1.) Researching the Company and Position

DO AS MUCH RESEARCH AS POSSIBLE on the organization and job position. Never go in for an interview without having a sense of what the position entails and how the company operates. Some people send out so many resumes that they may not even remember exactly what it was they applied for by the time they get the call back to set up an interview. If you are applying to a lot of positions, it helps to keep track of this information in a document so you always have a reference to consult. Start by finding the original job posting, and review the description of the position. Not enough information? – Try searching for similar job position postings with other companies – you may even discover new job leads as well.

Your prospective employer wants to believe that you targeted your job search specifically for them – that you want to work for their company in that specific position. Being educated on what the position typically entails will help prove this to them. A good resource for learning what a general position’s responsibilities is the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>). Of course, this only gives you a general guide to that position – every employer has different expectations of their own. And if you want to look up average salaries for that position, head to <https://www.glassdoor.com/>.



Remember, you don’t need to know everything about the position on day one. No one is born knowing how to work at a specific job; it will take training, practice, and a lot of experience. Businesses look for people who are trainable – they want to find someone who is a good fit for the organization and is capable of learning new things. So don’t be afraid to cast a wide net and look for things you may not necessarily have thought you’d be capable of doing. Job skills are often transferable between different positions and lines of work. No one grows their career by sticking with the same thing their entire life!

Once you’ve gotten a sense of what the position entails, research the company itself. Look under the “About Us” page to get a little understanding of the company’s history. Look for any press releases to get an idea of what the company has been doing recently. Search for the company on news aggregator websites like <http://news.google.com/> and read any related articles. You might not be able to figure out everything about the company, but a basic understanding of its organizational structure and recent projects should give you some good questions to ask in your interview. Your prospective employer will appreciate that you show interest in working for their specific organization and have at least a basic understanding of it – you will definitely have a leg up already over your competition.

Managing expectations is key to succeeding in any kind of relationship – your employer needs to know what they can expect out of you, and you need to know what you can expect out of your employer.

Research the competition too. Applying for McDonalds? It will help to know what next, new thing Burger King is doing with their Whopper. Ask yourself what does company “A” do differently than company “B”? What specific talents and capacities can you contribute to help them grow and advance their mission? You’ll have the opportunity to talk about this when you finally get to the interview. Get a general lay of the land of the industry too. Is it thriving or is it declining? You’ll find that there is a wide variety of different kinds of corporate cultures, based not just on individual companies, but also in specific industries. There’s a lot of difference between working in the tech sector versus working, say, in the coal mining industry, even if the job position titles seem practically identical. Do you expect



your workplace to have ping-pong tables, a nap room, and an in-office bar? – Or do you expect a more traditional, disciplined working environment? Knowing these things in advance will help you better tailor your interview and market yourself effectively as the best fit for the organization. Remember that managing expectations is key to succeeding in just about any kind of relationship – your employer needs to know what they can expect out of you, and you need to know what you can expect out of your employer.

2.) Preparing for the Interview

PREPARE YOURSELF IN ADVANCE of the interview. You don’t want to have to show up in a raggedy pair of old sneakers just because you weren’t able to find your dress shoes that you haven’t work in over a year in your messy closet. Have everything planned out the night before so you aren’t in a last-minute rush and risk showing up late and unprepared. Assemble, lay out, and iron if needed all of the clothes you plan on wearing. You want to make a good first impression from the moment you walk in the door. A good rule of thumb is to wear clothing one step above the level of the company culture. So, for example, if it is a fast-food or entry-level service job, then a polo shirt and khaki pants should suffice. But if the office environment is business casual, then it would be smart to stick to a more formal suit. You never want to dress down as it will show you really didn’t have any idea what you were getting yourself into in the first place. Get a sense of what people in the workplace wear on a typical day by looking for company photos on social media or elsewhere on the net.

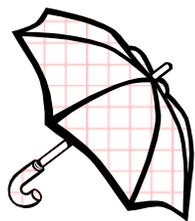


Make sure you have a guaranteed way of getting to the interview as well. Estimate how long it will take you to arrive and make sure you budget in enough time to account for anything unexpected, such as traffic delays, problems with public transportation, vehicle issues, zombie invasions, sharknadoes, etc. Google Maps even has a neat feature that will estimate how long it will take to get somewhere using public transportation. But always give yourself plenty more time than you think you will need, especially if you are unfamiliar with the area. Before you leave, check the weather too and grab your

Remember, an interview is a two-way street – you are just as much interviewing them as they are interviewing you. You need to make sure both of you are a good fit for each other.

umbrella if there's a chance it will rain. You don't want to show up sopping wet with soaked resumes – it will make a bad first impression and show that you don't know how to prepare for something as simple as a rainy day.

Speaking of those resumes, don't forget to bring multiple, clean copies with you. Just because you emailed a copy over, doesn't mean the interviewer is going to have it in their hands when you arrive. Bring multiple copies too in case anyone else at the organization might want one of their own to review. Get them printed on resume paper if you can, it usually costs less than a quarter per copy at your local office and print shop. It also helps to have a professional looking portfolio, or simple folder at least, to keep all of these materials organized. And to show your interest in the position, bring a pen and notebook so you can take notes of your own. Write down any questions that might pop into your



head so you can ask them later. You can also use it to write down things beforehand that you want to say so you don't forget. Interviews can be stressful for people sometimes and cause them to freeze up, so it doesn't hurt to have a reference of important things you want to mention about yourself, or things you want to ask about the company and position. Remember, an interview is a two-way street – you are just as much interviewing them as they are interviewing you. You need to make sure both of you are a good fit for each other.

Next, prepare for how you are going to approach the interview. You don't want to walk in and just sit there in silence trying to come up with answers. You need to prepare what you are going to say ahead of time. Ask yourself how you believe your qualifications make you a good match for the position. Take notes and jot down some ideas. Review them before the interview so you don't forget them later. In order to best convey to the interviewer how you think you're going to be the best fit for the position, you need to be clear about this yourself. There is a list of commonly asked interview questions and some tips on how to best answer them towards the bottom of this document. Even if you think some of the questions might be a little dumb, such as, "What is your greatest weakness?" – remind yourself that these questions are testing how well you can handle yourself under pressure. Feel free to look online for more helpful suggestions on how to answer some of the most common questions – there plenty of different resources out there.

How do your qualifications make you a good fit for the position?

3.) Conducting the Interview

REMEMBER YOUR INTERVIEW STARTS IMMEDIATELY; it may even start before you enter the door. Arrive respectfully and orderly. Sitting in your car waiting for your interview, rocking out to loud music while smoke of dubious origin billows out of your car windows? You can bet someone is going to see that and mention it to the hiring manager. Try to enter the door around 5 minutes before your scheduled interview time. If you arrive super early, just find something simple to do to kill a little time, like taking a walk around the block or reviewing the notes you took about yourself

Keep your focus on the position you are applying for.

earlier. If you get there way before they are ready for the interview, it might make for an awkward situation to have to just stand around with nothing to do – many workplaces don't even have reception or waiting rooms. And if you do have a feeling that you might arrive late, then it is imperative that you call and let them know as soon as possible. Being a little late won't totally rule you out, but it is important to show that you respect their time by giving them advance notice and a new estimated time of arrival.

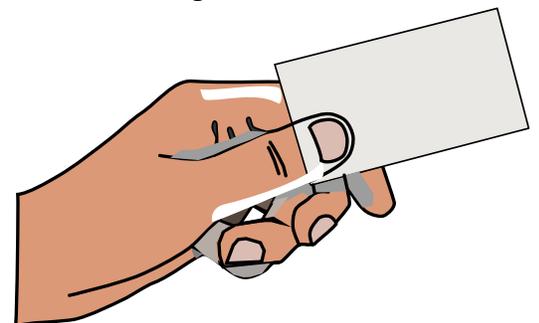
Once you've been introduced to the person you will be interviewing with, remember to be on your best behavior. Be polite, smile, and give a firm handshake. Keep good posture and maintain proper eye contact. They'll likely ask you initially to tell them a little bit about yourself. Give a brief list of your qualifications, some work-related evidence to back them up, and how you personally think you are a good fit for the position. Remember to keep it focused on the specific position. How do your qualifications and past job experiences make you a good candidate? So, if you are applying to be an investment banker, then it might not make much sense to mention that diploma you got last year from the North American College of Fly Fisherman with a major in Fly-Tying (however, if you are applying to be a salesperson at a fish and hunt shop then it would make perfect sense).

Remember that you are being interviewed to see if you will be a good fit for the organization. Employers want someone who is likeable and able to work productively in a team. You want to build a good rapport with your interviewer, but try to avoid talking about personal topics (especially stay away from sex, politics, and religion!) unless the interviewer brings it up themselves. It's okay to let the interviewer do a lot of the talking – sometimes that is a good thing. You don't have to feel like you need to dominate the conversation. Sometimes the most successful interviews take on a very casual, conversational tone.

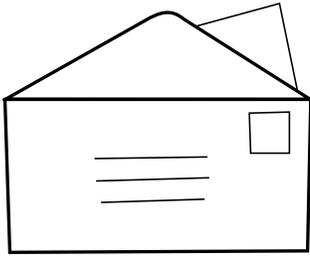


4.) Concluding the Interview

KEEP A POSITIVE MINDSET even if you think you screwed up. Everyone gets a little nervous at a job interview and your interviewer likely won't hold it against you. And likewise, if you think you nailed the interview, try to remain modest. You can do your celebrating in the privacy of your own home. At the conclusion of the interview, shake hands, politely say good bye, and let them know that you are still interested in the position after learning more about it and look forward to hearing back from them. Ask for a business card or their contact information, so you can send a short and succinct Thank You letter later to indicate you're continued interest. Sending it via email is quick and easy, but it's likely to get lost in the recipient's inbox. Writing a personal card and mailing it out shows a little more initiative on your part and is more likely to get you noticed. In the letter, thank the interviewer for giving you the opportunity to meet with them, and indicate your continued interest in the position. This



will also give you an opportunity to mention anything important that you may have forgotten in the actual interview.



Remember, you probably won't hear back immediately. The position you applied for might not even be open yet, and they are just interviewing candidates in advance. It doesn't hurt to ask during the interview when they are looking for someone to fill the position. Some organizations are looking to hire candidates on the spot, some want to give it a few weeks so they have a wide range of applicants to choose from, and some will wait as long as they need to until they find exactly the right individual. While you're waiting to hear back on this position, send in more resumes elsewhere. Don't put all of your eggs in one basket – getting a new job is a combination of successfully marketing yourself and being in the right place at the right time.

BIGGEST INTERVIEW DON'TS!

- *Don't* chew gum.
- *Don't* come in reeking of cigarette smoke, alcohol, or any other mild-altering substances.
- *Don't* apologize for being hungover from last night's party.
- *Don't* answer or even check your phone. Double-check that it's on silent. Even the vibrating function can be distracting, so turn that off. Best yet, just leave it in your car.
- *Don't* ask about compensation or benefits. You can discuss this when your prospective employer brings it up, which sometimes does not occur until the second or third interview stage.
- *Don't* ask about things like vacation days, how long your breaks will be, if they're okay with you leaving early on Fridays, etc. You want your questions to focus on how you *will* be working, not how you *won't* be working.
- *Don't* bring anyone else to the interview. Bringing your mom so she can vouch for what a hard worker you are will not improve your chances. During the interview, it is your responsibility alone to demonstrate why you are a good candidate.
- *Don't* arrive at the interview location more than 10 minutes before it is scheduled to begin. If you arrive early, find a way to kill time on your own by going to a coffee shop or taking a walk around the block.
- *Don't* show up empty-handed and tell them your dog ate your resume.
- *Don't* badmouth your previous employer, even if it was a really miserable place to work. You can explain what kinds of challenges you faced there and why you wanted to look for something new, but talking trash just shows that you may not be a person who is capable of always getting along with others.
- *Don't* talk negatively about any things that are a matter of personal taste; you might insult the interviewer if you talk about how "X" is such an awful restaurant or how you want "Y" to lose the big game on Sunday. Try to portray yourself as a positive thinker who is always open to new suggestions.
- *Don't* ask to use the restroom in the middle of the interview. Either politely ask to use the restroom prior to the interview, or wait until after the interview has concluded.
- *Don't* act completely desperate that you'll take on any job anyone will give you (even if it is true).
- *Don't* wear strong cologne or perfume. What might smell nice to you, might irritate someone else – remember you want to make the best first impression you can.
- *Don't* act like you already sealed the deal even if you think the job interview went spectacularly well. Remain modest; the interviewer can change their mind at any moment, and they likely will if they think you're boastful or arrogant.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR

Can you tell me a little about yourself?

- Resist going into a full diary of your entire life and career experience. Think of this as your “elevator pitch” or a 60 second TV commercial to market yourself. Try to grab their interest, but keep it relatively brief. If the interviewer wants to hear more, then he or she will ask themselves. There will be more time to elaborate in the rest of the interview. Give a basic outline of your most recent work experience, say a few things regarding your unique skills and qualifications, and then indicate your interest in the position.

Why should we hire you?

- This is a chance to display your confidence. You can give a few examples of some of your generic skills, but make sure to try to tailor them to the specific position. Give some real-world, work-related examples where you’ve been able to prove yourself a valuable asset.

What kind of value can you add to our organization?

- Think of yourself as a salesperson marketing yourself. How is their organization going to get the most bang for their buck? Provide examples.

What kind of duties did you perform and accomplishments you achieve at prior positions?

- This is an opportunity to elaborate what you already have on your resume. Try to think of some specific, job-related accomplishments. Were you part of any teams that developed successful, new strategies to grow business? – Or implemented any new policies/procedures to improve productivity and efficiency? Try to be specific as you can, giving numbers and statistics if possible. Employers want to see that you are capable of meeting and exceeding expectations, can take initiative by spearheading new projects for organization-wide benefit, and can hold yourself accountable for the tasks you set out to achieve.

What are your greatest strengths?

- This can be a time to gloat a little bit, but you don’t need to sound like a superhero. If you’re really good, for example, at de-escalating difficult customer service encounters, then mention that and give a real-world example. If you have excellent time management skills, then mention that and give an example, like maybe you use Google Calendar to schedule each and every day of your life with a detailed list of tasks and timetables to make sure you stay on top of things. Always provide examples.

What are your greatest weaknesses?

- You can be honest, but be selective in what you say. Don't say that you have a lot of trouble waking up in the morning and getting to work on time. Use this as an opportunity to outline how you plan on improving on any shortcomings, because let's face it, we all have them. Don't say that your biggest weakness is that you are a perfectionist, it will seem disingenuous. Be honest, but don't make yourself look bad. Remember, for every weakness you mention, try to put a positive spin on it by describing how you are planning to improve. For example, you can mention that you are prone to procrastination, but find that you work best under pressure, but nonetheless have been taking concrete steps to better manage your time and set deadlines and goals for yourself throughout a project's duration to help keep yourself on track.

Why do you want to work for us specifically?

- This is where you can draw upon the research you did about the company. Was there anything that stuck out? Any particular reasons why you think it would be a good fit for you? Try to stay work and career focused as much as you can. For example, if you're applying to Google, don't mention how much you want to take advantage of the rock climbing wall or free massages. Instead, mention how you want to work in the kind of collaborative, creative environment with like-minded colleagues that Google offers because you think it will really spark your own innovative thinking.

Where do you see yourself in five years? – What are your career goals?

- Don't tell the hiring manager that you want their job in five years – that will just come off as arrogant. Use this as an opportunity to discuss how you plan on growing and developing your career, and how this position at this company can best help you reach those goals. Your prospective employer is most likely looking for someone who plans on sticking around for a while. Tell them that you plan on using this potential job position to help develop new skills and take on new responsibilities. Try to think reasonably about where this position might take you up the career ladder. So if you are interviewing to be a proofreader, then it might make sense to see yourself as a junior copywriter in five years. Or if you are interviewing to be an entry-level sales associate, then maybe in five years you might see yourself as an assistant sales manager. Try to sound optimistic, motivated, and ambitious; but don't be unrealistic.

Why did you leave your last job?

- Be honest, but you can also be selective in what you say. Sometimes what you don't say is just as important as what you do say. Don't badmouth your past employers, even if they were miserable places to work at. If you were let go for performance related reasons, this is okay to mention – just make sure to include on how you plan on improving your shortcomings. Employers will appreciate someone who owns up to their mistakes and is willing to take the appropriate steps to rectify them.

Describe a time you made a big mistake and what you did to rectify it?

- Everyone makes occasional mistakes in their careers, but what employers are looking for are people who can own up to their mistakes and do their best to rectify them. They want honest and accountable people. If you made a mistake and then ignored it until it ballooned out of control, then you will not appear to be a very reliable candidate. However, if you made a mistake and immediately took the necessary actions to best rectify the situation and minimize any risks, then you will look like an honest and reliable candidate.

How did you hear about this position?

- This is a good time to mention anyone that may have recommended you for the position. You also may want to mention that you've always heard good things about the company and that you are interested in working specifically for them. Always try to indicate your interest. Don't tell them that you've just been sending out hundreds of resumes randomly until someone took the bait. Frame your answer so it seems like you are making a targeted job search.

Describe a difficult situation and what you did to overcome it?

- Avoid trying to look like some kind of self-centered superhero who came to the rescue. The interviewer is looking for someone who handles well under pressure and takes initiative in solving problems, but who also isn't afraid to ask others for guidance and assistance when necessary. Remember the **S.H.A.R.E.** method when responding to this question:
 - 1.) **S**ituation; share a specific situation.
 - 2.) **H**indrances; explain what made it difficult.
 - 3.) **A**ction; describe the actions you took to correct the situation.
 - 4.) **R**esults; list the results you accomplished
 - 5.) **E**valuate; explain what you learned from the situation.

Why do you have a gap in your employment?

- Employers value honesty, so don't lie and make up a position that you didn't actually have. It's okay to give a reasonable explanation to explain any gaps in employment. Maybe you wanted to take a short break from the workforce to focus on self-improvement while you figured out what you wanted to do next, maybe you had to take time off to care for a sick relative. Try to be clear and succinct; you don't need to give any more details than you need to give.

Do you have any questions for me?

- At the end of your interview, the interviewer will likely ask you this question. It is a good time to express your continued interest in the position by asking them to elaborate on specific things that were not clear to you. Asking questions shows that you want to be prepared for this position in case you are offered it and that you want to meet all of their expectations. Below is a good list of some common questions to ask. Don't ask them all, but pick a few. Jot them down beforehand in your notebook so you won't forget. Remember not to ask questions

whose answers were already brought up beforehand, it will make it appear like you weren't even paying attention during the interview. On the next page is a list of helpful questions to ask your interviewer. They will help you show your interest and you will get a better sense of the job should you be offered a position.

Helpful Questions to Ask Your Interviewer:

- ✓ Why is this position open?
- ✓ Who would I report to or be working with?
- ✓ When are you looking to fill the position?
- ✓ What challenges are facing your team right now?
- ✓ In the past, what has separated an average person in this position from an exceptional one?
- ✓ What are some of the most difficult problems one might face in this position? – And how are they best handled?
- ✓ What kind of advancement opportunities might be available in the future for someone who succeeds in this position?
- ✓ What are some of the accomplishments you want to see made in this position in the future?
- ✓ In what ways has this organization been the most successful in offering its products/services?

Now that you've finished reading this informative guide, begin preparing yourself for your next interview. Preparing in advance is the key to success. Even if you don't get this one, it will at least count as good practice. We wish you the best!



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