



EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWING

Everything that you have done up to this point in the job search process has been leading to this, the employment interview. The interview is your chance to demonstrate to the employer that you have the skills needed to do the job, the intelligence and motivation to learn skills you need, and the enthusiasm for working for this particular company. In essence, it is your time to shine and your best opportunity to convince the employer that you deserve his/her trust in you as a qualified candidate.

All in all, an interview offers a very short amount of time in which to communicate the entirety of who you are in relation to the job qualifications and in which the employer has to decide whether or not to take the risk of hiring you. A lot has to happen in such a brief time period. In order to make the most of this time, you need to prepare well in advance and practice your presentation in order to make the best impression.

What kind of interviews do employers offer?

It is important to understand that there are different types of employment interviews and to understand in advance in which type you are being asked to participate. Your preparation depends on this.

Telephone Interview:

Once your resume is "out there" you need to be prepared at all times to receive calls from prospective employers. This includes having a voice mail message that is professional and preparing family members to write down complete messages. Employers will often call candidates with several questions designed to get some additional information and decide whether to offer a next interview. It may be a recruiter or a secretary who makes these calls. No matter who it is, however, treat that person with total respect and give answers designed to show that you have what it takes to advance to the next level. Every telephone interaction with an employer is part of the interviewing process.

Screening Interview:

Sometimes, instead of doing some pre-screening on the phone, employers will call in candidates for short interviews (e.g., 45 minutes). Another possibility is that the initial screening interviews will take place at a job fair or similar recruiting activity. During this kind of interview, you must convince the employer that you are a good fit for company and that you are serious and enthusiastic about the possibility of working there. This is not the time to ask about salary and benefits.

On-Site Interview:

The final evaluation of and selection of candidates is typically done on-site at the company. A candidate may need to go through several interviews -- some of which may be with a single individual and some with a group of individuals including peers, superiors, and the person who will directly supervise the position. These interviews may take place all on the same day or over the course of several days or weeks. You just never know and need to adjust your interviewing strategy according to the styles of those company representatives involved in the interviews. When the interview is scheduled, be sure to get specific directions, an agenda for the interview, and the names correctly spelled and titles of all the people with whom you will be meeting.

What Are Some of the Common Interviewing Mistakes?

Employers report that candidates often make mistakes, some more serious than others. An employer may overlook a single mistake, but when a candidate makes several, the employer assumes that these and similar errors will be made on the job. Here are some of the most common mistakes employers say that they notice:

- Poor personal appearance, especially in terms of hygiene or choice of attire.
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm.
- Over-emphasis on money, making it seem that the candidate is only interested in the best dollar offer.
- Condemnation of past employers.
- Failure to look at the interviewer when conversing.
- Limp, fishy handshake.
- Unwillingness to travel or relocate.
- Late to the interview appointment.
- Failure to express appreciation for the employer's time.
- Undefined, vague responses to questions.
- Coming across as overbearing, overly aggressive, conceited with superiority complex.
- Inability to clearly express oneself; poor voice diction and/or grammar.
- Unwilling to start at the bottom; expects too much too soon.
- Makes excuses about and is evasive on unfavorable factors in record.
- Lack of tact, courtesy and/or good manners.
- Lack of vitality and energy; appears to be lazy.
- Appears to be indecisive about goals and next steps.
- Application filled out in a sloppy, incomplete manner.
- Seems to be merely shopping around.
- Cannot state clear reasons why candidate is interested in the company and/or industry.
- Low moral standards.
- Appears to be cynical.
- Makes statements that demonstrate intolerance and strong prejudice against difference.
- Inability to take criticism and is defensive.

? In your opinion, why do employers consider these to be mistakes? What can you do as you prepare for employment interviews to ensure that you do not make these same mistakes?

How do I prepare for the interview?

Preparation in advance is so important that it cannot be over-emphasized. Making an investment of time and energy in this preparation will go a long way to ensuring success. Basically, there are four areas where this investment is needed:

1. Gather information about the job requirements and description and about the company.

When your interview is scheduled, ask to be sent a complete job description, including the identified requirements and qualifications. Use the information to tailor your answers to questions and create your agenda of points that you want to cover about your self in the discussion. Employers will often measure your enthusiasm for the position by what you know about the company and the industry. This kind of information can be gathered by talking with people in the field and reviewing the company literature and website. You can also look for related information by doing an Internet search, using reference materials available at in the college or local community libraries, and reviewing information in business magazines or local newspapers.

Generally, you will want to gather the following information.

- Description of projected duties
- Skills, experience, credentials, and knowledge of ideal candidates
- Trends, major issues in the field
- A realistic salary for the position (<http://jobsmart.org/tools/salary/index.cfm>)
- Size, location and structure of the organization
- Past, present and projected growth
- Types of products/services offered and the typical client
- Major competitors and how the company relates to the competition
- Major executives or administrators and their backgrounds
- Mission statement and management philosophy

Use this and related information when planning your responses to interview questions and as information to drop at other times in the conversation. Show that you have done your homework that you are serious about the position and excited about the possibility of employment with this company.

2. Prepare your answers to possible questions and your questions to ask the employer.

There is no way to anticipate all of the questions that may be asked of you nor to memorize responses to even half that amount. Even if it were possible, simply reciting information in a robotic, rote manner will not be well received by the employer. Your answers need to flow naturally while still portraying you as a person with ample self-knowledge and ample professional qualifications.

Perhaps the best way to prepare for interview questions is to identify the skills and knowledge areas you want to emphasize in your interview answers. These may be ones that you are particularly interested in utilizing on the job and are hopefully those that match what the employer is looking for. Then, for each of these skills and knowledge areas, identify 3-5 examples of times when you successfully demonstrated them. Use the STAR format to structure the relating of your examples.

What is the STAR format, you may ask? It is a format to structure your examples or stories in which you describe the **Situation** in which you were involved, the **Task** that was required in dealing with the situation, the **Action** you took, and the **Results** of your action.

Try it! Use the example below as a guide to come up with your own STAR stories.

SKILL You Want To Emphasize	<i>Example:</i> SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULT
RESEARCH	<i>As part of a class project, our team evaluated an old mine site with damage due to acid mine draining.</i>	<i>This required monitoring the health of the site including water, soil, animal and plant health.</i>	<i>Conducted surveys of birds and vegetation using GPS to locate study points and took samples of water and soil, gathering specific data over the course of several months.</i>	<i>Wrote a report recommending possible restoration strategies that was submitted to the Bureau of Mines. This report was instrumental in the college receiving a \$25,000 land reclamation grant.</i>
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Stories such as these can be used as answers to almost any question that may be asked of you in an interview. The lead in to these stories could be "Let me tell you about a time when I demonstrated that skill."

In a *Recruiting Trends* survey, employers were gracious enough to share some of their favorite and most often used interview questions. Use the chart below to help you prepare to for an upcoming interview and note how many might be answered with one of your STAR stories.

Interview Questions Often Asked by Employers	
PERSONAL/ MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS <i>Give information directly related to the job qualifications and show you are self-motivated!</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please tell me about yourself. • How do you handle rejection? • Who or what has had the greatest influence on your life? • How would you describe your greatest assets? • What are some of your personal goals and have you achieved any of them? • What motivates you to be at your best?
SKILLS AND ABILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills and abilities do you possess that will help make you successful in today's job market?

<p><i>The employer's main intent is to evaluate how well your skills match the company's needs. Be specific with your skill descriptions and offer examples.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please describe some of your past leadership roles and your accomplishments in them. • Please describe a frustrating experience and tell me how you dealt with it. • How do you interact with people around you? • Who was the most difficult person you have ever dealt with and how did you respond? • What are your major strengths and weaknesses? • What organizational techniques do you use on a daily basis to accomplish your school, work and personal goals? • What skills and or special qualities do you possess for this job that would make you stand out from other candidates? • For you, what are some of the pros and cons of working on a team project? • Please describe your communication style and what you value in the communication style of others?
<p>CAREER GOALS AND OBJECTIVES</p> <p><i>State your career goals in terms that match the company's hiring objective.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your short term career goals? What are your long-term career goals and objectives? • How are you preparing to achieve these goals? • Please describe a time when you were extremely goal oriented and the results of your actions. • What are your standards of success for a job? • What work would you like to do that really interests you? • Please describe your ideal job.
<p>COLLEGE EXPERIENCE, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES</p> <p><i>Employers are most impressed with those who hold leadership positions in extracurricular activities. Talk about how you made a difference and what specific skills you developed.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With what extracurricular activities have you been involved? • Please describe your accomplishments in these activities. • Please describe your most rewarding college experience. • If you could relive your college experience, what would you do differently? • During your campus activities, what positions did you hold? • What were your major responsibilities in these organizations and how did you make a difference? • Please describe a situation in which you had to work as a member of a team for a campus organization. • What were some of the problems you encountered and how did you resolve them?
<p>ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS</p> <p><i>Talk about your accomplishments no matter how small. Be proud of what you have achieved!</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please tell me about some of the accomplishments you achieved during college and which make you the proudest. • How did you finance your education? • What are your greatest accomplishments at this point in your life? • What honors, awards, or other recognitions have you received and why did you receive them? • In addition to your educational and work experience, what else would you like us to know about you in order to help us make an appropriate decision?
<p>RELOCATION, TRAVEL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you willing to relocate? If not, why? • Do you mind traveling as part of your job? What is the greatest percentage of your work each week that you would be willing to travel? • What might get in the way of you being available to travel or relocate?
<p>ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS</p> <p><i>Employers are looking for additional information about how you make decisions and how your education gives you skills and knowledge relative to their hiring needs. Use</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you choose this major or field of study? • How satisfied are you with your accomplishments in this academic program? • What did you choose this particular college? • What were your favorite college classes and what were your least favorite? Why? • What is your grade point average (GPA)? How do you feel about your GPA? • Should grades be used as an indicator of future career potential when an organization is considering new college graduates? • How would you relate your academic accomplishments to your future career aspirations? • What electives did you take outside of your major and why did you choose these electives?

<p><i>what you know about the job description in choosing how you answer these questions.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your academic strengths? • What was the most difficult aspect of obtaining a college degree?
<p>WORK EXPERIENCES</p> <p><i>These are great questions for which to use your STAR stories. Again, direct your answers to what you know about the job description to further emphasize how well you match what the employer is looking for.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What prior work experience have you had that is related to this job? • What were your most significant achievements on these jobs? • What problems have you experienced on the job and how did you approach them? • What would your last two employers say about you, either good or bad? • Please describe a time when you had to meet a deadline for project completion. • What did you enjoy most about your previous work experiences? Least? • Please tell me about your toughest job assignment. • What one experience proves to you that you are capable of doing the kind of work we are talking about? • Please elaborate on one of the work experiences listed on your resume. • What would you have done differently on any of your work experiences that would have made a difference?
<p>KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORGANIZATION</p> <p><i>At a minimum, research the company in advance by visiting its website. Identify several salient facts that you can use in your answers.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes you interested in working for this company? • What are your expectations of this company? • What do you know about this company? • Please tell me what you believe to be the most pressing issues facing this company? • How do your qualifications relate to the business that we do? • What do you know about our competitors and why do you prefer us to them? • Who else are you interviewing with in your job search? • Please tell me about what you see as the major characteristics of our clients/customers?
<p>HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS</p> <p><i>Often times, the most important thing about your answer to a silly question is how you answer it and not what you say. When answering a question about a job-related hypothetical situation, consider sharing one of your STAR stories if it is relevant.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine that you are faced with a customer who is quite irate. How would you work with this customer to achieve a good outcome? • If I were to hire you for this position, I might come to you and ask you to gather a team to coordinate a project. What would you look for in prospective team members and how would you make your final selection? • If I were to tell you that I was writing a book entitled "101 Everyday Uses for the Common Red Brick" what are 5 uses for the common red brick that you could suggest to me. • If you had to choose to be a certain tree/animal/flower/car/etc., which one would you be and why? • Imagine that you had 15 minutes to speak with the President of the United States. What one question would you ask him and what one thing would you most want to let him know? • If you were given this assignment, how would you proceed?
<p>SALARY AND BENEFITS</p> <p><i>Research average salaries in advance and offer a range if pressed for your salary requirements. Rule of thumb is to let them mention a figure first.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What starting salary do you expect as an employee for this company? • What company benefits are most important to you? • How would you feel about an income made up totally of commissions? • When comparing one company to another, what factors will be most important to you besides starting salary? • How important is starting salary to you when considering a company's job offer? • What would make us consider giving you a starting salary at the higher end of our salary range?

Adapted from Recruiting Trends by Patrick L. Sheetz, Michigan State University.

It is just important to have some questions prepared to ask the employer. Typically, at the end of the interview after the employer has asked his/her questions of you, you will be asked if you have any questions to ask the employer. You should always have some to ask, as it shows good communication skills, your interest in and enthusiasm for the position, and the fact that you are taking the interview process very seriously. It may be

helpful to have 3-5 questions prepared in advance. Of course, additional questions may come to mind during the interview itself. Here are some possible questions:

Questions Often Asked by Applicants	
GENERAL COMPANY TOPICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What future changes do you see for this company? • What plans does this company have for becoming more competitive in the industry? • What is the greatest challenge, in your opinion, that the organization faces in the next year? • Has the company thought of going in the direction of xxx? • Of what is the leader of this organization most proud?
WORK ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe your corporate culture? • How would top management describe the corporate culture and how does this compare with the actual work environment experienced by those at the lower level? • Does this organization encourage mentoring of new employees, and if so, how are mentors assigned? • How much freedom is given to new employees to solve problems using their own methods? • What help is available to me if my methods of problem solving fail? • How would you describe the formal and informal methods of communicating information in this company?
ANTICIPATED WORK RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I were hired for this position, what would a typical day look like for me? What duties will I be performing? • What will be expected of me in this position and how are expectations communicated? • How does this job fit with the mission of the organization, the company performance, and the profitability of the company? • Will I be working in a team or group? If so, can you describe the mission of this team, its members, and the leader? • Is this a new position? If so, why was it created? • If this is not a new position, why happened to the person who used to be in it?
MEASURES OF WORK PERFORMANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe the most successful employees in your organization? • How will I be evaluated in this position and how often will I be formally evaluated? • Who supervises this position and what is the chain of command? • How does your company encourage new employees to keep pace with advancing technologies and best practices in this field? • What can I do within my first 5 years of employment to ensure my future success with this company? • What feedback has been given to your company by recent new hires?
SALARY AND BENEFITS <i>Don't ask these questions at the first interview, unless a job offer is made at that time.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the salary being offered for this position? • When in the application process will I be able to review your company benefits? • Is there tuition reimbursement available to employees and what are the advanced educational opportunities that this company encourages? • What training do new employees receive?
INTERVIEW CLOSURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does your company want from successful candidates for this job? • What would distinguish one candidate over another for this job? • Is there anything that concerns you about my qualifications? May I address that concern? • What do you need to know about me in order for me to prove myself and my commitment to this company? • What are the next steps in your decision making process? • When do you hope to have this position filled?

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3. Attend to logistics.

Attending to logistics means gathering everything that you are going to need for the interview and making sure you are prepared to arrive on time.

- Make a positive first impression through your attire. For most interviews, it is appropriate to dress in a business fashion, which will project an image of confidence and success. While the workplace may have a more casual dress-style, it is always better to play it safe by dressing in business attire. For men, this means a suit or a jacket with dress shirt, tie, and slacks. For women, this means a suit with a modest hemline or a pants suit. In both cases, it is best to be conservative in the color of your clothes and any accessories that you choose to wear. If conservative is not your typical style, consider toning it down for the interview; you can always add more of your personal style slowly after you have been hired. Most important is to be clean and well groomed for the interview.
- The day before the interview, consider taking a test drive to the location of the interview so that you know exactly where to go and how long it will take to get there. Arrive early to allow you enough time to calm yourself with a few deep breaths, but don't check in with the employer more than 10 minutes early.
- Bring additional copies of your resume and copies of your reference list and transcripts. While these may not be needed, it is best to be prepared should they be requested at the interview. A leather-like portfolio is always appropriate and can be a place to store these extra copies, as well as a notebook on which to jot down your notes before, during and after the interview.
- If you are applying for a job that will require you to show samples of your work □ e.g., graphic design, teaching, journalism, etc. □ bring your portfolio of samples to the interview.
- Ask questions at the time of setting up the appointment about the interview including how long it will last, with whom you will be interviewing (get correct spelling of names and titles), whether it is a screening or selection interview, and what you will need to bring to the interview.

4. Get excited about the Interview!

Enthusiasm and a positive attitude will often be counted more than actual experience when an employer evaluates you during an interview. Communicate in any way possible that you are excited about the opportunity in everything you do in interacting with others before the interview □ including those who set up the interview appointment and those who greet you at the company.

Before the interview, spend some time envisioning a positive experience with the interview, one that results in a job offer. Mental rehearsal and positive visualization are techniques used by some of our most successful professional athletes and can be effective for the job seeker as well. You may also need to practice some relaxation techniques, including taking deep breaths and imagining a peaceful scene. All of us at one time or another are plagued by thoughts and beliefs that limit us. If you are sending yourself these kinds of messages, stop! Start sending yourself positive, empowering messages that remind you that you are a capable person with skills and knowledge that will benefit the employer.

One suggestion □ ..before you get out of the car to go to your interview, sit in your seat quietly for a few minutes. During that time, close your eyes and take deep breaths. Tell yourself over and over that you are a qualified applicant and that you will make a great employee!! Then, slowly open your eyes, and go for it!

What Happens During the Interview and What Should I Do?

There are several stages to the typical employment interview. The interview typically opens with an introduction followed by a few minutes of small talk or polite conversation about matters not related to the interview. The bulk of the interview is spent in conversation with the interviewer asking questions and the applicant answering them. During this time, the interviewer is in control of the conversation topics, although an applicant with effective interviewing skills will steer the conversation in the direction of his or her strengths. In essence, both the interviewer and the applicant share the responsibility of where the discussion goes. The interview will end with an opportunity for you to ask questions of the employer and share any additional details that you did not have the chance to offer beforehand. There are several tips to keep in mind for making these most of these interview stages:

Tips for the Introduction:

- Smile, extend your hand in a firm handshake, and let the employer know how pleased you are to meet him/her and to have the opportunity to interview.
- Address the employer as Mr. or Ms. So-and-so, unless the employer specifically asks you to use his/her first name.
- Maintain eye contact with the person to whom you are speaking.
- Remain standing until the employer offers you a seat.
- Avoid unconscious behavior that indicates you are nervous □ e.g., tapping your fingers on the desk, jiggling your leg, or twisting your hair.

Tips for the Small Talk:

- Have a topic planned in advance. Possible topics include the weather if it is unusual, the recent success of a professional sports team, or something unique that happened to you on your way to the interview.
- Make a courteous observation about something that interests you in the building or in the employer's office.
- Be a good listener. The employer often brings up the small talk topic and will expect a response from you that indicates you are listening and interested.

Tips for Answering the Employer's Questions:

- Continue to use non-verbal communication that indicates your confidence, professionalism, and enthusiasm to the employer. This would include maintaining eye contact, smiling, maintaining good posture, and speaking in a clear voice.
- Keep your answers to questions brief and yet specific in detail. Considering using the STAR format when relating your examples that demonstrate your skills and accomplishments. Most important is to avoid rambling, which would indicate to an employer that you may be unorganized and unprepared.
- Be positive and avoid down playing your experiences. While you may not have years and years of professional experience related to the job for which you are interviewing, you do have some experience and skills that will transfer to the position. Be proud of where you are in your career and where you hope to go.
- Keep your own agenda in mind as you are answering questions □ i.e., what is it that you most want the employer to know about you in terms of your skills, characteristics, experiences and goals for the future? Interject these details into your answers as appropriate.
- If you are asked a question that leads to an answer that highlights a negative in your background or qualifications, do not get defensive. Simply state the facts of the situation, and then immediately lead the employer to your strengths in other areas or how you learned from a negative experience and gleaned new

self-understanding from that experience. For example, "No, I do not have any experience in that area, however, I have had good experience through my volunteer work in this related area that shows my ability to learn quickly." Or, "Yes, I did receive a failing grade in that class, however, I developed time management strategies that allowed me to receive grades of B or better in all my classes the next semester."

- If you don't know the answer to a question, do not try to think something up right on the spot. The result of this is that you will most likely ramble and won't get to the point. If you don't know the answer, be honest and say so and then go on to talk about how you would use specific resources to find the answer.

Tips for Closing the Interview:

- You know that the interview is nearing an end when the employer asks if you have any questions. Never say that you do not; always have a few questions prepared. This shows that you are giving serious consideration to the position.
- Express your enthusiasm for the company and the job and summarize the skills and other qualifications that you believe make you an outstanding candidate for the position.
- Ask about next steps in the application process and when you can expect to hear from the interviewer.
- As you are leaving, thank the employer for his or her time and interest, and reiterate that you hope to hear from them with a positive answer in the very near future.

Do I Just Wait by the Phone After the Interview?

Most definitely not! Immediately after the interview, find a quiet place where you can make a few notes about the interview experience. Pay particular attention to how well the position relates to your career goals and how interested you truly are in the position. Identify any areas of question or concern that you have about the position and write down specific questions you would like to ask the employer during your next conversation. Use these notes to be prepared for subsequent interactions with the employer. Additionally, you should also make notes immediately after the interview about your interviewing skills. How well do you think you did in the interview? What do you wish you had done differently? What will you do differently for the next interview in terms of how you will prepare? What will you do differently next time in the way that you answer the questions? This time of reflection is invaluable in improving your interviewing skills.

Thank You Note:

Within 2-3 days after your interview, send an email or a word-processed letter of thanks to the employer. Thank the employer for his/her time at the interview, summarize your qualifications for the position, and reiterate your enthusiasm for the position. Employers report that far too many interviewees never send a cover letter and that this reflects poorly with regard to their professionalism, communication skills, manners, and interest in the position. Not only is sending a thank you note good etiquette, but it can also make the difference in how well an employer evaluates you.

Follow-Up Phone Call:

If you have not heard from the employer after the time specified in the interview, make a phone call to inquire into the status of your candidacy. Always reiterate your interest and ask if there is something else that you might do to help in the evaluation of your qualifications. For example, you can offer to send copies of your transcript, reference letter, writing samples, or other documents that support your qualifications. After this conversation, you can consider sending a letter that includes the requested materials and again thanks the employer for his/her consideration.

Keep Contacting Other Employers:

Never put all your eggs in one basket. Continue contacting other employers about possible employment, although once you accept a job offer, you ethically must stop all interviewing activities.