

Interview Guidelines

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Interview Guidelines

Be Prepared

- Anticipate possible questions and practice answers.
- Research the company before the interview.
- Prepare questions to ask in the interview.
- Know the name(s) of the interviewer(s) and how to pronounce them correctly.
- Leave for the interview with plenty of time to spare. Make sure you know how to get there, where to park, and how much time to allow for traffic. You may want to do a dry run going to the interview location the day before your interview.

Look Good

- Go to the interview neat and clean.
- Dress conservatively and comfortably.
- Avoid heavy makeup and trendy or flashy clothes or jewelry.

Be Punctual

- Arrive 10 minutes ahead of schedule.

Be Aware of Body Language

- Turn off electronic devices (cell phone, pager, etc.) or **Leave them in the car!**
- Offer a firm handshake.
- Stand or sit erect but comfortably. Don't slouch.
- Relax. Don't fidget.
- Use eye contact, but don't stare.
- Smile ☺

Carry a Portfolio (or small bag)

- Show the interviewer that you planned ahead by bringing all necessary information:
 - Pad of paper, pen, calendar
 - Your notes on the company and your questions to ask the interviewer
 - Several copies of your resume – any correspondence from the company
 - Copy of the application form
 - Reference list and/or letters of recommendation

Be Enthusiastic

- Have a positive attitude in the interview.
- Be friendly, professional and courteous to everyone.
- Don't be negative about anything!

First Impressions

You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make it a good one! Interviewers can take about 30 seconds to decide if they don't want to hire you. Don't give them a reason to rule you out immediately by leaving a bad impression with weak, irritating or distracting body language. Keep these tips in mind:

- Be mindful of your facial expressions ... smile and look enthusiastic. But don't fake it, just be natural.
- Make sure your handshake is firm. Practice if you need to, and make sure it is neither bone-crushing nor limp. If you have sweaty palms, subtly wipe them before shaking.
- Eye contact should be appropriate, and this is something you may need to practice as well. You need just enough eye contact, but not too much or too intense. Look at the person you are talking with for a few moments, and then look away. If you are interviewing with multiple people, take the time to look at everyone while talking.
- When you're practicing good body language for your interview, be on the lookout for these things to avoid: Finger tapping or drumming, fidgeting in your seat or swiveling in your chair, fiddling with your hand, hair or anything else you touch, or leg shaking and foot tapping.
- Beware of verbal tics, those little words we use as fillers, like "umm", "uh," "like" and "you know." You'll conquer these when you practice your interview questions.
- If you think you'll be nervous in an interview situation, practicing good body language will help ease your mind. A little bit of nerves can actually be a good thing, but practicing will give you the confident edge you need.

Selling Yourself in an Interview

Many people find it difficult to toot their own horn in an interview; it just isn't something they're used to doing. If this is you, now's the time to prepare to sell yourself in an interview. If you don't tell them how great you are, who will? However, avoid appearing cocky or arrogant. Practice, and get a variety of feedback to strike the right balance!

Pre-Interview Preparation

Research the company and the position. Use that information, along with your accomplishments, to illustrate your potential contribution and value to the employer. Tell them exactly what you can do for them; quantify previous accomplishments, describe how you solved problems, saved money or increased revenue.

Finding and Using the Interviewer's Hot Buttons

- Listen to how interviewers describe the position, its duties, the work environment, etc., to pick up on cues about what is important to them.
- Two questions to help uncover what the interviewer thinks are important:
 - What do you think is the greatest challenge for this position?
 - What qualities do you consider to be most important for this position?
- Use the answers to frame your responses to future questions. Show how you can solve the greatest challenges and how you possess the qualities they seek.

Closing

Convey the following in the descriptions of your character and ability:

- Motivation
- Energy and drive
- Confidence
- Determination
- Positive Attitude
- Reliability
- Honesty and integrity
- Listening skills
- Analytical skills/critical-thinking skills
- Dedication

Say Thank You

- At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer(s) for their time.
- Follow-up with a brief thank you note that:
 - Reviews points brought up in the interview and adds any ideas you forgot to mention

Phone Call Interview Checklist

Remember, this is your first chance to make a good impression. Your interview begins here. When you receive a call for an interview, be sure to find out the following information.

- Company name: _____
- Position you are interviewing for: _____
- Name and title of person conducting the interview: _____
- _____
- Where and when to report: _____
- _____
- Anything special to bring to the interview: _____
- _____
- Who is calling: _____
- Return phone number: _____
- Additional information: _____

30-second Commercial

The 30-second commercial is a statement to describe the skills and services that you have to offer an employer. It is essentially a brief monologue that sells your professional abilities and reflects your ideal job profile.

It can be used in a variety of settings; professional conferences, career fairs, or informal social events. The goal is for the 'commercial' to lead into further conversation. This could happen on the spot if there is time or in the future with

a business card exchange and follow up email or phone call. Remember to give your 30-second commercial to everyone – at family gatherings, in the waiting room of the dentist, at student organization networking events. You never know where the next job is coming from.

What to Do

- Choose a combination of the following components that will comprise your pitch:
- Greetinginclude your first and your last name
- Experienceaccumulated experience in your specific industry and jobs
- Areas of Expertise.....your major job functions and skill categories
- Strengthsspecific skills that you possess
- Accomplishmentsspecific accomplishments that emphasize your strengths
- Professional Style....traits & characteristics that describe how you perform your job
- Job Search Strategy.....what you want to do with your experience

Examples of these components:

Hi, I'm Melanie Smith, and I'm a recent nursing graduate from Mercy College of Ohio. I have a specific interest in pediatric care. I completed a clinical rotation at Mercy Children's Hospital and discovered my passion for helping children. My ability to put children at ease in a medical setting allows me to deliver exceptional care. I am looking for a position as a Registered Nurse within a family practice (private doctor's office).

My 30-second commercial:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

At the Interview

Typical Interview Format

- Most interviews follow a typical format from arrival of the applicant to the closing.
- **At Reception** - Never treat anyone you meet at the interview location rudely. You don't know who has the formal or informal power in the organization yet; treat everyone as though they had the power to hire you on-the-spot.
- **Small Talk** - Be prepared to participate in short, polite conversation at the beginning of the interview. This is usually done to put you at ease and to help the interviewer learn more about you. Look around the interviewer's office to get clues about what to talk about (e.g., awards, pictures of family, artwork, books, etc.) Avoid anything controversial, such as politics or religion. However, if the interviewer is "all business," reflect that attitude and don't attempt to engage in small talk. **Take your cues from the interviewer.**
- **About the Job** - Often, the interviewer will begin with a brief description of the position. Listen carefully; they will often highlight the things they think are most important. Ask questions if you are unclear on anything, but don't interrupt the interviewer.
- **Interviewer Questions** - This is the part of the interview people are most familiar with - when the interviewer asks questions of the candidate. Be prepared by reviewing the job description, company research, listening to the interviewer and being intimately familiar with your accomplishments and skills.
- **Candidate Questions** - Toward the end of the interview, most interviewers will give you an opportunity to ask questions. You should always have some intelligent questions prepared, ones that demonstrate your understanding of the company and the position. However, be respectful of time restrictions; if the interview is only scheduled for one hour and you are given five minutes for questions, do not go over your time limit.
- **Closing** - Take this opportunity to sell yourself one more time; identify how your qualifications match those required for the job, and explicitly state how you can help the company. **Ask the potential employer about the next steps in the process**, if you may follow up with them, and when. This should give you some insight into where they are in their decision-making process, and when they think they'll have a final decision. Be gracious, thank the interviewer for his or her time, and enthusiastically state (or re-state) your interest in the position.

Interview Questions

Types of Interview Questions

There is no limit to the questions you could be asked in an interview, but interview questions generally fall into two categories: **traditional** and **behavioral**. Traditional questions are general questions about your skills, your personality, your qualities, your strengths and weaknesses, and how you get along with others. Examples include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What do you consider to be your strengths and/or weaknesses?
- What do you think you'll be doing five years from now?
- How well do you work with people?

Sometimes traditional interview questions are used to build a rapport with you and may not even be phrased as a question. Success or failure with these questions tends to hinge on how well you can communicate your answers, so a thorough and confident response will go a long way.

Behavioral, or situational, questions may also address each of those things, but they are framed in such a way that the job seeker is forced to provide a specific example from their past experience to answer the question. Examples include:

- Tell me about a time you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me a specific example of a time you had to conform to a policy you did not agree with.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Give me an example of a time when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.

The idea behind behavioral interviewing is that the candidate's past performance is often the best predictor of future performance. You will probably find that many employers use a combination of both. However, since an increasing number of employers use behavior-based methods to screen job candidates, understanding how to excel in this line of questioning is becoming a crucial job-hunting skill.

Common Interview Questions

Most interviews will include some common interview questions. When you have a specific interview lined up, you can customize your answers to the specific employer you will be speaking with. Here is a list of common questions along with guidance on possible responses.

Why should I hire you?

Give the interviewer a one- to two-sentence synopsis of who you are, your biggest strength, and the major benefit the company will get from this strength. Target your answer to the specific job. Focus on how your skills and experience meet and exceed the job requirements.

Tell me about yourself.

Give the interviewer a three- to five-sentence snapshot of your skills or professional experience.

What did you like least about your last job?

Avoid speaking negatively about your previous company, co-workers or supervisors. Instead, focus on what you want and how you believe your talents can be used in the position for which you are interviewing. Expressing a desire for growth, challenge and opportunities are good ways to turn this question from a negative into a positive statement.

Tell me about a time when...

Listen carefully to the question and tailor your response to exactly what the interviewer is looking for. If you don't have a professional example, use one from your personal life, but keep it neutral (don't mention anything that could rule you out, like religion, politics, age, etc.) and focus on how your actions would apply in a work situation.

Answering Questions

The STAR Method

You will be able to respond successfully to many interview questions, traditional or behavioral, using the STAR method.

The method involves a four-step process that explains:

- The **situation** or context of the example you are going to give
- The specific **task** that was before you
- The **action** that you took
- The **results** of your behavior

You will be far more successful if you use this method to provide the interviewer with specific situations that demonstrate your skills and abilities than by responding in vague or general terms.

Consider how we can use the STAR method to answer the following behavioral question:

"Give me an example of a time when you met a deadline."

Situation

Describe briefly the surrounding circumstances. What was the situation? Give the employer some background information about where your example took place, in what role were you functioning, and who else was involved. Consider this response:

Situation: During my last semester at business school ...

Task

What was the problem or the challenge before you? What was the task you were assigned? In addition to knowing the situation, the main thing on which the employer will focus is the skill.

Task: I was responsible for completing a business plan as part of a group project.

Action

The next step is telling the interviewer what specific action you took. While others may be involved in the situation, the key here is to keep the focus on your actions. The interviewer is looking to pull apart your response and look for a specific skill or ability, so it is important that you give them one.

Action: Based on the six weeks I had to complete my portion of the project, I established weekly goals to keep me on schedule.

In this action statement, the candidate was specific about what he did without shifting the spotlight to any of the other players involved. Had he ended his response right here, it probably would have met the minimum criteria of what the employer was seeking. But for a response to outshine the competition there is one last step.

Result

To really ensure that the interviewer knows the value of what you did, clearly describe what happened or the result. Explain to the listener how your action helped, what you learned, and how the situation was better as a result of what you did. Consider this completed example:

Result: By breaking the project into smaller parts, I was able to meet my weekly goals and keep the project running on schedule. I was able to complete my portion three days ahead of schedule, which allowed my teammates to have extra time for their portion.

By detailing the results of his actions, the candidate was able to show how his actions benefited not only himself, but also the rest of his team. By quantifying his responses using phrases such as "weekly goals" and "three days ahead of schedule," the candidate is putting his accomplishment in perspective for the employer.

Using the STAR Method

When asking questions about your past experiences, employers are not going to limit themselves only to things that went well for you. They are going to probe into negative experiences too, including problems, challenges, difficult colleagues and even personal weaknesses. As part of your preparation, you need to construct responses that deal with positive and negative situations.

When dealing with negative experiences, end your response (or your story) on a positive note.

Your responses should consist not only of the problem, challenge or difficulty, but also what you did to overcome, defeat or cope with the difficulty that was faced.

Questions to Ask at an Interview

What to Do When It Is Your Turn to Talk

Make your interview a two-way conversation by having questions ready for the people who are interviewing you. Consider these tips:

- Make sure your questions focus on the job, the duties, and the company – this is your chance to find out what they are looking for and how you fit their requirements.
- Ask questions to help you decide if you would enjoy working at this company – questions like "Can you tell me about the company culture here?" or, "What do you like about working for this company?"
- **Some questions are inappropriate at this level of the job hunt, so stay away from questions about salary and benefits during a first interview.**
- You'll also want to make sure you don't ask questions that could have been answered if you had researched their company first (things like their mission statement, number of employees and company history are often found online, so make sure and do your company research before the interview!)

Interviewers respect candidates who think about their choices carefully, and they appreciate knowing you have done your homework.

During the interview you will also be deciding if the company is a good place to work. Based on the answers to your questions, you will learn about the employer. Look for a match between the company and your goals, needs, and attitudes.

It is a good idea to write out five or six questions before the interview. Revise the questions for each interview based on your research. If a question gets answered before you ask it, choose another question from your list. Your questions should do two things. They should get the information you want to know about the company. They should also reflect your knowledge of the company. Use the information you learned while doing research on the company to write your questions.

Following is a list of suggested questions.

1. How would you describe a typical day on the job?
2. To whom would I report?
3. What other positions would I interact with while performing my duties?
4. How would you describe the work environment?
5. Do your employees work individually or as a team?
6. What further education or training does the company consider important for my future progress?
7. How are performance reviews done?
8. What is the general management style with regard to customer service, products, or employees?
9. How would I be trained or introduced to the job?
10. What are the department's goals for the year?
11. What would you say are the top two personality traits someone needs to do this job well?
12. What improvements or changes do you hope the new candidate will bring to this position?

The best questions show that you have done research about the company and, at the same time, get you information you really want to know. The following are three examples of this type of question. Of course, you will tailor each question to the company information and the job opening.

1. What opportunities might I have to work in the _____ area?
2. Your company literature indicated that the company actively encourages continuing education. What opportunities are there?
3. In your Annual Report, the company president talked about a new fiber optics division. What are the research goals of that division and how would it relate to the division where I am applying?

Good questions can use information the interviewer shared with you earlier in the interview. For example, if the interviewer mentioned that the company plans to develop new products, you might ask how those plans will affect the job you are seeking.

Finally, **pay attention to the time left in the interview**. Usually, the interviewer will invite you to ask questions during the last five to eight minutes of a one hour interview. So, write out at least six questions you want to ask to help you get the information you need. If time is short, say something like: I had hoped to ask you several things, but as our time is short, let me ask the two questions that are most important to me.

Interview Follow-up

- Recognize that it may take weeks before hiring decisions are made.

Thank-you Letters

- Be sure to follow up on your interview with a proper thank you letter or e-mail. This will distinguish you from the competition and remind the interviewer of your skills and abilities. A well-written thank you note also demonstrates good manners, dedication and enthusiasm.
- Although it is easy and efficient to send a thank you via e-mail, a handwritten note can help your candidacy.
- The format of your letter is simple: Thank the interviewer for their time, remind them about what you interviewed for and when, write about what you enjoyed and how you can help, and restate what the next steps will be. Sign your letter, and include contact information.

Example:

Dear Mr. Thompson,

I appreciated the opportunity to talk to you on (date). The information you shared with me about (Company Name) was excellent, and I am excited about the possibility of applying my education and experience to the position we discussed.

If I can provide you with any additional information, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

(Your signature – neat and legible)

Second Interviews

- If you're asked back for a second or subsequent interview, you can expect it to be different from the first, and so you'll want to prepare differently. Start by patting yourself on the back for landing a second interview, that's a great sign that you're a top candidate.
- First, expect that you will meet more people, perhaps in a panel/peer interview format, or perhaps as you're brought around the company to meet folks. Work to remember names, and ask them about what work they do.
- You may be given a tour of the workplace and invited for a meal. Once again, you'll want to wear appropriate clothing, and be ready to make small and large talk with the people you are spending time with. Get to know them, and help them get to know you with **relevant**, interesting information.
- If you have been requested to demonstrate a skill or do some hands-on work, be prepared. Dress appropriately and have everything that you need with you. Once again, you have a chance to shine here, so practice before the interview.
- Finally, this is the time and place to be discussing salary and benefits, so go in prepared. Research what the median salary is for your position in the US and your particular state.
- Remember, take these follow-up interviews as seriously as you took the initial one: prepare, and follow up with appropriate thank-you notes to all involved.