



Quick Guide

Interview Skills for Success

The job interview is a strategic conversation with a purpose. Your goal is to persuade the employer that you have the skills, experience, and ability to do the job, and that you fit into the organization and its culture. At the same time, you can gather information about the job and organization to determine if the job and work environment are right for you.

Before you go

- Take stock of your strengths, skills, contributions, and personal and professional goals.
- Research the employer and understand the job description and what the employer is looking for so you can connect the dots between what they are looking for and what you have to offer.
- Review the job description and company profile so you can anticipate questions you may be asked.
- Develop a set of “scenarios” – situations you can draw upon to provide examples when answering questions.

Dress and Grooming

- Exceed expectations. The emphasis should be on appropriate dress; there is no rule that fits all people, however, choosing clothing that fits the company culture or one step above is advised.
- Avoid flashy colors, loud fashions, excessive jewelry, perfume/ cologne. Clothing should fit correctly and be neatly pressed. Shoes should look new and be and polished. Socks should match pant color. Avoid plunging necklines and short skirts.
- Avoid smoking before an interview or eating foods which may cause bad breath.
- Some organizations have piercing and tattoo policies. You may want to cover tattoos and ask about policies.

During the Interview

- It's ok to be a bit nervous. Be yourself. **Smile and be enthusiastic!** Let your true self shine!
- Plan to arrive for your interview 10-15 minutes prior to the appointed time. Greet the receptionist.
- Be sure to use a firm handshake and eye contact when greeting the interviewer.
- Wait until you are asked to be seated before doing so.
- Pay attention to your nonverbal behavior, body language and tone of voice – all give clues about your confidence and attitude. Face the interviewer in an open, relaxed manner. Listen carefully and nod at appropriate times. Control nervous habits.
- Maintain a comfortable amount of eye contact during the interview, without staring. If you are interviewed by a panel, answer the person who asked the question directly, while still making eye contact with others.
- Bring a padfolio and pen, copies of your resume, references, and job description. Use the padfolio to record names of those interviewing you and to record information you receive and questions you may have.

Communicate Effectively

- Speak clearly and enthusiastically about your experiences and skills. Be professional and let your personality shine through.
- Listen carefully. You may be asked multi-part questions, so you will need to focus and concentrate on what is being said, both explicitly and otherwise. Your answers should be concise and to the point. Use your notebook as a tool.
- Be positive. Employers do not want to hear a litany of excuses or negativity about an experience. Focus on the facts (briefly) and what you learned from the experience, what you would change next time, or how you grew.
- Don't be afraid of short pauses. You may need a few seconds to formulate an answer. The interviewer may need time to formulate an appropriate question or make notes. It is not necessary to fill up every second with conversation.

At the End of the Interview . . .

- Prepare questions ahead of time and during your interview so you can gather information about the job and company.
- Ask about the next steps in the interview process and when you could expect some kind of a response.
- DO NOT bring up salary or benefits. Wait for the interviewer to introduce the topic or until a job offer is made.
- Follow up with a thank you email – this is your opportunity to express gratitude and remind the employer of your interest, what you can contribute and how you fit.

An Offer in Hand

- Once you have the job offer, ask questions about salary, benefits, overtime, shift differentials, bonuses and vacation.
- Also, be prepared with salary ranges for the type of work and region where the job is located so you can negotiate your salary.
- Don't be afraid to negotiate – the job is yours and you can turn it down if you don't reach an agreement with the employer.

Answering Interview Questions

The most important interview question of all is “Why should I hire you?” In fact, all of your answers should be geared toward this question, supplying evidence of how your skills fit the job and company. In order to answer questions purposefully, read between the lines to understand what is really being asked and tailor your answers accordingly. Most questions are designed to find out about your self-management skills and personality, but interviewers are rarely this blunt. The employer’s *real* question is often to gauge your qualities such as dependability, work ethic, and potential to be productive and stay on the job for an extended period of time.

Strategies for Answering Traditional Interview Questions . . .

“Tell us about yourself.”

- This is typically the first question asked. It is designed to be an ice-breaker, but unprepared candidates often give away too much personal information. Craft an answer that helps the employer see you from multiple perspectives. Focus on applicable experiences, identify qualities supervisors and co-workers see in you, and a “fun fact” that shows you are easy to get to know.

“What are your strengths?”

- Identify skills from the job description and talk about them. For higher impact, name the strength and give a quick example to illustrate the skill. Follow up by identifying a second and third strength, providing examples for each.

“What are your weaknesses?”

- Identify only one weakness unless asked for more. Objectively state the weakness and tell how you cope/work around it. Do not dwell on this answer, but end on a positive note. Do not identify weaknesses viewed as “key” skills for success in the job.

“What are goals?” or “Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?”

- Focus on professional goals only related to advancement in your field or obtaining levels of responsibility. Avoid discussing personal goals related to family and relationship status.

“What did you like most or least about your last job?”

- Give positive answers to these questions. Talk about the aspects you enjoyed and how you were able to contribute. Do not “bad mouth” a former supervisor or company, but carefully discuss why you left or are seeking a new opportunity.

Strategies for Answering Behavioral Interview Questions . . .

Behavioral questions are based on the notion that the best predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. The interviewer will identify the skills necessary for the particular job opening and then ask you to give examples of when you used those skills in previous work situations. Open ended questions are often asked to give you the opportunity to describe your experience.

Behavioral questions often begin with these phrases: “Tell me about the time when you...”, “Provide an example of when you...”.

When you encounter these questions, you are invited to “tell a story” about a specific instance to illustrate your response/reaction to a situation. Be specific and avoid a vague or broad answer. Use the **STAR** technique to craft a focused and concise answer:

- **Situation:** Select a situation from a previous job, volunteer experience, or relevant event. Briefly describe the situation, giving the listener enough details to follow your story, but do not drone on so they (and you) forget the point of the question.
- **Task:** Identify the task that needed to be accomplished, providing a brief explanation of why it needed to be completed.
- **Action:** Describe the action you took or how you contributed to a team effort. You may describe the roles of the team, but keep the focus on your actions. This is the most important part of the answer, so be detailed and focus your attention on skills and knowledge you used to accomplish the task. Help the employer see how this experience would contribute to the job.
- **Results:** What was the outcome of your efforts? Describe how the story ended, what you learned or would change next time.

Final Tips for Answering Interview Questions:

- If you are not sure what the employer is asking, restate the question or ask for clarification.
- Develop short (1-3 minute) stories that highlight the skills you possess from previous experiences
- You may find one story fits a variety of questions. *Don’t overuse an example*, unless a different skill can be highlighted.
- Keep answers on a positive note, even though you may be describing a difficult or negative situation. Be prepared to explain what you learned from the experience and how you have grown or what you would do differently next time.
- If asked a question about which you have no experience to recount, don’t make up an example to fit a situation. You are not expected to have experienced every possible scenario. You might consider what you *hope* you would do in such a situation.