

Congratulations! You have an interview. Conducting an interview helps the employer to determine whether you have the right qualities and personality for the job. Prepare in advance by knowing what to do before, during, and after an interview.

Before the interview

I. Know Yourself

- Develop an understanding of your skills and experiences that you bring to a position. Be able to explain how your skills and experiences have prepared you to be successful in the advertised job.
- Prepare for the most commonly asked questions and keep answers work-related. Avoid no personal information such as age, relationship status, children, etc.
- PRACTICE OUT LOUD. Listen to the tone and pace of delivery and be aware of content.
- **Consider conducting a mock interview and get feedback on your performance.**
- Develop a 30 Second Speech that introduces yourself and explains who you are concisely. Use your speech if you only have a moment with an employer (like at a career fair).
- When talking about yourself describe the path you took to get where you are in your career. Where have you been, where are you going, and what you have to offer now. Think about your skills and experiences that would benefit the employer.
- Think about relevant examples or stories from your past and relate skills and abilities from these experiences to the job.
- Prepare your references or people who will talk to potential employers about your candidacy. Keep them informed about your progress and let them know when you have an interview.

Come prepared: bring copies of your resume, cover letter, and references, a portfolio or work samples, a notebook, pens, directions, information about the interview, information to fill out an application, and change for parking if necessary.

Consider: an employer's first impression of a candidate includes: pre-interview communication, personal appearance and grooming, and your professionalism (manners and social skills).

II. Know the Employer

- If you are interested in a company – you need to know something about them, their products and services, locations, how they brand themselves, etc. Do your research!
- Research the people conducting your interview. Know who they are, what role they play in the company, and how the position you are applying for impacts that role.
- Don't ask anything you could have found out for yourself before the interview.
- Get directions to the interview site. Know how to get there and be aware of the traffic, parking, building location, etc.

III. Know the Job

- Know the job responsibilities and be ready to connect them to your skills and abilities.
- Review the soft and hard skills that make you qualified for the position
 - Soft skills (non-tangible – hard to prove): Dependability, trust, communication, developing relationships, hard-working.
 - Hard skills (tangible – can be demonstrated): Experience, training, record of achievement, abilities.
- Do not ask about salary, benefits, or perks – cover those issues *after* you've been offered a job or if the topic is brought up by the employer. You may be asked about salary, so research an average salary range for the position for a person with your education and experience.

At the interview: Understand the power of *first impressions!*

IV. Dress Appropriately

- A first impression is made within the first few moments of meeting someone. Prepare ahead of time to “look the part” and feel confident about your look.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Shower, brush your teeth, and use deodorant. Wear clothing that is clean and pressed.
- Smell fresh and clean, not of cologne, perfume, or smoke.
- Your interview outfit should be one step nicer than what you would usually wear to the job.
 - For example: If you would wear jeans & sneakers to work, interview attire should be slacks and nice shoes.
 - For example: If you would wear “office attire” at work, appropriate interview attire would be a suit).
 - Professional attire for women includes: black, charcoal grey or navy pantsuit, white blouse, scarf, or necklace, matching pumps, hose, belt, and bag or black dress pants, well-fitting blouse/sweater, dress shoes.
 - Professional attire for men includes: Business suit, navy blue blazer, grey slacks, white shirt, striped tie, black dress shoes, black socks, black dress belt or dress or khaki pants, dress shirt, casual dress shoes.
- If you need help finding professional clothing to wear, visit the Jefferson College Career Closet to find free professional outfits.
- Clean, polished shoes (no sneakers or flip-flops).
- Hands should be clean and nails neatly trimmed.
- Makeup - find the right balance not too much or too little.
- Be aware that some employers have very defined policies about hair cut or style, facial hair, piercings or visible tattoos.

V. During the Interview

- Attend your interview by yourself. Arrive on time or no more than 10-15 minutes early.
- Your interview starts when you are on site. Keep that in mind for all pre interview interactions.
- Do not bring your cell phone into your interview.

- Be friendly and polite to everyone you meet.
- Shake hands firmly and smile.
- Maintain good eye contact, good posture and be aware of your speech patterns (monotone, pace).
- Be aware of your body language including facial expressions and gesturing while speaking.
- Be enthusiastic, confident and well informed about the company.
- Deliver a strong opening statement (30 second speech) that discusses your training, skills, and accomplishments. Make sure to only discuss professional topics.
- Ask questions. Conversation is good, but make sure to stay on topic.
- Bring extra copies of your resume and reference sheet.
- Avoid verbal garbage “um” “like” and “you know” and slang terms. Don’t curse!
- Never be negative – do not refer to problems with prior jobs, management, supervisors, co-workers, etc. If you have to discuss a negative situation, try to look for the learning experience involved.
- End with a strong summary statement that highlights your qualifications and indicates your excitement for the position.
- When faced with a difficult question:
 - Make sure that you understand the question being asked – it is ok to ask for clarification.
 - Take a moment to think (a little silence is ok)
 - Answer briefly in a non-damaging way (state the facts and present as an advantage)

VI. Interviewing Tips

- Balance speaking and listening. People who talk too much or too little don’t get hired.
- Have a list of questions to ask when prompted. The questions should communicate your interest in the job and the company. Don’t ask anything you should know from research.
- End the interview with a thank you and a firm handshake.
- Write a thank you letter within 24 hours. You may send a written note, a letter or an email. Asking about the timeline for the position will help you select the best option.
- Sample Interview Questions. Practice these before your interview.
 - Tell me about yourself.
Tip: Keep this professional. Where have you been? (what brought you into the field), where are you now? (education/ training), and where are you going? (what job do you want to be doing).
 - Why are you interested in this job? Company?
Tip: Do your research! What makes you excited about working here? What can you bring to their company?
 - Why should we hire you? Or What makes you qualified for this job?
Tip: What skills and experience do you bring to this position?
 - What is your greatest strength?
Tip: What do you excel in? Where do you stand apart from your coworkers? Explain a talent you have and how it has benefited your employer.
 - What is your greatest weakness?

Tip: Always turn a negative into a positive. Make sure to be concise and complete in your answer. Tell them about the problem (what happened), the solution (how did you address it), and the outcome (what happened after).

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

Tip: You don't have to pull out your crystal ball, the company wants to know that you have direction and often that you don't plan to leave too quickly.

- Tell me about a time when you had to handle a difficult situation?

Tip: Be honest, but choose wisely. Select a problem that has a clear resolution and discuss your role in its resolution.

- What is your greatest accomplishment and why did you choose it?

Tip: Dig deep, you have to be able to brag about yourself and

- If you could have any super power what would it be and why?

Tip: These questions are often asked to see how you think on your feet or your creativity.

- When prompted always have questions prepared to ask at the end of the interview

- Questions you can ask after the interview:

- What does the ideal candidate for this position look like?

- Can you tell me about a typical day for a person in this position?

- What are the most important things this position will need to concentrate on in the next three months?

- What do you enjoy about working here? What is the biggest challenge?

- What is the reporting structure?

- What is the timeline for filling this position?

- Researching resources:

- Research using: Internet/ Library, Better Business Bureau, speaking to current/ former employees, Professional/ Trade associations and unions, or Dunn & Bradstreet Directory or Sorkin's Directory

VII. Final Points

- Following-up - Send a thank you note to each person who interviewed you within 24 hours (see more on thank you notes below)
- Reflect on the experience. What did you do well? What would you like to improve?
- Take notes on the interview to remember key points
- Make sure you follow-up if you said you would in your interview
- Negotiating Salary – If you are offered a job, you need to learn how to negotiate salary
 - Avoid stating a number, but be familiar with the typical salary range
 - Be willing to compromise
- Making a decision - When deciding on a job offer ask for 24 hours to think about it
 - Make a pro and con list about the position
 - Consider your career goals and your life situation
 - Formally accept or decline the position

Types of interviews

- Telephone Screening Interview – a call from the employer to screen for required qualifications
 - Don't let the word screening fool you, this is a job interview - prepare
 - Have your job search materials organized and in front of you
- In-person Screening - gathers an initial first impression of your attitude, interest, and professionalism
 - Prepare as you would for a regular interview
- Selection Interview - questions about your qualifications used to determine if the position is a good fit
 - Establish rapport (before and after interview). Show how you would be a natural addition to the team
- Work Sample Interview - demonstration of a skill set via portfolio or skill demonstration
 - Practice describing your portfolio and brush up on your skills
- Peer Group Interview - meeting with potential co-workers and interviewers to determine if you are a good fit
 - Be friendly and show confidence. Balance being assertive and aggressive
- Group or Panel Interview - three or more people asking you questions about your qualifications
 - Direct your answer to the person who asked the question, but maintain eye contact with everyone in the group
 - Try to determine how your role interacts with the different people on the panel
- Luncheon Interview - interview over a meal to assess your ability to handle social situations
 - Choose something easy to eat so you can pay attention to the conversation
- Stress Interview - questions intended to cause discomfort to determine how you react to stress
 - Stay calm and take your time responding
- Video Conference Interview (see skype interview guide for more details) - an interview done by video can be one on one or with a panel
 - Practice using the same program in the same setting, if possible, to work out technology issues
- Interview types adapted from careeronestop.org

Types of Interview Questions

Employers will ask different types of interview questions to determine specific information about a candidate. By knowing the possible types of interview questions you can practice and prepare answers.

Question Types

Straightforward or Direct-

These questions get right to the heart of the job often involving the role or tasks involved with the job. Sometimes yes/ no questions.

Example:

What is your experience with the Linux operating system? or

Do you have experience in management?

Tip: Connect your skills and experience to those needed in this job. Be honest about skills you do not have, but you may look for connections with other skills or highlight being willing to learn.

Behavioral-

These questions are used to determine how you have responded to certain situation(s) in the past.

Example:

Tell me about a time when you lead a project and about the outcome. Or

Describe a time that you provided excellent customer service.

Tip: Prepare examples or stories to describe a variety of different scenarios. For example: conflict, customer service, completing a task, etc. Make sure to be concise and complete in your answer. Tell them about the problem (what happened), the solution (what you did about it), and the outcome (what happened after).

Situational-

These questions test your analytical skills/ critical thinking skills. They are often posed as a hypothetical, "what if" type of question.

Example:

What would you do if you were given a project with an impossible deadline? Or

How would you ensure our customers are satisfied?

Tip: Break down the situation into manageable steps. Make sure you follow through the entire process; tell them about the problem (what happened), the solution (what you did about it), and the outcome (what happened after). Providing an example of when you have completed a similar task can be helpful.

Skills Tests-

These are tests designed to test your technical knowledge in a specific area. They could also use brain teasers or logic puzzles.

Example:

Many welding employers will have candidates perform a welding test to determine their strength with type of welding or ability to meet industry codes or quality control standards.

Some employers hiring office assistants will test computer skills or ability with a specific program.

Brain teasers: How many ping pong balls would it take to fill this room?

Tip: Prepare if possible and do your best. If you do not have a certain skill or knowledge base, be honest.

Unexpected-

These are questions that seem to come out of nowhere and have nothing to do with the job or company. These are often used to see how you think on your feet.

Example:

If you could have a super power which would you choose and why? What kind of fruit would you be?

Tip: Take a moment to think and be creative and genuine. A fun, memorable answer can go a long way.

Illegal Questions-

Unfortunately, illegal questions are among the questions you could be asked. Make yourself aware of what illegal interview questions are and think about how you would feel most comfortable addressing them.

Illegal questions include questions on the topics of race, gender, sexual orientation & identity, religion, marital status, family status, pregnancy, age, disability, ethnic background, and country of origin.

Example:

Have you ever been arrested?

Are you married?

Do you plan on having more children?

What country are you from?

How long have you been working?

Tip: When confronted with an illegal interview question you have a number of choices.

1. Don't answer the questions, but answer the intent behind it. For example, if an employer asks about your childcare arrangements you could explain that you can meet all of the expectations of the described work hours.
2. Refuse to answer the question. This comes with the risk of appearing uncooperative.
3. Answer the question. This comes with the risk of the employer using the information in their hiring decision.

The Importance of Thank You Notes

In a competitive job market, the thank you note cannot be neglected. Writing one can give you an advantage over other candidates and increase your chances of being hired. Statistically, less than 10% of interviewees ever follow up with thank you notes. Imagine how positively the 10% who send them will be viewed. A thank you note can make a candidate stand out from the rest of the pool.

Writing a thank you note:

Thank you notes should be sent as soon as possible after the interview within 24 hours. The thank you note can be sent as a hand written note, a formal letter or even an email. To have the most influence, it must be sent before the hiring decision is made, and it should say more than just “thank you”.

1. Be sincere

Convey your appreciation for the meeting and express your continued interest in the position. Caution: Do not make the note overly friendly (people have a tendency to do with email).

2. Personalize it

Reemphasize your strongest qualifications. Take this opportunity to feature your most relevant skills. Indicate how those skills match the job requirements or qualities the employer is seeking. Also, use this opportunity to answer or expand upon any key points from the interview.

3. Restate your appreciation

In addition to expressing thanks for the opportunity, discuss a point from the interview that makes you qualified, interested, or excited about the job. Use the thank you as another opportunity to sell your skills.

Typed vs. Handwritten vs. Email

For conservative employers, you may want to consider typing a thank you note. However, a handwritten thank you is perfectly fine. Handwritten notes require legible handwriting and tasteful note cards.

An e-mail thank you note may be appropriate if you have communicated with the interviewer via email prior to your interview or if you know a decision on the position will be made quickly and mail would not arrive in time.

Choose this method wisely; some employers may prefer the traditional “snail-mail” approach. Also, handwritten or typed hard copy thank you notes typically get filed in an applicant’s folder, whereas email is typically read sooner, but then deleted.

Sample: Thank You Letter (Typed)

Address

City, MO 55555

Month day, year

Robert Curry

Service Manager

ABC Organization Inc

555 Tomco Avenue

City, MO 55555

Dear Mr. Curry:

I want to thank you very much for the opportunity to interview yesterday for the Service Technician position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about the organization and the service department.

Your projects for next year, the new database and the tool upgrades, sound fascinating and very useful to your customers. I know that my previous experience in _____ and my skills in _____ will be helpful to you on both of these projects, and that I could make a positive contribution to your team.

Thank you again for the time in your busy schedule. It was a pleasure meeting you and I hope to speak with you soon. Please feel free to call me at 555-555-5555 if I can provide you with any additional information.

Sincerely,

(Written signature)

Kyle Barrett