

How to Interview with Success

A Basic How to Guide for Purposeful Interviewing



CAREER DEVELOPMENT

...embrace your calling

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Overview

You have already submitted your resume and the employer has called you for an interview. Remember - the resume gets you the interview. The interview gets you the job (*or in some cases, a second interview*).

The most important thing to remember is that you are a salesperson during your interview. Good salespeople know their products well, so you must be able to describe your knowledge, skills, and abilities with ease.

Remember every question they ask you is to determine whether or not you will be a good fit for their organization. Answer every question with that in mind.

You can tell the interview is going well when the questions move from the past (*tell me about yourself; how did you pick your major*), to the present (*what are your strengths and weaknesses*), to the future (*if you worked for us, what would you do if...*).

The typical interview process has five parts: before the interview, the start of the interview, the interview, the end of the interview, and the follow-up. You need to be prepared for each of these parts of the interview process.



Before the Interview

- **Do your research!**
 - ✓ Find out as much as you can about the company and the people you will interview with. Ask current employees who you know, go to the library, research online.
 - ✓ Before you go to your interview you should know the services/products of the organization, the history of the organization, current hot topics of the organization and the field.
- **Don't get lost!**
 - ✓ You should know where you are going for your interview.
 - ✓ If possible, drive by the interview site the day before to time how long it will take you to get there.
- **Don't be late!**
 - ✓ Arrive at the interview at least 5 – 15 minutes early and check in with the secretary or administrative assistant.
- **Be prepared!**
 - ✓ Bring copies of your resume, your portfolio, and a notepad and pen to your interview.
 - ✓ Use the notepad to prepare notes to ask the interviewer and to take notes during the interview.
- **Cell phone.**
 - ✓ Bring your cell phone in the car with you in case you get lost or meet unexpected delays but...
 - ✓ **TURN IT OFF [or better yet leave it in the car] WHEN YOU ARRIVE AT THE INTERVIEW!!!**



Interview Wardrobe

Some of what you wear will depend on the location and industry where you are interviewing. Dress conservatively to make sure the interviewer notices and remembers you and not just your clothes. It is typical to dress one or two levels above the job or the typical everyday dress for that type of work.

Spending extra time on your dress shows that you are serious about the position.

- **Hair:** clean, neat, and pulled away from your face.
- **Hands:** nails are groomed and neat. Avoid long nails or bright polish.
- **Scents:** Make sure you brush your teeth and use deodorant. You may use mints before the interview, but make sure there is nothing in your mouth once the interview begins. Avoid perfume, cologne, and scented aftershave – your interviewer may be allergic.
- **Jewelry:** Don't wear more than one earring per ear or more than two rings per hand. Remove all facial jewelry (nose rings, tongue rings, etc.).
- **Shoes:** No open-toed or backless shoes (clogs, mules, slip-ons, etc.). Dress shoes are most appropriate for men and women in a basic black or brown or coordinating with your interview outfit.
- **Women:** A skirt or pants suit is most appropriate. The suit should be tailored to your body but not too form-fitting. A black suit should be avoided for an interview as it may be interpreted as too serious. If you plan to wear a dark colored suit, make sure there is another color near your face to soften the outfit. Makeup should be flattering but not excessive. Even in South Florida, bare legs are not a good idea during the interview process. Buy nylons, stockings, or dress socks in neutral colors or matching your pants or shoes.
- **Men:** At the very least - pants (no jeans or shorts) and a collared shirt are required. A tie and sport coat or blazer are almost always necessary as well. Blue and gray are generally a better choice than black for suits.

The Beginning of the Interview

- **Introduce yourself.**

- ✓ Let the secretary or receptionist know that you have an interview, whom it is scheduled with, and when it is scheduled to begin.
- ✓ Make sure you smile and accept some water if it is offered. It is the polite thing to do, and you will likely want it later.

- **Meet the interviewer.**

- ✓ When greeting the interviewer, look him or her straight in the eyes, shake hands firmly.
- ✓ The most effective handshake is known as 'web-to-web'.
- ✓ Smile and introduce yourself, but wait to sit down until you are offered a seat.

- **Avoid these mistakes.**

- ✓ Bringing parents or other uninvited guests to the interview, being late, smoking (even before the interview), chewing gum, cursing or using slang, slouching, touching items on the interviewer's desk (especially without permission), and fidgeting.



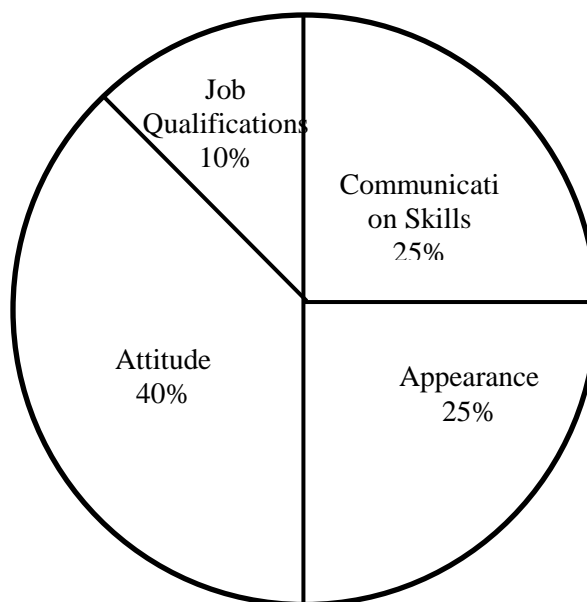
No one wants to shake hands with a dead fish!!



The 'web' between your thumb and first finger should meet the same place on the other person's hand.

The Interview

- **Posture.** Always face the interviewer. If there is a panel of people interviewing you, look primarily at the person asking you each question, but also make brief eye contact with the other people at the table during your answer. Do not cross your arms, this presents a closed body stance and implies that you are not 'open' to the interview conversation.
- **Stay positive.** Your attitude and answers should remain positive throughout the interview. Even if you are referencing a position you did not enjoy or one you left under bad terms, you still learned *something* positive to which you can speak.
- **Know your stuff.**
 - ✓ **Review.** Make sure you review your resume and portfolio and are prepared to discuss and answer questions about them with the interviewer.
 - ✓ **Truth.** Be honest in all your answers. "Little white lies" are easy to detect by interviewers.
 - ✓ **Yes or No.** Never answer a question with a 'yes' or 'no'. Provide explanations and examples. If you need a second to think – take it. A short pause is much better than a poorly planned answer.
 - ✓ **Huh?** If you do not understand the question, ask for clarification. It is better to ask than to answer the wrong question. You will tend to speak quickly when you are nervous – remember to speak slowly and enunciate.
- **Be prepared.** Think about your answers to typical interviewing questions and prepare questions to ask your interviewer (see the interviewing questions at the end of this packet).
- **Consider this.**



Types of Interviews

This alphabetical list of interview types is not a comprehensive list. Also most interviews will fit into more than one category. If possible, ask the potential employer what type of interview to expect but be prepared for anything!!

- **Behavior-based Interviews**

- ✓ This type of interview is designed to elicit actual information from candidates that will demonstrate their effectiveness as long-term employees, and facilitate the matching of organizational and applicant needs. The goal of behavioral questions is to have the candidate recall and describe situations where critical thinking and success factors were demonstrated. A sample behavioral question might be: "Describe the situation which best demonstrates your ability to get things done through others".
- ✓ Through the behavioral questions, the interviewer is seeking **REAL ANSWERS**, that is: Relevant information, Experience, Action taken, Leadership demonstrated

- **Campus Interview**

- ✓ Treat it like a non-campus interview, recruiter is seriously interested

- **Group Interviews**

- ✓ Employers bringing several candidates together in a group situation to solve a problem are testing your ability to work in a team environment. They want to know how you will present information to other people, offer suggestions, relate to other ideas, and work to solve a problem. In short, they are testing your interpersonal skills. It is difficult to prepare for this type of interview except to remember what is being testing and to use the skills you have to be the best team player and/or leader you can be.
- ✓ Some employers will take you to meet the staff who would be your co-workers if hired. This is a very casual type of interview, but leaving a positive and friendly impression is no less critical.

- **Non-directed Interview**

- ✓ Typically employs open-ended type questions such as "Tell me about yourself." This allows the applicant to express himself/herself in his/her own unique way--offers greater exposure to an applicant's personality and attitudes. Many campus interviews will at least appear to follow this format.

- **Panel Interviews**

- ✓ Similar to a one to one, but with more people; similar questions to the one to one (structured) but the questions are likely to be spread between the group, with the person most competent in a particular area, asking you the relevant questions. The important thing to remember here is to give your answer to the person that asked the question but during this process make brief eye contact with the other panel members to ensure that they feel included.

- **Performance or Situational Interviews**

- ✓ A company might want to test your performance on aspects of work which are important to the job but which are difficult to assess in other ways. Examples of such tests include: meeting performance, sales performance, role plays for client service, and logistic and management exercises. Job imitation tests may also be used to evaluate skills directly related to a position. For example, you could be given tests for proofreading and spelling, computing tasks, shorthand, driving, and mathematical or statistical ability. You might even be invited to lunch, dinner or a social occasion so that the employer can evaluate your personal and professional behavior.

- **Stress Interview**

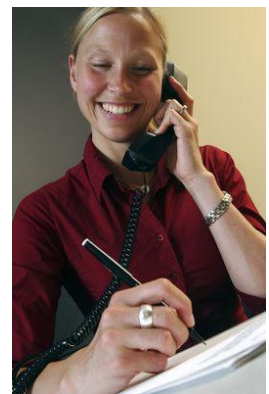
- ✓ The purpose of this method is to measure the applicant's ability to handle stressful situations. Stress interviews may be used to weed out individuals who react defensively or who are easily injured. Stress interviews are seldom used on-campus. However, stress questions and/or techniques are often utilized in various interviews.

- **Series Interviews**

- ✓ Employers invite those applicants they are seriously considering as an employee following a screening or initial interview. These interviews are generally conducted by middle or senior management, together or separately. Applicants can expect more in-depth questions, and the employer will be expecting a greater level of preparation on the part of the candidate. Applicants should continue to research the employer following the first interview, and be prepared to use any information gained through the previous interview to their advantage.
- ✓ Consist of individual interviews with three or more people in the organization, all in one day. The participants are possibly the same people as the panel interview but you will meet one at a time rather than as a group.

- **Telephone Screening Interview**

- ✓ There are generally 3 instances where you may encounter a telephone interview.
 - As an initial screening method - brief and containing questions based on the selection criteria, it is often used as a pre-cursor to a face-to-face interview.
 - Substitute for a panel or one to one interview - due to difficulties in either panel members or interviewees attending the interview. If possible, avoid these interviews, as face-to-face communication is very important to the employer.
 - When you are speaking with employees, recruiters, supervisors or other company employees about the position. Be prepared, as applicants are often surprised when a simple telephone enquiry to the company suddenly turns into an impromptu screening interview.



The End of the Interview

- **Ask.**
 - ✓ Ask the questions you have prepared.
 - ✓ Ask about the next step and when you will hear from them.
 - ✓ Ask about salary and benefits and time to think about it **ONLY** if you are offered the job on the spot.
- **Be sure.**
 - ✓ Make a short, concise summary of your qualification and stress your interest in the position.
 - ✓ Confirm the interviewer knows the best way to contact you in case they have any more questions. This also expresses your continued interest in the position.
- **Manners.**
 - ✓ Thank the interviewer for his or her time and continued interest in you as a candidate.
 - ✓ Shake hands firmly on the way out.



The Follow-up

- **Thank you.**
 - ✓ Send the interviewer a thank-you note as soon as possible after the interview.
 - ✓ You may prepare the basics of the letter before the interview, and fill in the details at the conclusion of the interview. To ensure prompt delivery, consider mailing the note on your way home.
- **Be patient.**
 - ✓ Depending on the field and type of job, the interview process will be long and you might experience an unexpected wait.
 - ✓ If the interviewer has given you a time estimate of when you should hear from them, do not call before then.
- **Call.**
 - ✓ If you have not heard anything in the designated time (a week or more), call the organization to find out if they have made a decision.
 - ✓ If they have not, ask them when they expect to have a decision.



Interview Questions

Asked by Employer:

1. Basic Interview Questions

- a. Tell me about yourself.
- b. What are your strengths and weaknesses? *(or What are three positive things your last boss would say about you? What negative thing would your last boss say about you?)*
- c. Why do you want this job?
- d. What's your ideal company?
- e. What attracted you to this company?
- f. Why should we hire you?
- g. What did you like least about your last job?
- h. When were you most satisfied in your job?
- i. What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
- j. What were the responsibilities of your last position?
- k. Why are you leaving your present job?
- l. What do you know about this industry?
- m. What do you know about our company?

2. Behavioral Interview Questions *(tell me about a time when...)*:

- a. Give me an example of a time that you felt you went above and beyond the call of duty at work.
- b. Can you describe a time when your work was criticized and how did you handle it?
- c. Have you ever been on a team where someone was not pulling their own weight? How did you handle it?
- d. Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. How did you handle it?
- e. What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?
- f. What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
- g. If I were your supervisor and asked you to do something that you disagreed with, what would you do?
- h. What was the most difficult period in your life, and how did you deal with it?
- i. Give me an example of a time you did something wrong. How did you handle it?
- j. Tell me about a time where you had to deal with conflict on the job.
- k. What's the most difficult decision you've made in the last two years and how did you come to that decision?
- l. Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.

3. Career Development Questions:

- a. What are you looking for in terms of career development?
- b. Where would you like to be in your career five years from now?

- c. How do you want to improve yourself in the next year?
- d. What kind of goals would you have in mind if you got this job?

4. More About You:

- a. How would you describe your work style?
- b. What would be your ideal working situation?
- c. What techniques and tools do you use to keep yourself organized?
- d. If you had to choose one, would you consider yourself a big-picture person or a detail-oriented person?
- e. Tell me about your proudest achievement.
- f. What kind of personality do you work best with and why?
- g. What is your personal mission statement?
- h. What three character traits would your friends use to describe you?
- i. If you were interviewing someone for this position, what traits would you look for?
- j. List five words that describe your character.
- k. Who has impacted you most in your career and how?
- l. What is your greatest fear?
- m. What is your biggest regret and why?
- n. What's the most important thing you learned in school?
- o. Why did you choose your major?
- p. What is your greatest achievement outside of work?
- q. What are the qualities of a good leader? A bad leader?
- r. There's no right or wrong answer, but if you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?
- s. What's the last book you read?
- t. What would you do if you won the lottery?
- u. Who are your heroes?
- v. What do you do in your spare time?
- w. What is your favorite memory from childhood?

5. Brainteaser Questions (*typically no right answer - looking for creativity and quick thinking*):

- a. How would you weigh a plane without scales?
- b. Tell me 10 ways to use a pencil other than writing.
- c. Sell me this pencil.
- d. If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?
- e. If you could choose one superhero power, what would it be and why?
- f. If you could get rid of any one of the US states, which one would you get rid of and why?
- g. With your eyes closed, tell me step-by-step how to tie my shoes.

Questions You Should Ask

Do not ask any of these questions if the information appears on their website or in printed information!

Do not ask these questions if the employer provided the answer during the interview!

1. Please describe the typical path of a _____ in this organization.
2. What will be my opportunities for advancement?
3. How and by whom will my performance be reviewed? Are there specific criteria upon which I would be evaluated? And how frequently is formal and informal review given to new employees?
4. Can you describe an ideal employee?
5. Do you have any questions or concerns about my qualifications I might answer for you?
6. What do you like about this company? What keeps you here?
7. What do you most enjoy about your work with this organization / company / agency?
8. How does your company encourage further education? What is the company's policy on providing seminars, workshops, and training so employees can keep up their skills or acquire new ones?
9. What can you tell me about the culture and the environment?
10. What issues or concerns are facing this department/organization?
11. What are the goals and/or objectives for this department/organization for the upcoming year?
12. What new projects has this department/organization undertaken recently?
13. What makes this company different from its competitors? What are the organization's/company's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
14. What is the organization's plan for the next five years, and how does this department fit in?
15. What are the various ways employees communicate with one another to carry out their work?
16. Who would my co-workers be, and what are their functions?
17. What sort of communication style works best with this team?
18. What are the main challenges associated with the team?
19. Could you explain your organizational structure? Where will this job fit into the organizational structure?
20. Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
21. What's our next step? *(Take the lead and set a plan for follow-up)*