

## **Interviewing Tips: Getting the Job You Want**

The interview is one of the last steps of the hiring process - and one of the most important. Prospective employers are looking to answer one question: "Why should I hire you?" Don't wait until you have an appointment with an employer to start preparing for an interview - it starts long before you meet the employer! Most employers will take the time to evaluate the "total" you. This includes your attitude, appearance, personality, confidence, and knowledge about the organization, as well as your ability to do the job. In the short amount of time that you will spend with a potential employer, you will either be screened in or screened out, so you must project yourself in a professional, positive and enthusiastic manner. Your job is convincing the employer that you can fill a particular need or vacancy. This handout is designed to help you with that preparation.

### **Preparing for Your Interview**

Preparing for an interview involves many tasks. To help you simplify the interview preparation process you can divide your tasks into phases. The first phase involves two main tasks: Getting to know yourself and knowing the company you are interviewing with. You can actually work on these two tasks simultaneously, however, it might be easier to begin with the first task, knowing yourself.

An important part of being comfortable in an interview is knowing who you are and what you have to offer. Don't underestimate the importance of taking time to engage in personal introspection. After all, being able to clearly communicate who you are will help a potential employer see why you are the perfect fit for the position you are applying for.

Consider the following prompts to help you further explore who you are and learn about your prospective employer.

### **Know Yourself**

- Analyze your strengths, weaknesses, background, academic performance, interests, and personal aspirations and values
- Think about the skills that relate to the job and how you can demonstrate them
- Be prepared to explain why you are applying for the position and why you think you are qualified for the job
- Find out what your work is worth
- Get feedback from people you trust to give you an honest assessment of your professionalism and communication skills
- Think positively and stay in encouraging environments

## **Know the Organization**

Doing a little research prior to your interview can not only help lower your stress, but arm you with the knowledge you need for a successful interview. When you have a good understanding of what the organization is all about, you will feel more confident going into the interview. Moreover, your level of preparation conveys your level of interest in the position. Research will also help you select in advance appropriate examples to share during the interview that will demonstrate how you can contribute to the position and company goals. Remember, organizations want to hire people with similar values to those of the company culture.

### **How and what to research:**

Business publications such as Forbes, Business Insider, or company reviews on sites like glassdoor.com can help you learn a wealth of information and help you to stay up to date on the latest news about a company and its industry. Don't forget to review the company's web pages including:

- About Us
- Our Brands/Products/Services
- Locations
- Career
- Leadership
- Media
- LinkedIn company page

You may also want to check out a company's financials. Doing a Google search can uncover the current state of the company. Have they gone through a merger or have they expanded recently? Knowing a little about the company's competitors can really help you understand where the company is positioned in the marketplace.

As you learn about the company do not forget to include a thorough review of the job description. Make sure you read and review the job description. It is very important to fully understand the job that you are applying for. Most job descriptions follow a similar pattern and are usually categorized by the following points:

- Job title/Department
- Duties and tasks
- Skills required

The job title and department will give you an understanding of the major purpose of the position and where the role fits into the organization.

### **Project a Professional Image**

Phase two should consist of understanding and leveraging your professional image. Projecting a professional image is important to those who value their careers and it is an important consideration as you prepare for your interview. So, exactly what is a professional image? Is it how you dress? Your grooming? The quality or cost of your clothing? Simply put, your professional image is the image you project in the professional world. Professional image consists of personal appearance with regard to clothing, grooming, manners and etiquette, personal behavior, and communication effectiveness. To summarize, your professional image includes:

- Appropriate professional appearance
- Use of correct manners and etiquette
- Appropriate personal behavior
- Effective communications

As you prepare for your interview review your professional image. Employer surveys consistently indicate that clothing is an important factor in the total picture of the candidate. In the same way that you have invested in your education and the preparation of your credentials, you may want to consider investing in an interviewing outfit.

Consider the following points to review as you reflect on your professional image.

- Dress appropriately for the job and the organization for which you are applying (this is not the time to make a fashion statement)
- Grooming should be neat
- Emphasize the positive, be assertive in answering questions, and show confidence
- Express appreciation
- Avoid using filler words (i.e., and, um, uh, you know, etc.)
- Extend courteous behavior to everyone you come in contact with at the prospective company
- Do not ramble or use slang
- Maintain eye contact and an open posture—no folded arms, head turned downward etc.
- Let your personality come through

### **Interview Structure and Stages**

The location, format and length of an interview is determined by a number of factors, including the company's culture, budget, the position and the stage of the hiring process.

Phase three includes making sure that you are aware of the nuts and bolts of the different interview structures and stages.

During the recruiting process, you may experience a combination of the following interview formats:

- Phone
- Skype/ Video
- On-Campus
- Career Fair
- On-site at a company's office
- Question and Answer - Panel or Series
- Presentation or Job Talk
- Group Competition or Project
- Case Interview
- Behavioral Interview
- Technical Interview or test
- Psychometric test
- Dinner, Lunch or Reception Meet and Greet

## Interview Types

Remember, interviews come in all shapes and sizes: Sometimes you're with one interviewer, others you're with eight. Maybe you'll be asked to lunch, expected to solve a problem, or invited to a Zoom interview. The point is that you need to be prepared! Listed below are examples of different types of interviews. When you are speaking with the person setting up your interview, it is appropriate to ask whom you will be interviewing with and what their position is. Asking this will give you some insight into the type of interviewer you are up against for your interview.

- **Screening:** Basic qualifier questions generally to determine opportunity for personal interview
- **Traditional:** Various questions asked to gauge knowledge, experience, interest and fit
- **Behavioral:** Intent to understand past behavior in order to predict future behavior  
\*\*\*see more below
- **Stress:** Pressure purposefully applied to see how you will react; may involve demonstration of skills
- **Case:** A significant problem/scenario is presented and a well-formulated resolution is expected. \*\*\*see more below

An interview may last as little as 15 minutes (or even 2 minutes at a Career Fair), or as long as 2-3 days incorporating a number of the activities above. Although interviews vary depending on industry, most interviews last between 45 minutes. The length of time spent in an interview is also highly dependent on how senior and/or specialist the role is, as well as the total amount of time the staff have available. Regardless of the length of the interview, it generally follows this structure:

## **Four Stages of Interviewing:**

### Reception/Acceptance

- The initial stage during which you meet the interviewer and during which the interviewer usually forms a first impression.

### Information Exchange

- During this stage the employer might tell you about the organization and/or the job. Questions will be asked to determine if you are qualified for the job and if you will fit into the overall organization.

### Your Turn

- During this stage, you have the opportunity to ask questions to obtain information that you will need in order to evaluate the employer.
- Ask detailed questions, but avoid questions regarding salary. This may be asked at a later time after a job offer has been made.

### Closing

- The final stage when the employer indicates the interview is over and during which you find out when and how you will be informed about the outcome.
- If the interviewer does not offer this information, then it is up to you to ask what the next step is in the hiring process.

## **What to Bring on An Interview**

Keep in mind that your interview may be virtual so make sure that the below documents are saved digitally. Be prepared to send the documents during or right after the interview if requested. Regardless of whether the interview is in person or a video interview, you will need a padfolio and a pen.

- Extra copies of your updated resume.
- Reference sheet.
- Employment History. Keep an informal document for yourself with the details of your past experience (former employer addresses, phone numbers, start and end dates, supervisor names, etc.) in case you are asked to complete an application form during your interview.
- Portfolio. Printed samples of your work, papers, supervisor evaluations, and any other relevant information.

## Important Note on Punctuality

It goes without saying that you should be on time for an interview. It's always a good idea to give yourself some extra time in case you have delays due to traffic or public transportation. Plan to arrive at your interviewer's office about 15- 20 minutes before your scheduled appointment. Have the phone number and email of your contact handy so you can call in the event that you will be late or won't be able to make it the interview.

## Special Types of Interviews

### *Technical Interviews*

**What is a technical interview?** Technical interviews are designed to gauge your problem-solving skills, your ability to think under pressure, and your technical knowledge in your chosen field. In a technical interview, the interviewer wants to see how you think through a problem to reach a solution.

**How do I know if an interview will be technical in nature?** Ask the recruiter what to expect in the interview. This will allow you to prepare appropriately.

**What types of technical questions can I expect?** Technical interviews may include general problem-solving questions or logic puzzles as well as focused technical questions that are specific to the job you are applying for.

**General Problem-Solving Questions** General problem-solving questions test your analytical thinking skills rather than specific knowledge of your field. These questions take a variety of forms. They may be very open-ended with a variety of possible answers (for example, "How would you improve the design of this pen?"), or they may be more precise, requiring a definite answer (for example, "Why are manhole covers round?"). Some employers may ask you to solve logic puzzles.

**Focused Technical Questions** These questions focus on the knowledge and skills required to perform the job. For example, a mechanical engineer entering the aerospace industry might be asked, "How does a gas turbine engine work?" A software engineer might be asked to write or debug a program. To prepare for these questions, familiarize yourself with the job description and the technical skills required, and then brush up on those skills.

## How do I answer a technical question?

- Think out loud. According to recruiters, the most important thing to remember when answering technical questions is to verbalize your thought process. The interviewer is as interested in your problem-solving approach as they are in your solution. Make sure to provide relevant details.
- Ask clarifying questions. Make sure that you understand the question and have all the information you need to solve the problem. Some questions may be intentionally

ambiguous to gauge your confidence in asking questions and gathering data to tackle problems that are not clearly defined.

- Don't bluff your way through an answer. If you don't know the answer, take some time to think it through. Think out loud as you consider possible approaches. If you have absolutely no idea, admit that you don't know. Admitting that you don't know is better than attempting to make up an answer.

### *Behavioral Interview*

**What is a behavioral interview?** A behavioral interview is a popular type of job interview, where an interviewee is asked to provide examples from their past employment of specific situations and go through how they behaved in those circumstances. The logic is that past performance is predictive of future performance, i.e. how you behaved in the past will forecast how you will behave in the future. Behavioral interviewing is said to be an accurate predictor of a candidate's future performance. Rather than simply taking a candidate's word for it that they have the skills and required for the role, this method of interviewing allows them to prove it with specific examples.

### **How do I answer a behavioral question?**

\*\*\*Use the **SOAR** model for behavioral-based questions such as: "Tell me about a time..."

**Situation** What happened? Describe a specific event to put your response in context.

**Obstacle** What were the challenges you faced?

**Action** What did you do? Tell what actually happened with a focus on your actions.

**Result** What was the end result? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

### *Case Study Interviews*

**What is a case study interview?** Case studies are descriptions of real or hypothetical problems. Candidates are expected to understand, analyze, and recommend solutions to these problems. Because solving the case mirrors the actual work that staff and consultants do day-to-day, this interview tends to be the most important part of the hiring process especially for consulting firms.

**How do I prepare for a case interview?** Practice, practice, practice! Start by searching for the company online. Some companies may even provide their exact case study material online. If the company doesn't provide a direct hint, you should study comparable material from another company or [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com). Most importantly, it is essential that you create organized, structured, and logical arguments throughout your interview.

**What should I expect?** Remember that this is not just an opportunity to showcase analytical, problem solving, and more technical skills, but also a predictive measure of how you would interact with co-workers and clients. Approach the interview as if it were a business

discussion, not an interview. Seek to engage in a thoughtful and insightful conversation with your interviewer that demonstrates your judgment. That being said, ask clarifying questions whenever necessary. Many cases purposefully lack details to see if you can figure out what important information is missing. If he or she gives you advice, take it; assume it's intended to be helpful. When you are making a final recommendation at the end of the case, remember that you need to be pragmatic. Mention any potential concerns with your proposed solution. Does it make sense in real life? What are the risks? How can they be overcome?

### **The Final Phase: Following up After the Interview.**

Do not leave the interview without knowing what the next steps are in the hiring process. A good interviewer will let you know the timeline for the decision-making process. If this information is not shared with you, it's okay to inquire. Ask when the hiring decision will be made as well as permission to follow-up regarding the status of the position for which you've interviewed.

Additionally, a follow-up letter/email after an interview is an essential part of the process. While it appears on the surface merely to express your appreciation for the opportunity to talk with the interviewer, it also serves to remind the interviewer of your qualifications and interest in the job or company. It leaves a very favorable impression and could be the one factor that really makes you stand out from the crowd. Ensure that names and titles have been spelled correctly; a careless spelling error can negate the courtesy and attention to detail taken in sending the thank-you note in the first place. Thank-you notes ideally should be sent within 24 to 48 hours following the interview.

Finally, evaluate yourself given your preparation and hard work for the interview, you should have a vested interest in reflecting on how you performed under pressure. Each interview – good or bad – is a learning process and because of it, your next interview can be even better. Take some time to review what went well and what could use some improvement.

### **Avoid these Common Interview Mistakes**

- Showing up late for interview
- Poor personal appearance
- Inability to express self clearly
- Lack of proper career planning; purposes and goals ill-defined
- Lack of knowledge about field or company
- Overbearing, too aggressive or conceited
- Little interest or enthusiasm; indifferent
- Overemphasis on money; interested only in best dollar offer
- Disparity between resume and responses
- Unwilling to start at the bottom; expects too much too soon
- No confidence and poise; fails to look interviewer in the eyes

## BONUS TIPS

### Video Interviewing Tips

Many organizations are conducting job interviews virtually because they are fast, easy and inexpensive. Below are several tips to help you ace video interviews.

**Background:** Avoid stark white walls or brightly colored and too busy backgrounds. Computers distort colors and can make it difficult for the interviewer to focus.

**Lighting:** The correct lighting will help your interviewer see you at your best. Overhead lights that are very bright or florescent tend to wash your face out. The best lighting is natural sunlight from a nearby window.

**Where to look:** Your natural reaction is to look directly at the screen as the interviewer speaks, try to look up into the computer camera. Looking into the camera will give the effect that you are speaking eye to eye.

**Avoid Technical Difficulties:** Ensure that your computer, webcam and internet connection are working properly.

### Telephone Interview Tips & Techniques

Phone interviews are often used to screen candidates in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. Telephone interviews can be challenging because both you and the interviewer are deprived of visual cues such as office environment and culture and most importantly body language. Therefore, it is critical as you talk on the telephone that you pay more attention to intonation and tone. It is more difficult to gain rapport with the interviewer because you cannot see the interviewer's non-verbal reactions and cues. This places all the weight on your phone manners, clarity of speech, voice tone, and the content of your answers. Keep your resume in clear view, on the top of your desk, or tape it to the wall near the phone. If you sent a cover letter, have that on hand as well.

- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking
- Make sure to have a copy of the job ad or description and the research you have done on the company.
- Turn off music and the TV and close the door.
- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
- Speak slowly with purpose and enunciate clearly.
- Confirm the caller's name and company. Get the caller's telephone number and write down the full names and titles of each call participant.
- Give short answers – don't take longer than one to two minutes per answer.

- Do use the technique of repeating or re-phrasing questions. It tells the caller that you listened carefully, and gives you time to think about your answer.
- Before ending the call, be sure you know the next step in the hiring process.