



Interviewing Guide

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INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Anticipating your first job interview can be stressful. Being prepared for the experience is the first step in combating any anxiety you might feel. This guide is intended to familiarize you with the interview process and give you advice on how to prepare for and perform well in the interview.

Use this guide to prepare for your first interview and to assist you in improving your skills for future interviews. Gaining experience so that you are comfortable with the interview process is critical to your success. In addition to using this handout, we suggest that you attend an interview preparation workshop. We also urge you to practice your skills in a **Videotaped Mock Interview** as another way to increase your confidence and ability to perform well in a “real” interview.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

The resume is the document you use to sell yourself to a potential employer. The interview is your **opportunity to sell yourself verbally and interpersonally** as the best candidate for the position.

From the standpoint of the **candidate**, an interview is used to:

- ◆ demonstrate strong communication and interpersonal skills
- ◆ expand upon relevant information in your resume or provide additional information i.e. offer a more complete picture of your skills and experiences
- ◆ gather additional information about the organization with which you are interviewing
- ◆ get a feel for whether or not this organization and this position would be a good match for your skills and interests

The **employer** uses the interview to:

- ◆ evaluate your ability to express yourself effectively and interact appropriately
- ◆ share additional information about the organization and the position for which he/she is hiring
- ◆ gain further information about your skills, related experience or knowledge
- ◆ learn about your interest in the organization and the position
- ◆ determine whether you would be a good match for the organization

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Analyze the Position:

You need to know exactly what you are applying for. This includes being aware of the typical job duties and qualifications for that position. At a minimum, review a copy of the job description and highlight specific qualifications. If you are still unclear about the nature of the position, review occupational information and conduct informational interviews to gain a better understanding of the type of work you are pursuing.

Keep in mind that employers with lengthy qualifications statements rarely find applicants strong in all areas, so do not get discouraged if you do not meet all of the specified requirements.

Check out the Employer:

Learn as much as you can about the employer's mission, services and/or products, where its branches are located and what its future prospects are. Understand how the organization compares with similar or competing organizations. The best place to start your research is on the employer's website. Information can be obtained from:

- ◆ Article searches
- ◆ Attending company presentations/events
- ◆ Networking with alumni/company employees
- ◆ Visiting VAULT online
(http://www.vault.com/cb/careerlib/careerlib_main.jsp?parrefer=6096)

Research is **very** important because it will help you formulate thoughtful questions. Through networking, you can pick up difficult-to-obtain insider information which in turn will allow you to be able to better explain why you are particularly interested in working for that employer. In some instances, understanding the employer will let you know that you **DO NOT** want to work for them.

Review Your Qualifications:

Now that you know about the employer and the position, it's time to assess how your past experiences have prepared you.

When reviewing your qualifications, consider all experiences valuable even if they do not directly relate to the position. For each experience, identify the skills and areas of knowledge you developed. Also, be able to say how the experience has prepared you to contribute to their organization.

Practice, Practice, Practice:

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The more you practice, the more at ease you will feel with your responses and, in turn, will make you more confident.

Try the following methods:

- ◆ Practice saying your responses out loud to interview questions. Answering potential questions in front of a mirror can be useful for assessing your facial expressions.
- ◆ Ask a friend or family member to pretend they are an employer, ask you a list of questions, and give you feedback.
- ◆ Video or audio tape your responses and review your performance. Ask yourself: how can I improve, did I look/sound relaxed, and did I sound enthusiastic?

Avoid feeling like you have to be perfect or that you have to memorize answers. The goal is to become familiar with the process of presenting yourself to others and to give the impression that you have given thought to important questions. Through practice, you will become more comfortable and you will polish your presentation.

EIGHT INTERVIEW TIPS

1. Practice good eye contact with the interviewer.
2. Express your genuine interest by how you answer questions.
3. Listen carefully by focusing and giving your full attention to the interviewer and the question being asked.
4. Be specific and give examples. This adds credibility to statements you make about your qualifications. It is better to make a few strong points than many brief, unrelated points.
5. Organize your thoughts, understand issues and communicate. The employer may not necessarily be looking for the right response to a question but is analyzing how you respond.
6. It's OK to pause to collect your thoughts and if need be, ask for clarification. Avoid "uh," "like," and "you know!"
7. Do not diminish your past experiences; don't say, "I was just a cashier."
8. An apparent challenge to your qualifications may not be a rejection, but rather a call for more information.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

The most typical interview is one-on-one. However, other types of interviews include:

Panel: more than one person interviews you at the same time.

Group: you are not the only applicant in the room. Usually a group of candidates is interviewed by a panel.

Meal: you are interviewed while eating, usually over lunch.

Working: you are actually put to work and observed.

Most interviews consist of a mix of questions that depends on the position and organization. There will typically be some general questions, some behavioral questions and some case questions (especially for business/analytical positions).

Telephone Interview:

Telephone interviews may be used by employers in another part of the country during the preliminary stages of the selection process. Increasingly, employers are using the telephone interview on a local basis. Sometimes, in addition to an on-campus interview, the employer conducts phone interviews as a second screening before inviting you to an on-site interview. Don't underestimate the importance of making a positive impression during the telephone interview.

Schedule the interview at a time when you can give a 100% of your attention. Take the phone call in a quiet place. Jot down ahead of time key points you want to make and questions you want to ask. Keep a copy of your resume and the job description near the phone.

Because the employer can not see your body language, it is even more important to be aware of your tone of voice. Sounding upbeat and positive is one way to show your enthusiasm for the position and the employer.

On-Site or Second Interview:

You are most likely to meet several people including your potential supervisor and co-workers. You may be asked many of the same questions throughout the day. Be enthusiastic, honest and consistent in your answers.

If you participate in any group activities, your ability to work with people and your “fit” in the organization is being evaluated.

Ask questions that will demonstrate your interest and knowledge of the organization. Most firms hire by consensus. You will need to win the approval of each person who interviews you.

Be sure to note company culture and management style. How are decisions made? Do they promote from within? Are they involved in the community? Also, observe the work environment. What is the atmosphere/physical setting like? Do employees seem relaxed and friendly? Will you be productive here? These observations will allow you to make an informed decision.

TEN ETIQUETTE TIPS FOR DINING

1. Dining with a potential employer may seem more relaxing than the actual interview, but this is still part of the evaluation process so continue to be on your best behavior.
2. When having a casual conversation with company representatives, try to find easy topics of mutual interest. Avoid controversial topics or careless banter.
3. Turn off your cell phone and pager. Answering the phone or checking your messages is discourteous to your host.
4. The employer will be paying for the meal, so follow their menu recommendation(s) or order a mid-priced meal.
5. Order a meal that is easy to eat. Take small bites, do not talk with your mouth full, and do not gesture with your utensils.
6. Be very cautious about ordering alcohol because you need to remain alert during the entire interview.
7. Understand the table setting. Your bread plate is on the left of your place setting and your water glass is on the right. Use your utensils from the outside in. If you are ever in doubt, follow the example of your host or other guests.
8. Place your napkin on your lap as soon as you sit down. Should you leave the table briefly place the napkin on the chair. When you leave at the end of the meal, leave the napkin to the left of your plate.
9. Be sure to talk with other guests at the table.
10. Thank your host for the interview and meal.

QUESTIONS ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

Employers will ask job applicant questions to determine if you are a fit with their organization. Their concerns include:

Are you focused?

Can you articulate your career goals and how your skills, interests and background support your career interests? Do your future plans match those of our organization? Some examples of questions that address this concern include:

- ◆ What are your career plans?
- ◆ What do you see yourself doing in 5 years?
- ◆ Describe your ideal job.
- ◆ What other positions are you interviewing for?
- ◆ Do you plan to return to school for future education?
- ◆ What classes did you enjoy most/least and why?
- ◆ Why are you pursuing this field?

Do you know about our organization?

Have you taken time to learn about this organization? Do you consider the work we do as important and interesting? Some examples of questions that address this concern include:

- ◆ Why are you interested in our organization?
- ◆ Where do you see yourself fitting in?
- ◆ What do you know about our services/products?
- ◆ How do you feel about traveling or relocating as part of your job?
- ◆ In what type of work setting do you do your best work?
- ◆ What have you done to prepare for this interview?

Are you qualified for this position?

Do you have the skills and abilities to perform successfully in this position? Do you understand the nature of this position? How do you operate in a work environment; for example, how do you make decisions, get along with co-workers, and communicate? Some examples of questions that address this concern include:

- ◆ Why should I hire you?
- ◆ Tell me about yourself.
- ◆ What have you learned from some of the jobs you have had?
- ◆ Tell me about three accomplishments that you are most proud of.
- ◆ What can you offer us?

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- ◆ What have you learned from your failures?
- ◆ Tell me about your greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses.
- ◆ Do you prefer to be directly supervised or to work independently?
- ◆ How does your background relate to this position?
- ◆ What motivates you to do good work?
- ◆ What qualifications do you have that make you feel that you would be successful in this position?
- ◆ How would a former supervisor describe you?

Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral interviewing is popular with many employers and something you must prepare for. **It is based on the premise that past behavior best predicts future behavior.** For example, if you have shown initiative in a club or class project, the belief is that you are likely to show initiative when you are working for the employer that is interviewing you. Before an interview, each position is assessed by the employer for the skills and characteristics that relate to job success.

You should respond to behavioral interview questions by giving a specific example where you have already demonstrated the skill that the interviewer is looking for. You may find it helpful to remember the mnemonic **SAR** in composing a concise and thoughtful response to an interviewer's question. Here's how it works:

Situation – What was the situation in which you exercised a desired skill or strength? What was the problem, need or concern? Include obstacles you had to overcome.

Action - What steps did you take to correct the problem? How did you create a new program/product/service that met a need?

Results – Describe the results and positive benefits you achieved. Quantify the results and relate your skills, action and results to the employer's needs when possible.

Before the interview, prepare a few illustrative examples of problems you have solved. For each, outline the 5-7 main steps involved in solving the problem, the alternatives you considered, and the results you obtained.

Case Interview Questions

In the case interview, the interviewer will present you with a complex problem involving issues or situations that are not likely to be familiar. You will be asked to formulate a solution to the problem under tight time constraints. Consulting firms often use the case study approach. While primarily an analytical exercise, an interviewer uses a case to gauge

your curiosity about the problem at hand, and your ability to clearly articulate your insights. There are two primary types of case interviews:

1. **Guestimate** – These questions are designed to determine how logically and quickly you can think on your feet and to see whether you think before you speak. An example is: “How many disposable diapers were sold in the U.S. last year?” There are no right answers. You must work off assumptions. They might include:
 - ◆ The population of the U.S. is 250 million
 - ◆ The average household size is 2.5 people
 - ◆ There are 100 million households in the U.S.
 - ◆ The mean household income is \$35,000
 - ◆ The U.S. Gross Domestic Product is \$6 trillion
2. **Business Case Problem** – The second type of case is more analytically focused and tries to assess your comfort and confidence with numbers. To understand these cases, you will often need some understanding of the numbers that validate the hypotheses. An example of a business case problem is: “Savannah Jane’s is a convenience store franchise located in Needham, MA, across the street from the Hershey Commuter railroad station. Needham has a population of 28,000. In the town there are four convenience stores. Savannah Jane’s wants to increase sales and profits. What would you do to help them?”

Further suggestions for responses to case studies are located online at wetfeet.com. Please visit the Career Services Center for a password to access this service.

Case Interview Preparation

- ◆ Read the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist* or other business journals; focus on articles discussing specific companies or industries.
- ◆ Familiarize yourself with introductory microeconomics.
- ◆ Read the first few chapters of *Competitive Strategy* by Michael Porter.
- ◆ Learn more about case interviews by visiting *VAULT* (http://www.vault.com/cb/careerlib/careerlib_main.jsp?parrefer=6096).
- ◆ Develop a framework in which to evaluate problems (such as “profits = revenue-cost”).
- ◆ Think about products and services, that you use on a day-to-day basis; how do they reach the market? What criteria do you use when buying products?
- ◆ Practice cases with friends who have had case interviews. Also, make an appointment with a career counselor to do a videotaped mock interview.

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CASE INTERVIEW TIPS

1. Ask questions.
2. Back-translate: hitting the highlights, repeat the question back to the interviewer.
3. Take notes.
4. Ask what the client company's true objective is.
5. Organize your answers and manage your time.
6. Think before you speak.
7. Listen to what is being said between the lines.
8. Brainstorm and be creative.
9. Describe out loud the logic you are following.
10. Show enthusiasm and a positive attitude.

Tips for Answering Difficult Questions

When encountering a difficult question, pause for a moment and ask yourself, "What is the interviewer really looking for?" A few examples follow:

Tell me about yourself. This is a commonly asked question that often puzzles applicants. Keep your comments focused on information that will help the employer determine your qualifications and/or interest in the position. This can include your future career aspirations, what you have gained from your education and/or experiences and your enthusiasm for beginning a job in your field of interest.

What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses? Interviewers ask this question to determine how insightful you are and how positive your self-image is. View this as the opportunity to point out strengths that relate to being successful in the position for which you are interviewing. Back up your statements with examples of experiences in which you have demonstrated your strengths. Strategies for addressing a weakness (and only mention one) include choosing one you have overcome, or selecting an area/skill that you have not had much time to develop or an area that is not that important to the demands of the job. Employers are impressed by people who can recognize and overcome personal challenges.

What are your salary expectations? If you are asked this question during a first interview, assume that the employer is deciding whether or not they can afford you, or wondering if you will undersell yourself. Research location-appropriate industry salaries (i.e. salary.com) so you can quote your findings and say, "I'm comfortable with a salary that's in this range." If the interviewer persists, make sure that they name a figure first. You can do this by saying, "I'm sure you have a range in mind. What are you willing to offer?"

QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

By asking employers thoughtful questions, you have the opportunity to demonstrate your interest in working for their organization. Also, if given an offer, you will be more able to make an intelligent decision about whether or not to accept.

Formulate your questions while researching the organization and the industry/field. General knowledge about the career field and specific knowledge about the employer will impress your interviewer tremendously.

Normally, you would ask questions when it is appropriate during the course of the interview, and typically the interviewer will ask you if you have any questions at the end of the interview. Though questions will vary with each interview, the following are some possible general questions to ask:

- ◆ When and how are employees evaluated?
- ◆ What are the best/worst aspects of working in this organization?
- ◆ What's the biggest challenge facing this group/organization right now?
- ◆ How would you compare your organization with your major competitors? What are your plans for expansion in terms of product lines, services, new branches, etc.?
- ◆ How would you describe the management style in this organization? How are decisions made?
- ◆ What are some typical first-year assignments? What is the career path for my position? How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?
- ◆ What kind of training is given to new employees?
- ◆ Do you have any concerns about my background that I can answer now?

As a general rule, questions about salary and benefits are best left until a job offer has been made.

TEN ETIQUETTE TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS

1. Be on time! Even better, be early.
2. Introduce yourself with a firm handshake.
3. Unless otherwise directed by the employer, dress professional for an interview. Men should wear a dark-color suit and conservative tie. Women should wear a dark-colored suit. Avoid miniskirts, trendy outfits, or loud colors. Wear dark, polished conservative shoes with closed toe and heel. Men should wear long, dark socks and women should wear dark or nude-colored nylons.
4. Don't chew gum or wear too much fragrance.
5. Style your hair neat and keep it off your face. Grooming is always more important than what you wear.

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6. Minimize jewelry. Women should wear no more than one pair of small earrings. No additional body piercings.
7. Carry a briefcase or portfolio if you like. Women can avoid carrying a purse this way, but do not put your belongings on the interview table. Leave your backpack in the waiting room.
8. Leave cell phones and pagers out of the interview room or turn them off before you walk in.
9. Get your references ready before interviewing. Contact your references and let them know what you are doing and alert them to the possibility of being contacted by an employer. Share your resume with your references.
10. Mail or e-mail a thank you letter within one or two days of the interview. Send a letter to each person you met. You should mention your interests in both the job and the organization.