



Interviewing Prep: Quick Tips and Suggestions

Your Interview Goals:

1. Sell yourself by describing skills and experiences that match the job, and demonstrate that you have a sense of direction in your career.
2. Get information about the position and organization not found online or in writing.
3. Determine whether the position and organization are right for you.

Employer's Interview Goals:

1. Determine whether the candidate can succeed at the job by evaluating their skills, experience, and personality.
2. Assess the candidate's "fit" with a work team and/or organization.
3. Sell the organization and the position.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Screening Interview / Phone Interview: Typically, this is the hiring step an employer takes after all resumes for a position have been reviewed. These interviews may last 15 to 30 minutes and may take place either in person or over the phone. The purpose of this interview is to assess a candidate's skills and personality to determine if they are capable of meeting the basic/minimum job functions of the position. Ultimately, employers want to "screen out" those applicants they should not hire due to a lack of skills/experiences or poor first impression and "screen in" those candidates they feel should be further interviewed.

General / Structured Interview: This is the type of interview most think of when they talk about interviewing. This interview may be combined with a screening interview due to time constraints in the hiring process. You can expect to meet and be interviewed by the supervisor over the position for which you are interviewing as well as additional staff with whom you would be working. As an extension of a screening interview, in this interview you will be discussing the specifics of the position and company for which you are applying.

Group / Panel Interview: This can be the most intimidating type of interview for most given the amount of people involved and pressure of feeling as though "all eyes are on you" or "you must do better than the person next to you". There are two variations of the group interview. You may meet alone and be interviewed by a panel of anywhere from two to five interviewers, or you may be included in a group of several candidates being interviewed by two to three interviewers, at the same time. Employers may use this type of interview to save time in the hiring process as well as observe how well you perform under pressure and in group settings.

INSIDE THE MIND OF AN EMPLOYER

When interviewing, most employers look for certain desirable characteristics and skill sets, including:

- Excellent listening skills
- Strong verbal and written communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Proven ability to get along with co-workers, i.e., interpersonal skills
- Dedication, reliability and good attendance record

To prepare for a behavioral interview, refresh your memory regarding special situations you have encountered and appropriately dealt with, as you may be able to use them to frame responses. Recall and prepare stories that illustrate times when you successfully overcame challenges or performed memorably. Finally, when responding, use the STAR method (see below).

S.T.A.R. Method

Situation: Briefly describe the situation you were in, provide background and context. Give enough detail for the interviewer(s) to "get it".

Tasks: Identify the task(s) or goal(s) you set out to accomplish. This step may reflect your strategy/approach.

Action: Describe the actions you took to address the situation. What did you do specifically? What skills did you use?

Results: Describe the outcome. What happened? What did you learn or achieve? How might you do things differently next time?

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- **Review your resume:** make sure you know your resume well enough that you can discuss every line if necessary!
- **Develop your career objectives:** be prepared to articulate your career goals, highlighting how these goals fit in with the position and organization you are interviewing for.
- **Research the employer:** research its history, present day standing and future directions. Explore the company's website, company brochures, yearend statements, trade journals, local Chamber of Commerce, professional organizations and media coverage. Develop an understanding of their mission and vision, size and locations, organizational structure, services/products offered, sales volume and competitors.
- **Practice, Practice, Practice:** conduct a mock-interview with a colleague, friend, family member or Career Development Center professional. Keep in mind that the less familiar you are with your mock-interviewer, the more likely you are to experience and have the opportunity to practice managing the "real life" anxiety and pressure you can expect during your actual interview. Prepare a list of questions to ask of the interviewer(s).
- **Choose your interview attire:** try it on after you pick it out and model it for a friend. Be certain it is laundered and pressed. Business attire is appropriate for most interviews, unless otherwise notified. See interview clothing tips later in this guide.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- **Prepare and Send "Thank You" Letters or Emails:** Keep your letters /emails brief and send them within 24 hours of your interview (see "thank you letter" handout).
- **Following-up:** if the discussed follow-up timeframe has passed and an employer has not followed-up with you, wait a few days and email or call the employer to inquire as to the status of the position and your candidacy. If you weren't given a timeframe, it is appropriate to follow-up with an employer a week after the initial interview.
- **If you are offered the position:** thank the employer and ask for time to consider. It is wise to take at least 24 hours to evaluate an offer, but do not drag things on. Ask the employer when they need to know your decision.
- **Declining a job offer:** thank the employer for their job offer and express regret that you will not be able to accept their offer at this time. Remain friendly and tactful throughout, as you do not want to burn any bridges with them.
- **Response to being declined for a job:** be sure to demonstrate a positive attitude and express gratitude for having been considered. If so desired, suggest that you would be interested in similar positions within the organization as they become available. If you anticipate reacting poorly to being declined for a job, talk about this with someone as soon as your complete your interview so that you can prepare accordingly.

COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- Describe a situation where you failed.
- What motivates you?
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet.
- Discuss a situation where you resolved a conflict.
- How would a former supervisor describe you and your work?
- Describe your ideal job.
- Where do you want to be in five years?
- Give an example of how you've taken initiative.
- Describe a project or experience where you worked as part of a team.
- Give me an example of a time when you set and then achieved a specific goal.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the past year.

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES TO ASK DURING AN INTERVIEW

1. What type of training programs do you have?
2. What can I expect in terms of job progression in your organization?
3. Are there any new offices or sites being planned?
4. How much travel is normally expected?
5. What are the next steps in the interview process?
6. What are you doing in the local community?

INTERVIEW KILLERS: LEADING TO JOB REJECTIONS

1. Poor personal appearance
2. Lack of confidence and poise, increased nervousness
3. Late to interview with no good reason
4. Lack of researching the company or organization
5. Asks no questions about the job
6. Lack of planning for career, no purpose or goals