

# Effective Interviewing



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## TOP TEN TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

1. Research the company and review the job description prior to interview.
2. Identify your top 5 skills and past experiences that are relevant to the position.
3. Complete a practice/mock interview prior to the actual interview.
4. Dress professionally; your first impression is cast within 60 seconds of meeting the interviewer.
5. Bring additional copies of your resume, references, and other pertinent information to the interview.
6. Arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview; turn off your cell phone.
7. Be specific and provide examples in your responses. This adds credibility to statements you make about your qualifications.
8. Ask 2-3 questions when asked, "Do you have any questions for us?"
9. Collect business cards of the individual(s) who interviewed you.
10. Always send a thank-you note to interviewer(s) within 24 hours of the interview.

## ALTERNATIVE TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

**PHONE INTERVIEWS**-Used as a tool for screening candidates prior to an in-person interview

- Prepare to have a phone interview without prior notice.
- Be ready to talk about your background, accomplishments, and skills. Keep your resume near the phone.
- Have a pen and paper nearby for taking notes.
- Turn off/ignore call waiting. No kids, pets, TV, stereo. If it's an inconvenient time, ask to reschedule.

**PANEL INTERVIEWS**-Take place when an applicant is interviewed by a panel/group of interviewers. The applicant may meet separately with the panel or there may be multiple candidates all in the same room. Preparation for a panel interview is similar to preparation for a general interview; some additional tips to keep in mind:

- Speak directly to **each person on the panel**.
- At the conclusion of your panel interview, thank everyone personally, gather business cards, and send thank you letters to all.

**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**-Conducted to collect information about a job, career field, industry or company.

- What are the duties performed during a typical day/week/month/year?
- What skills are needed? What educational program is recommended as preparation?
- What kind of work/internship experience would employers look for in a job applicant?
- What are the important "key words" or "buzz words" to include in a resume or cover letter when job hunting in the field?
- What are the different salary ranges?
- Is this a rapidly growing field? Is it possible to predict future needs for workers in this field?
- What types of technology are used and how are they used?

**LUNCH AND DINNER INTERVIEWS**-Used by employers to evaluate candidates' social, communication, and interpersonal skills.

- Review the basics of dining etiquette before the meal.
- Engage in a conversation.
- Choose a reasonably priced menu item unless your interviewer suggests a dish based on his/her past experience; do not order alcohol.
- Select a meal that will be easy to eat and not too messy.
- Know that the interviewer will be paying for the meal.

## PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

### RESEARCH THE COMPANY AND REVIEW THE JOB DESCRIPTION PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW

*One of the biggest complaints from interviewers is that candidates have not researched the employer and/or the industry.*

- Visit the company website to research.
  - Mission, value statements
  - History, size, locations
  - Products, services, and clients
  - Key personnel
  - Company culture
- Conduct research on the Internet.
  - Competitors
  - Financial stability

#### **Resources:**

- Google
  - Vault
  - Wetfeet
  - Glassdoor
  - Hoovers
- Use LinkedIn, other social media to get updates on companies you are interested in and learn about the interviewer.

### BE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT YOUR CHOSEN FIELD

- Required skills, education, certification
- Employment outlook
- Salary expectations

#### **Resources:**

- O\*NET (onetonline.org)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov)
- Salary guides (salary.com)

### IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Create a list of your skills and abilities that are relevant to the position.
- Prepare a one- to two-minute commercial/introduction about yourself.
- Be ready to answer basic interview questions.
- Write 6-8 success stories to answer behavior-based interview questions.
- Prepare 3-5 questions to ask the interviewer.
- Research salaries to determine your worth.
- Get permission from your references to use their names.
- Plan for professional attire.
- Take a practice drive to the interview site (optional).

### THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- Carry these items to the interview:
  - Several copies of your resume on resume quality paper
  - A copy of your references
  - A pad of paper and a pen to take notes
  - Directions to the interview site
- Plan to arrive early—10-15 minutes before your appointment.

## INTERVIEW DRESS

Appearances count in the business world! The level of formality you project is interpreted by the interviewer to show that you understand the importance of the situation and respect the person you are meeting. When in doubt, it is better to dress more conservative than casual.

### WOMEN

#### SUITS

The standard interview attire for women is a dark navy, black, or gray pant or skirted suit.

Skirt length should be just below the knee and never shorter than just above the knee.

Make sure the suit fits properly, is clean, pressed, and not too tight or too baggy.

#### BLOUSES

Blouses should be white or another light color and coordinate with the suit.

#### SHOES AND HOSIERY

Clean and polished dress shoes with closed toes and a conservative heel. Pantyhose should be flawless (no runs) and conservative in color.

#### MAKEUP AND JEWELRY

Makeup should be minimal, with lipstick and nail polish in conservative tones. Minimize use of cologne or perfume.

Limit jewelry. Wear only one set of earrings; no other piercings unless mandated by religious beliefs.

#### HAIR

Neat, professional hairstyle with hair out of your face.

#### ADDITIONAL

Carry a padfolio and professional looking purse. Don't smoke before the interview.

### MEN

#### SUITS

The standard interview attire for men is a dark navy, black, or gray suit.

The sleeves should end just over the wrist so the shirt cuff extends about ½ inch beyond the jacket.

Make sure the suit fits properly, is clean, pressed, and not too tight or too baggy.

#### SHIRT

Choose a neatly pressed long-sleeved shirt. White is best, cream or light blue is next best.

#### SHOES & SOCKS

Clean and polished dress shoes. Wear with dark colored, over-the-calf socks.

#### TIE

Your tie should be darker than your shirt with a conservative pattern and should not extend below the belt.

#### JEWELRY

Wear only wedding or class rings. No earrings or other piercings. Minimize use of cologne or after shave

#### HAIR

Get a haircut; short hair always fares best in interviews. Facial hair could be a negative; if you insist on keeping your beard and/or mustache, it should be neatly trimmed.

#### ADDITIONAL

Carry a padfolio or briefcase. Don't smoke before the interview.

# FIVE PHASES OF THE INTERVIEW

Every interview is different, but most follow a general pattern:

## 1. **Building Rapport:**

The first three to five minutes are usually devoted to establishing a connection between you and the interviewer. The interview starts the moment you introduce yourself and shake hands. Try to relax and enjoy the conversation. Your ability to talk and express yourself professionally is being measured.

- Utilize positive nonverbal communication including eye contact and hand gestures.
- Give more than *yes* and *no* responses.
- Don't forget to smile!

## 2. **Answering Questions:**

The interviewer is seeking to obtain information regarding your knowledge, skills, and abilities to determine if you are a match for the company's needs. This is your chance to elaborate on your strengths.

- Don't limit your answers to *yes* or *no*.
- Listen to the questions carefully; think about what you're going to say before you answer.
- Present a positive picture of your skills and knowledge that match the position.
- Demonstrate enthusiasm and excitement for the organization and the position.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest and admit you don't know. Offer to get back to the interviewer with an answer later.
- Respond to behavior-based questions using specific examples.

## 3. **Asking Questions:**

Well-thought-out questions will send the interviewer the message that you're prepared and interested in information beyond the basics.

- Ask specific questions about the position.
- Don't ask questions that could be answered by looking on the company website.
- Avoid questions about salary or benefits.

## 4. **Wrap Up:**

This is when you want to reemphasize your interest in the position and why you are the best candidate. Ask about the next steps in the interview process and when you can expect to hear from the company.

- Thank the interviewer for his/her time.
- Shake hands.
- Obtain a business card from all people you interviewed with.

## 5. **Reflection and Follow Up:**

After you leave, take 10 or 15 minutes to review how you did. What questions did you find difficult? What did you forget to say? How can you improve on the next interview?

- Consider keeping a log or diary with written notes.
- Keep a list of specific interview questions and how you responded.
- Send a thank you note (email is acceptable) to everyone you interviewed with within 24 hours.

## TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—WITH SUGGESTED ANSWERS

Tell me about yourself.	Create a one- to two-minute summary of your education, experience and skills that demonstrate your qualifications for the job. Never discuss personal information.
Why did you choose your career path/major?	Be prepared to elaborate on your strong interest/passion for your chosen field. Never say you chose your field because of good job potential.
What do you know about the company?	Know the organization's mission statement, history, size, services, products, clients, organizational structure, and philosophy.
Why do you want to work for this company?	Focus on how your skills, abilities, and experience meet the organization's needs and goals.
What are your greatest strengths? Why should I hire you?	Describe the skills and experience that directly align with the job you are applying for. Be prepared to give specific examples to illustrate your strengths.
What is your biggest weakness?	Be honest, but end on a positive note. Turn a negative into a positive by explaining that it is something that you are actively working to improve.
What is your greatest accomplishment?	Be specific as possible; cite the number of people you supervise, the money you saved your organization, processes/systems you created or improved. If you don't have major work accomplishments, focus on your educational achievements.
What are your short and long term goals?	Indicate that you would like to grow within the organization, perhaps moving into a supervisory/managerial position.
Why are you leaving your present job?	Never speak negatively about a former supervisor or organization. Reasons for leaving can include your desire for more challenge, responsibility, or opportunity to advance.
What are your salary expectations?	Research salary ranges ( <a href="http://onetonline.org">onetonline.org</a> , <a href="http://salary.com">salary.com</a> ). Give a range of what similar positions pay and one based on your skills and experience.

## ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What factors are most important to you in finding a place to start your career?
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- How well do you work with other people? How well do you work independently? Which do you prefer?
- What type of manager do you like to work for?
- What are three leadership qualities that you think are important?
- Describe a leadership position you have held. Do you consider yourself a leader?
- How would your last supervisor describe you? Your co-workers? Your professors? Your friends?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Describe your time management skills.
- Do you think your grades/GPA are a good indication of your academic achievement? (Emphasize areas in which you have excelled, be prepared to discuss academic problems without making excuses).
- What courses did you like best? Least? Why?
- Have you ever changed your major field of interest while in college?
- In what activities have you participated? Why?
- What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?
- What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?
- What criteria would you use if you were hiring for this position?
- How would you rank these critical factors in order of importance to you?
  - C** Challenges
  - L** Location
  - A** Advancement
  - M** Money
  - S** Security
- What is a reasonable commute for you? How much overnight travel, as a percentage, is acceptable?
- Would you consider relocation?
- If presented the perfect opportunity today, would you be prepared to turn in your resignation today and start a new career in two weeks?

## BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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### How to prepare for behavior-based interview questions:

**1. Prepare 6-8 success stories to demonstrate your abilities in:**

- Teamwork/Cooperation
- Leadership
- Motivation/Initiative
- Critical Thinking
- Time Management
- Customer Service
- Communication
- Stress Management
- Problem Solving
- Conflict Resolution
- Decision Making
- Continuous Learning/Development

2. Examples can be positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals. Alternatively, examples can start out negatively, but end positively.
3. Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life. Pull from jobs, internships, class projects, student organizations, community service, etc.
4. Use fairly recent examples.

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### Use the STAR technique to answer questions:

**S= Establish the Situation**

Offer details of a situation you encountered that relates to the question. Describe a specific event, not a generalized description, of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand, but keep it brief. This situation can be from a previous job or school/volunteer experience. Don't use personal stories or events that make you emotional.

**T=Establish the Task**

State the task(s) that you needed to accomplish. This statement summarizes the action(s) needed to meet the goals and objectives.

**A=Describe the Action**

Your plan of action-what you did to solve the problem, overcome the obstacle, or remedy the situation. Focus on what you did specifically. Even if you are discussing a group project, describe what you did –not the actions of the team.

**R=Describe the Result**

What happened as a result of your action? What were the benefits? What was learned? Did you gain any insights?

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### Sample response:

**Situation:** During my marketing internship last fall, I was responsible for managing various events.

**Task:** I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 25% over the past two years and wanted to do something to improve these numbers.

**Action:** I designed a new marketing brochure to send to local businesses and organizations. I also included a questionnaire to obtain feedback on our events and made contact through email and in person to enhance interest and communication with these organizations.

**Result:** I utilized some of the ideas received as feedback and raised attendance by 18% the first year.



## SAMPLE BEHAVIOR-BASED QUESTIONS

### Teamwork/Cooperation

- Give me your best example of working cooperatively as a team member to accomplish an important goal. What was the goal or objective? What was your role in achieving this objective?
- Tell me about the best team you have worked on. Why was it so good? The most difficult team?

### Leadership

- Have you ever worked in a position (or school project) where you acted as the team leader? How did you organize the other people's activities?
- Tell me about a situation when you had to work in a group or with a team that wasn't functioning well. What was the situation or task? What action did you take?

### Motivation/Initiative

- Give an example of a time when you had to motivate yourself to do something you did not want to do. What was the outcome?
- Provide an example of a time you were able to motivate co-workers/team members.

### Critical Thinking

- Tell me about a time when you worked on an assignment or project where the work was not well defined or was in an area in which you had little experience/knowledge. Describe the process. What did you do?

### Time Management

- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do. How did you accomplish your goals?

### Customer Service

- Give me an example of a time when you had to address an angry/difficult customer. What was the problem? How would you assess your role in defusing the situation?

### Communication

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have agreed with your perspective.
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.
- Describe the process you use to prepare for a presentation to a large group. What do you typically do?

### Stress Management

- Tell me about the highest-pressure situation you have dealt with recently.

### Problem Solving

- Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.

### Conflict Resolution

- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give an example of a time when you successfully managed conflict.
- What do you do if you disagree with someone at work?

### Decision Making

- Tell me about a decision you made but wish you had done differently.

### Continuous Learning/Development

- Discuss the highlights of your most recent educational experience. Did you accomplish any special achievements? What were your most difficult challenges?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

- Could you tell me the major responsibilities and activities involved in this position?
- How would you describe a typical day on the job?
- What are some typical projects I would be working on in this position?
- How was this position created? Was it an existing position or is it newly created?
- How does this job and department fit into the organization as a whole?
- What are the most challenging facets of this position?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted? Is it company policy to promote from within?
- What is the natural career progression for an employee with my skill set?
- How did you come to work in your current capacity?
- What have you enjoyed most about working for this company?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- What are the short- and long-term strategic directions of the company? Who is involved in the strategic planning?
- What industry trends will affect this company in the coming years?
- What is the next step in the hiring process? When will you make the decision to hire for this position?

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Collect business cards or contact information for each person you interacted with during your interview.
- Send a thank you note to each person within 24 hours of the interview; it is acceptable to email this letter.
  - Shows your appreciation for the interview.
  - Gives you an opportunity to reemphasize your interest.
  - Reminds the interviewer of important points you made during the interview.
  - Allows you to mention something you may have overlooked discussing.
- The letter should be brief, typically 2-3 paragraphs, and follow this format:

Heading from Your Resume

Date (4 spaces between *Date* and *Name of Interviewer*)

Name of Interviewer  
Interviewer's Title  
Company  
Company address

Dear Mr. /Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

**First paragraph:** Thank the interviewer for meeting with you. Express your enthusiasm about gaining employment in the organization.

**Second paragraph:** Reiterate your qualifications for and continuing interest in the position. Include any personal skills you neglected to mention during your interview or anything about the position or company that was of particular interest. Emphasize a specific skill or accomplishment that would make you an asset as an employee.

**Closing paragraph:** Briefly thank the interviewer again for consideration. Express confidence in your ability to perform well in the organization. State that you look forward to hearing from the interviewer.

Sincerely,

Signature

Your name typed (4 spaces between *Sincerely* and your typed name)

- Ensure there are no misspelled words, grammar errors, or typos in your letter. See the next page for a thank you letter sample.

## SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

**MICHAEL WALSH**

852 Franklin Estates Lane  
West Bloomfield, MI 48323  
(248) 555-1414  
mwalsh@gmail.com

October 1, 2015

Anne Karson  
Human Resources Manager  
Smith Jones Johnson CPAs  
2532 Main Street  
Troy, MI 48083

Dear Ms. Karson:

Thank you for talking with me about the Staff Accountant position in your organization. I appreciate the time you spent telling me about the responsibilities and goals for this year. I am confident my skills are a good match for your team, and my background offers a record of success in exceeding organizational objectives.

My academic coursework has provided me with practical training in accounting principles, and I believe I could be immediately productive. I was intrigued by your explanation of the new project your department will begin next month, and I would welcome the opportunity to contribute to its success.

Again, thank you for considering me for the position of Staff Accountant. I look forward to learning of your decision soon.

Sincerely,

Michael Walsh