

The Job Interview

Interviewing to Get the Job

Preparing for the Interview

Interviewing for a job can be a stressful experience. Many job applicants report that they feel unprepared and uncomfortable about the interview process.

But job interviews do not have to be a source of stress.

This informative guide will help prepare you for your next job interview with advice on interviewer expectations, dress and appropriate business behavior.

Take Time to Practice

Being prepared for an interview means familiarizing yourself with what you have to offer. You should be able to effectively communicate your strongest qualities and achievements to your potential employer.

Remember, you are trying to sell yourself. Whenever possible, try to fit honest descriptions of your abilities into the interview.

The first step in preparing for an interview is research. You will need to research the company or organization with which you are interviewing to learn about the company's products, services, customers and recent activities. This will help you to find out if you are a "good fit" with the company, and it will help to boost your confidence.

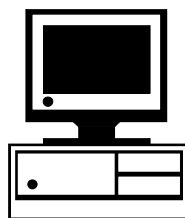
Where to Research Prospective Employers

Annual Reports contain information about companies and reflect their personality and direction. Annual reports are public relations tools that are written to show the company in the best light possible. Call the company you are interviewing with and ask them if they will send you a recent annual report. Annual reports may also be available at a corporate headquarters or on a website. Annual reports often give insight into the company's values or mission. Use this information to think about how you will fit into the way they do business.

Reference material, such as directories, can be found in public libraries and colleges in your community. They contain factual information about organizations like addresses, telephone numbers, names and titles of officers, annual sales and products of companies.

Friends and Acquaintances can give you useful, firsthand information about potential employers. In particular, personal references can help increase your chances of landing a job.

The Internet has many resources that can help with your job search. Look to see if a potential employer has a website; organizations will often post information about their daily operations that you should familiarize yourself with. In addition, if you are looking for step-by-step advice about what to do before, during and after a job interview, consult the websites below.

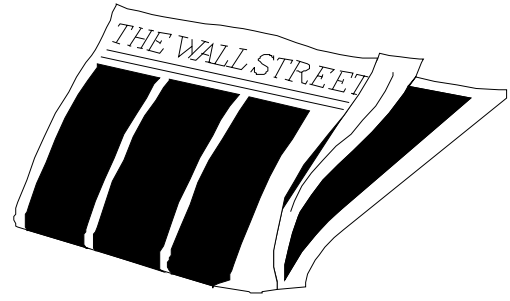


www.job-interview.net
www.jobweb.com/Resumes_Interviews/default.htm
www.pohly.com/interview.html
www.quintcareers.com/intvres.html
www.careerplanning.about.com/od/jobinterviews



Preparing for the Interview cont.

Financial Publications list the current status of many employers. You'll find information about the successes and failures of companies you may be interested in working for. You can find publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *Fortune* or *Forbes* at your local news stand or at your neighborhood library.



Dressing for the Interview

It is critical that you dress appropriately for the interview since first impressions are strong and are often based on appearance. The following tips are from Women Work!'s guide, *Work Your Image!: Creating a Professional Appearance to Get and Keep a Job*.

- ! Find out what type of clothing is considered appropriate for your job. If you're not sure what to wear, remember you can never look too professional.
- ! Dress in a clean-cut and conservative manner. Wear low heels and make sure all clothing is clean, free of stains and wrinkles and in good repair.
- ! Beware of clothes that are ill-fitting. Avoid anything that is too tight, loose or low-cut.

For a free copy of the *Work Your Image!* tip sheet and participant guide, please mail your request with your name and address to:

Women Work!
Attn: WYI Request
1625 K Street, NW #300
Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 202-467-6346
e-mail: info@womenwork.org



Before the Interview

Be Prepared. Typically, most employers will expect you to bring a copy of your resume, cover letter and list of references to the interview. Even if not explicitly asked, plan on doing so anyway -- it never hurts to be prepared. You can also bring a portfolio with samples of your work.

Arrive 15 minutes early. Be courteous to everyone in the office and everyone you see, including the receptionist. Speak naturally, but try to avoid expressions such as, "ah, um, like, you know." Use your hands naturally, but be aware of any nervous habits.

At the Interview, DO

- ☺ Give a firm handshake
- ☺ Make eye-contact and smile
- ☺ Speak clearly and loud enough to be heard
- ☺ Maintain good posture
- ☺ Relax and believe in yourself

At the Interview, DO NOT

- ☹ Use first names (unless asked)
- ☹ Smoke (even if encouraged)
- ☹ Sit down (until invited)
- ☹ Show anxiety or boredom
- ☹ Look at your watch
- ☹ Discuss sex, race, national origin, religion or age
- ☹ Ask about salary or benefits during the first interview
- ☹ Criticize a former employer
- ☹ Assume a submissive role. Treat the interviewer(s) with respect but as an equal.

Three Basic Questions in an Interview

Although many books and articles on job interviewing list hundreds of commonly asked questions, they all boil down to the following three questions. Because you should always expect to face these three basic questions at an interview, practicing your responses beforehand will help you be clear and to the point in your delivery.

Question # 1

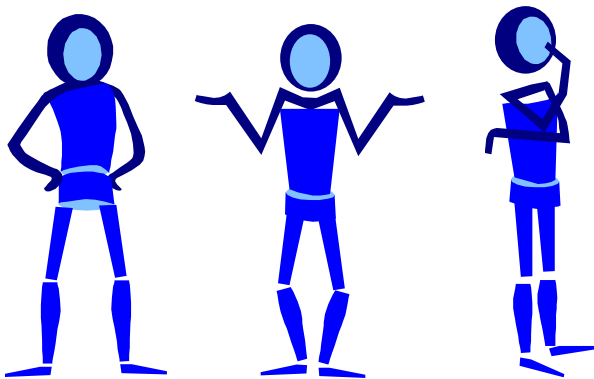
Do you have the skills and background to do the job?

Other ways this question is asked:

- ? Tell me about yourself.
- ? Why should I hire you?
- ? How can you make a contribution to the company?
- ? What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?

Keep in mind that when you answer this question, the way you choose to say something can be as significant as what you are saying. Besides determining whether or not you are qualified for the position, employers want to know whether or not you will be a reliable benefit to the organization. For this reason, they will take your personal character into serious consideration.

If you are unsure how to approach this question, try to prepare a brief introductory speech outlining your key accomplishments and strengths. Be honest in your assessment of your abilities and express your eagerness to join the organization. Avoid clichés such as, “I like to work with people.” Instead, use more business-oriented language like “I have demonstrated that I work well with people by interacting with others in community projects and clubs.”



Question #2

Are you willing to do this job?

This question may be phrased in different forms like:

- ? What are your long-range and short-range goals?
- ? What would you like to accomplish in the next two years?
- ? What did you learn from your previous job experience?

You will need to explain how the job fits with what you want to do, and how you will continue to grow with and within the organization. In your answer, give them a sense that you are committed to staying. Show you are ready to learn and do whatever is offered to advance.

Question #3

Will you be a good fit for the company?

Other ways this question may be asked include:

- ? What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- ? In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- ? How do you think a friend who knows you well would describe you?
- ? What would you do if you didn't get along with a fellow coworker?

The answer to this question is interpreted by the interviewer based on instinct. Factors considered, consciously or unconsciously, will be your ability to respond effectively to the various personalities in the workplace, the company's outlook, the management style of your supervisor and the pace of your workplace.

Illegal Questions

Interview questions should always be job related. Employers are forbidden by federal law to discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, national origin or religion.

Examples of illegal questions:

- How old are you?
- Is your last name Japanese?
- Are you divorced? / Is that Ms. or Mrs.?
- Do you plan to have children?
- Are you Catholic?
- Does your family approve of your commute?
- Are you gay?

If you are confronted with an illegal question, it is best to sidestep the matter and redirect the discussion to a new topic. Most illegal interview questions are asked in true ignorance of the law; many interviewers are not aware of how the information may be used by others in a discriminatory way.

If you direct the conversation to a new subject, the interviewer might recognize the personal misstep and appreciate your willingness to put it aside and move on. However, when you feel you have experienced blatant discrimination, you have every right to end the interview and leave.

Questions You Might Ask in an Interview

Studies have revealed that employers take note of the type of questions candidates ask during an interview. Try to ask thoughtful and engaging questions. Also, steer clear of certain subject areas. For instance, do not seem overly concerned about the starting pay rate or the amount of vacation time; you can always bring these subjects up after you have been offered the job, before you accept it.

Examples of appropriate questions:

- What are the company's long- and short-term goals?
- Can you describe the work environment.
- What are the most challenging aspects of the position?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?



Examples of inappropriate questions:

- What does this company do?
- If I get the job when can I take time off for vacation?
- Can I change my schedule if I get the job?
- May I see the break room?
- What disabilities do you have?
- Is smoking allowed on the premises?

After the interview

Within 24 hours of the interview, write a thank-you note or e-mail to each of your interviewers. Mention that you are grateful for the opportunity to meet with them and try to include as much detail about your visit as possible.

Make sure to be specific about how and why you are excited about working for the organization. Try to reference similar goals with the organization's mission statement. Finally, mention that you look forward to hearing back from them soon. If you plan to follow up on a certain date, let the interviewer know.

The Job Offer

If you are offered the job, do not accept right on the spot – you need to carefully consider all of the factors involved before making your decision.

First, do not forget to maintain your composure, impressions still count. Second, confirm the details of your job offer: inquire about the salary, start date, location and date they need your job offer response by.

Make sure you take some time to consider the job offer. Employers know you are interviewing with other organizations and will appreciate your honesty. Once you have decided to accept an offer, you should stop other job search efforts. Notify any other employers with whom you are in discussion about employment that you are no longer a candidate. Cancel any upcoming interviews by explaining that you have accepted another job offer.

In the case that you are not offered the job, be gracious. If you are still interested in the organization, ask that your resume be kept on file in case there are any new job openings.