

# Interview Preparation

An interview is a two-way conversation intended to help the candidate and the employer assess mutual fit. Like any good conversation, an interview requires flexibility and “give and take” by each party. During an interview, the interviewer is trying to discover two things about the interviewee: 1) can this person excel at our organization and 2) do I want this person on my team? At the same time, you are also interviewing the company to ensure that it is the right place for you to work.

Interviewing is highly subjective and while merit does factor into the equation, the establishment of chemistry between you and the interviewer is important. The only controllable factor in each interview you have is *you*. The guiding principle of interviewing is to know yourself. Be aware of your likes, skills, talents, personality and experiences. *Be yourself!* Do not falsify who you are to force a fit with the opportunity and do not create a professional interview alter ego, assuming this persona will get you the job. Instead, employers will be more comfortable getting to know who you really are, which in turn will allow you to be able to relax a bit in the process.

## What do employers want?

Aside from looking for candidates whose skill sets and experience are highly suited for the specific duties of the job, many of the qualities employers seek are “soft skills”.

### Top 10 Qualities Employers Seek

1. Communication skills (verbal and written)
2. Honesty/integrity
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others)
4. Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
5. Motivation/initiative
6. Strong work ethic
7. Analytical skills
8. Flexibility/adaptability
9. Computer skills
10. Organizational skills

### ...and 10 Ways to Impress Them!

1. Come to the interview prepared
2. Dress appropriately, shake hands firmly and maintain good eye contact
3. Know about the company and industry
4. Be an excellent listener
5. Be positive
6. Don't ramble
7. Cite specific examples
8. Ask great questions
9. Tell the interviewer you really want the job
10. Send a thank-you note

## Before the Interview

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- **Research the company and the position.** If you are asked what you know about the company, you want to be prepared and capable of responding to the inquiry in a knowledgeable manner. *Areas to research:* key people in the organization, their products or services, their size in terms of sales and employees, their organizational structure and major competitors, views of the company by clients, suppliers and competition, as well as latest news reports.
- **Familiarize yourself with your skills and experience.** Make a list of all your work, volunteer, internship, and academic experiences and review the responsibilities and your achievements for each.
- **Find the location and parking for the interview at least a day before.** To ensure promptness, arrive for the interview early (at least 10 minutes).
- **Confirm the logistics and details.** Double-check the date and time of the interview and know the name and title of the interviewer(s).

- **Determine what you want to take to the interview. This may include:**
  - Extra copies of your resume, especially if it has been revised
  - Notepad and pen to take notes
  - Hygiene tools such as a brush or comb, mints, etc.
  - Transcripts and/or a list of courses you've completed
  - List of references

## During the Interview

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### Potential Interviewers and Interview Types

#### Interviewers

- One-on-one
  - HR professional
  - Potential manager or supervisor
- Group
- Panel

#### Interview Types

- 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
- 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

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

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| <b>Situation</b> | What happened? Describe a specific event to put your response in context.                |
| <b>Obstacle</b>  | What were the challenges you faced?  |
| <b>Action</b>    | What <u>did</u> you do? Tell what actually happened with a focus on <i>your</i> actions. |
| <b>Result</b>    | What was the end result? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?                    |

## After the Interview

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### Know What's Happening Next

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.

### Say, "Thank You"

To show courtesy and appreciation for the employer's time, always send a thank-you note, hand written or typed, following the interview. A separate note should be written and personally written to each individual with whom you met. 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 and should indicate something specific that will remind the employer of his or her meeting with you.

### **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. This step could be critical, especially if you find that job search opportunities tend to fizzle after the interview.

## **Avoid these Common Interview Mistakes**

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- Lack of proper career planning; purposes and goals ill-defined
- Lack of knowledge about field or company
- Overbearing, too aggressive or conceited
- Overemphasis on money; interested only in best dollar offer
- Asks no or poor questions (about the job)
- 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
- Poor personal appearance
- Little interest or enthusiasm; indifferent
- Inability to express self clearly
- Showing up late for interview

## **Telephone Interview Tips & Techniques**

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Phone interviews are often used to screen candidates in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. They are also used as a way to minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates. 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, so you have to 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. Conversely, the interviewer cannot see your enthusiastic expressions or professional appearance. This places all the weight on your phone manners, clarity of speech, voice tone, and the content of your answers.

### **Be Prepared to Interview**

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for a regular interview. Compile talking points for the call including your strengths and weaknesses, lists of answers to typical interview questions, information about your background and skills, and the value you bring to the company. Also write out specific questions you want to ask the interviewer about the company and position.

- 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 and a calculator if you might need one.
- Develop several questions to ask of the interviewer.
- Make sure to have a copy of the job ad or description and the research you have done on the company.
- Clear the room – evict roommates, children, or pets. Turn off music and the TV and close the door.

### **During the Phone Interview**

- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink. Keep a glass of water handy, in case you need to wet your mouth.
- Take notes when appropriate.
- Smile and stand up. Smiling changes the tone of your voice and will project a positive image to the listener. By standing, your voice sounds stronger.
- Speak slowly with purpose and enunciate clearly.

- Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. And their last name). Only use a first name if they ask you to.
- Take your time – it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.

### **Communicate as Effectively as Possible**

- 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.
- Avoid the simple yes or no; add selling points at every opportunity.
- Support your statements with examples of accomplishments when possible.
- 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.
- If you need to take more time to think about a question, say so.
- If they ask if you have any final statements, re-affirm your qualifications and express your interest in the job and company. Say you would appreciate the opportunity to talk about the job further in person.
- Before ending the call, be sure you know the next step in the hiring process.

### **After the Interview**

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
- Promptly send a thank you note that reiterates your interest in the job.

## **Video Interviewing Tips**

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Many organizations are conducting job interviews virtually because they are fast, easy and inexpensive. Since you are online using your computer and a camera, it can be a tad uncomfortable the first time. 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.

**What to Wear:** Wear what you normally would for an interview. A nice blouse with a jacket for women or a nice shirt with a suit jacket and tie for men is appropriate.

**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.

**Practice:** Practice with a friend or family member on the platform that you are using for your interview. Practice speaking up and looking right into the camera. Test out your interview outfit, background and make sure your posture is strong.

*Adapted from "5 Tips to a Great Skype Interview" by Laura Backes*

## **Practice Interviews**

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Schedule a practice interview with a staff member in the Center for Career & Professional Development to receive feedback and advice on your interviewing skills. We also coordinate Employer Practice Interview Days which allow students to sharpen their interviewing skills by conducting practice interviews with local employers and human resources professionals.