



Interviewing Quick Guide

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Preparation is the key to an effective interview. The interview is your opportunity to make a positive first impression, express your talents and fit for the position, and demonstrate that you are the right person to hire. The interviewer is assessing you, the candidate, from the first moment; the initial greeting and handshake are as important as how you respond to each question.

A job applicant, or candidate, must consider these elements in order to prepare well for an interview: the interview format, questions the interviewer may ask, appropriate attire, questions for the hiring company, and general interview information.

Interview Formats

One-on-one Interview

Most interviews are conducted between one candidate and one interviewer (or hiring professional). These can be conducted on-campus, at the employer's site, via telephone or in a career fair format.

Serial Interview

This is a variation of the one-on-one, or traditional, interviewing technique that involves a series of sequential interviews with several interviewers. The interviewers have hiring authority, and may be the future manager(s) of the new hire. Treat each person you meet as if he/she were a key player in the decision-making process, even the administrative assistants. Making a positive impression with each individual will likely be reported in the evaluation phase, and weigh favorably for the candidate.

Group/Panel Interview

Panel interviews are becoming more common as organizations encourage more teamwork and group decision-making. This type of interview typically occurs at the employer's location. The panel may include three to ten people, possibly more. Each person may have been assigned a specific area of questioning. Your strategy should include equal eye contact with each person, with special attention to the individual who asked the question.

Before the Interview...

- Research the company/organization, its culture, and the industry.
- Learn the needs of the industry.
- Practice answering interview questions by yourself or, even better, with someone else in a mock interview. (Our Career Coaches are available for mock interviews as well!)
- Know your value. Also, what is the job worth?
- Own a black or other dark colored suit (navy, brown, dark grey).
- Prepare questions for the interviewer(s). (Examples appear in this booklet.)
- Memorize the key selling points you want to present in the interview. Be prepared for the appropriate time to communicate these.
- Prepare a list of references in case the interviewer asks for it. Notify your references of the types of opportunities for which you are applying.
- Assess your skills and career path in context of position.
- Make sure your phone and email address(es) are in working order!
- Make sure that the voice-mail greeting and email address(es) are professional!
- Have an online presence from which an employer would conclude that you have a good reputation.
- Get enough sleep the night before the interview.
- Allow extra time for possible interview add-ons like a personality and/or skills assessment test.

Sample Interview Questions

Below are some questions that you can practice answering in a mock interview or by yourself after answering on paper.

- Describe your most successful/most challenging team experience.
- Tell me about a time when your course load was heaviest. How did you get all of your work done?
- Tell me about a situation in which you were able to find a new or better way of doing something significant and how you implemented it.
- Describe a situation when you were unable to meet a customer's request.
- Tell me about a time when you made a bad decision.
- Why did you choose to attend your college/university?
- Why did you choose this major?
- What are the three most important things to you in your new position if hired?
- What would you like to be doing five years from now? Ten years from now?
- What has been your greatest accomplishment?
- Describe your strengths and weaknesses.
- What makes you the best candidate for this position?
- What have you learned from the jobs you have held?
- With what kinds of people do you find it difficult to work?
- How do you handle rejection?
- What's been your biggest disappointment, and how did you handle it?

- See this ____ I'm holding? Sell it to me.
- Tell me a little about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for this company (or organization)?
- Why are you interested in this career?
- Do you prefer working alone or in teams?
- Give me an example of when you thought “out of the box”.
- In what ways do you think that you can contribute to this company?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this company?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
- Recall a situation when you “stepped to the plate” and were a leader.
- What do you know about this company/organization?
- What do you know about our competitors?
- How do you see yourself developing in the position?
- What does success mean to you?
- How do you handle change?
- How do you handle conflict in general?
- How do you motivate people?
- Tell me about the last time you found a creative solution to a problem.
- **Why did you leave the _____ Company (or organization)? (Always answer with a neutral response like “I wanted to gain experience working in a different industry”**
- **Do you have any questions? (Always have a question; be ready with three.)**

Questions for the Company/Organization

Develop intelligent, probing questions that will help you get the information you need to make an informed decision. Do not ask questions for which the answers can be found via the company/organization website or via research. Good questions can help you gather information (content measure), and make a positive impression on the interviewer, who will be assessing you based on the quality of your questions (style measure).

A candidate can develop good questions by researching the employer's organization and the industry. The interviewer will recognize the extent of your research. It is acceptable to write key questions on a notepad which you carry with you to the interview. Be sure to prioritize your questions, as you may have time to ask only one or two (prepare 3-5 questions.). Here are some suggested questions:

For the Human Resources professional:

- I've read the job description, but can you give me more detail on the position?
- Where does the position fit within the organization/department?
- Can you describe the organization's structure?
- How would you describe the department's culture? The company's?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- Would you explain the performance review process and how I would be evaluated?
- To whom does the position report?
- Can you share with me more about the company's new ____ project (or initiative)?

For a Colleague/Peer:

- What is it like to work here? What do you like best? Least?
- How did you get into this business?
- Describe your job/role here.
- Describe how projects get completed here. As a team? Independent contributors? A combination?
- How long have you been with the company? With this department?
- Describe a typical day on the job.
- How would you describe the culture of the department? Company?
- How will my taking this job impact your position? Your group/department?
- What are some of the projects you are just starting?

For the Hiring Manager:

- What do you see as the greatest challenge in this position?
- How would you describe your management style?
- What makes your organization different from your competitors?
- How can I best solve your needs by taking this role?
- What specifically are you looking for in the candidate you hire for this position?
- What would you consider to be exceptional performance from someone in this position during the first 3 to 6 months on the job?
- Can you describe the typical first year assignments for this position?
- Tell me about the last person who held this position? What were his/her successes? In what areas do you want to see improvement?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful at this organization?
- What is your vision for this department?
- How does this position interact with other departments?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?

Interview Dress Code

Different companies and industries have different norms in regard to business dress. For example, a financial analyst at an investment firm may not wear the same work attire as a computer engineer at a small start-up internet company. Likewise, a journalist's work clothing may be far different from that of an agricultural sales representative. The majority of organizations in all industries, however, have very similar expectations when it comes to interview attire. The standard protocol is professional dress, which means a conservative, well-tailored suit. Although a business suit may not always be the everyday work attire for an organization, recruiters expect candidates to look their most professional during a job interview.

When dressing for the interview, there are certain things that both males and females will want to do to give the best impression of one's professionalism and to show respect for the company/organization:

- Always wear a business suit, no matter the weather, with a button down shirt. Let the suit be black, navy, brown, or dark grey and make sure the shirt buttons are conservative.

- Do not allow exposure of skin: Ladies, wear stockings or pantyhose, and men, wear high socks.
- Make sure that your outerwear looks professional as well.
- Make sure that everything is neat and pressed.
- Cover tattoos.
- Wear a small amount of jewelry that is not distracting. Remove multiple piercings.
- Don't wear flashy colors.
- Wear very little or no fragrance.
- Wear clean and polished *dress* shoes.
- Don't bring food, water bottle, coffee cup, or drinks to the interview.
- *What to bring*: professional briefcase or portfolio instead of backpack or purse; a black ink pen and a blue one; a notepad (not a mini memo pad); several copies of your resume and cover letter (along with other required materials) in an envelope or folder; your planner or calendar; driver's license or other photo ID; Social Security card (in case you are hired immediately); freshening items like toothbrush, deodorant, and hairbrush; and a TIDE pen or other handheld stain remover.

Below are dress tips for men and women separately:

Interview Attire for Women

- Suit with skirt length at or just above the knees or slacks
- Blouse with a conservative neckline (if not wearing button down shirt)
- Black or other dark colored chemise underneath top if shirt/blouse is somewhat see-through
- A size top (shirt or blouse) that fully covers your bust and torso.
- Closed toe shoes with heel less than or equal to 4 inches (like a medium heel)
- Neutral hosiery
- Moderate amount of jewelry or accessories. A general rule is to wear no more than 5 accessories: no more than 1 ring on each hand (exception: an engagement ring and wedding band) and one conservative earring in each ear
- Minimal makeup that matches your skin color and is blended well
 - Wear a light neutral colored gloss.
 - Use neutral eye color like brown or cream shadow, brown or black eyeliner, and brown or black mascara.
 - Do not wear false eyelashes.
 - Don't overdo blush (just a touch)!
- Trimmed fingernails with a fresh coat of conservative color, if any, or a French manicure
- Professional watch, especially one without an alarm that may sound during the interview
- Neat hair style

Interview Attire for Men

- Dark, two-piece suit with a subtle stripe or solid is acceptable.
- Undershirt (crewneck with short sleeves)
- Basic tie with small conservative pattern
- Dark socks matching the pants that, when you are seated, will remain above the pants cuff
- Belt matching color of shoes, typically black or brown
- Neat hair style

- No more than 1 ring on each hand
- Professional watch, especially one without an alarm that may sound during the interview
- No theme clothing, such as a cartoon tie
- Trimmed and clean fingernails
- A clean shaven face
- No baseball caps

After the Interview...

- Make sure your phone and email address(es) are in working order!
- Make sure that the voice-mail greeting and email address(es) are professional!
- Have an online presence from which an employer would conclude that you have a good reputation.
- Return phone call or email message within 24 hours, better yet on the same day.
- Check email and voice mail regularly.
- Send thank-you note (handwritten and email) within 12-24 hours of interview to each individual who interviewed you even if each is of the same organization/company.
- *After 7 to 10 days*, contact the interviewer by email if you have not heard from him/her. If no response is received within 1 to 2 days, then contact the interviewer by phone. After having left a voice message, if no one answers, make a third and final attempt. "Let go and let the process happen (Pollak, (2012), p.305)."
- Keep looking and applying for opportunities.
- Don't act desperate. Be calm and professional in emails and on the phone.
- Contact references to know if they were contacted. Ask what was asked of them in order to know what the interviewer or hiring person is/was looking for. Send thank-you notes.

General Interview TIPS

- Arrive at the interview early (15 minutes before time)! Allow plenty of time for parking, walking, weather, etc. Look in the mirror right before you arrive to make sure you are looking your best.
- Remember to turn off all your electronics (phone, IPAD, tablet, & laptop).
- Try to avoid eating a heavy meal right before the interview. Drink some water. Check your teeth to make sure that there is nothing stuck in them.
- Be polite and kind to everyone you encounter on site of the interview. That person's opinion may be sought by the interviewer in considering you for the position.
- Be aware of the importance of a good first impression. Your appearance should reflect professional dress and grooming. Smile and show enthusiasm for the interview, the position, and the company. Maintain good eye contact and give a firm handshake. Exit the interview with the same mannerisms.
- Upon entering the interview room or office, take the lead from the interviewer. Take a seat when and where he/she asks. Sit comfortably with good posture and be attentive, not overly relaxed (e.g., do not slouch in the chair).
- Avoid using the words "um", "ah", and "like" or others like them to fill space while speaking. Using these words takes away from the message that you wish to communicate to the interviewer.

- Carry an attractive portfolio and include extra copies of your resume, references, and transcript. Jot questions on a notebook pad that you may want to refer to later in the interview. Listen carefully to the questions being asked and answer them completely and concisely.
- Memorize the key selling points you want to present in the interview. Be prepared for the appropriate time to communicate these.
- Select and be prepared to describe situations and events that you have dealt with effectively. This is good preparation for a behaviorally based interview.
- Memorize 3-5 well-stated questions that you will ask the interviewer about the job or the organization.
- Avoid discussing salary, vacation, or benefits until the interviewer initiates the discussion. Provide salary expectation only after you have researched the salary ranges for someone with your qualifications, in your specific field. (See Salary Negotiation Quick Guide.)
- Request a business card and ask if you can call or e-mail the interviewer with any additional questions or follow-up on the status of your application. The business card will provide the correct spelling of the interviewer's name and his/her mailing address and allow you to send a thank-you to the recruiter within two days of the interview. Send a letter via e-mail and snail mail of thanks to the recruiter and restate your interest in the position and in the company. A strong thank you letter makes a great follow-up to a positive first impression. (See Thank You Letter Quick Guide.)
- Don't give a bad report (bad mouth) anyone (like a previous boss or co-worker). Only mention his/her strengths. You want to present yourself as very positive.
- Be prepared to give a specific example for each of your achievements.
- Recognize and address the need(s) of the interviewer(s).

Sources:

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