



Tips and techniques for acing your interview

Getting through to interview stage is a huge achievement - it means you've convinced recruiters that you're capable of doing the job. But you'll be one of many candidates vying for the job, and while you can't alter the calibre of the other applicants you can make sure you're thoroughly prepared.

Facing an interview for a new job can cause you sleepless nights. You don't want to jeopardise your chances of being hired and you know first impressions count (in fact research shows it takes an interviewer only 15 seconds to form a good or bad impression of you).

Our step-by-step guide will give you the best possible chance for interview success.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

It's important to dress appropriately for your interview.

If you're a man applying for a senior job or a post in a conservative company you should wear a black, dark-blue or a dark-grey suit, a tie and a white or blue long-sleeved shirt. White socks are out. The colour of your socks must match your pants. Your tie must be properly knotted and remember, a stiff collar always looks neater than the soft button-down kind.

Steer clear of ties with cartoon characters. The smaller the detail on your tie the more professional it looks.

Ensure your shoes are polished.

Women should wear a conservative, corporate form of clothing and pay attention to colour coordination. If you wear a skirt with your jacket make sure it's not too short - just above the knee is dead right.

Steer clear of anything revealing that shows too much flesh. Be subtle with your make-up and ensure it complements your face. Earrings that are too long and dangly are irritating so choose small ones. And don't wear bangles that jangle and may distract the interviewer.

Keep your hair out of your face and ensure it's neat.

Don't wear too much fragrance or aftershave.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE?

Positive thinking will boost your self-confidence.

Find out as much as you can about the employer. Check if the company has a website where you can find out more about its products and services. Visit the firm's offices to pick up leaflets or brochures on its operations. Make sure beforehand this is the kind of company and product you'd want to be associated with.

By doing a little research on the company you'll be able to ask the right questions during the interview. It will make a good impression on the prospective employer if you get a change to chat to him or her during the interview and show you've gone to the trouble of doing your homework.

Ensure you're well prepared and clued up on the job you're applying for. If possible find out who'll conduct the interview and whether you'll face a panel or an individual. If you're going before a panel make sure you make eye contact with everyone - don't focus on one and ignore the others.

Be prepared for the type of questions that may crop up and practise your responses beforehand in front of the mirror.

If you believe in yourself so will others.

DON'TS

- ❖ Don't be late. People couldn't care less if you have transport problems.
- ❖ People aren't all jokers so avoid cracking jokes unless you have already established a rapport and don't use slang or swear words.
- ❖ Lose the chewing gum and be aware of what you do with your hands - don't fiddle with your tie, blouse or watch. It will make you appear uncertain.
- ❖ Tell the interviewer if you don't know the answer to a question. It immediately shows you're honest.
- ❖ Maintain eye contact throughout the interview and don't look down; it will make you look shy and inadequate. It could also create the impression you've lost interest.
- ❖ Don't address the interviewer by his or her first name and don't speak without thinking first. Don't go into detail about something personal that could be your disadvantage at work.

DO'S

- ❖ Be yourself during an interview - natural, open and willing to provide information.
- ❖ Announce yourself confidently at reception and be friendly.
- ❖ A pleasant facial expression is important; smile and make eye contact with the interviewer.
- ❖ Wait for the person to invite you to sit down. Be natural and sit straight in the chair.
- ❖ Your face reflects how you feel; don't sit there expressionless.
- ❖ Know your CV backwards so you don't contradict yourself.
- ❖ Ensure your hands are visible. Put them on your lap or if you're at a desk place them on your desk. If interviewers can't see your hands they might unconsciously wonder what you're hiding.
- ❖ Listen and ask questions about the duties and responsibilities relating to the job.
- ❖ Refer to previous relevant experience and explain why you're confident you can do the job.
- ❖ End the interview with a smile and shake the interviewer's hand before leaving.

When it comes to the job interview, there are four things you need to master, being positive, being prepared, being personable, and being professional. Positive thinking means believing in yourself and your abilities. When interviewing, attitude is everything. If you know you are the best person for the job, you have a much better chance of convincing of someone else.

Preparation is the second key ingredient to successful interviewing. If you come prepared and ready to get the job, you can impress the employer with your knowledge about the position, company, and product. Prior to the big day, gather all the information you can about the employer. You can do this by accessing the employer's web page, reading annual reports, and talking with people who work there. There is no excuse for a poor response to the question: "What impresses you most about our company?"

Be personable. Be who you are. Laugh, make jokes if appropriate, make small talk. Build rapport with him or her. Employers want to hire people, not robots. By showing your personality, your genuineness shines through. Not surprisingly, one of the main reasons people get hired is because they are likeable.

Finally, be professional. Even if this is your first time in an interviewing situation, you can act like you are a pro by dressing conservatively, answering questions directly, and maintaining proper nonverbal communication (leaning forward in your chair and smiling). This may be their first or last impression of you, so make it a good one!

The 10 Most Common Job Interview Questions

Too many job seekers stumble through interviews as if the questions are coming out of left field. But many interview questions are to be expected.

So study this list, plan your answers ahead of time and you'll be ready to deliver them with confidence.

Read on to learn how to overcome the most dreaded interview questions.

What Are Your Weaknesses?

This is the most dreaded question of all. Handle it by minimizing your weakness and emphasizing your strengths. Stay away from personal qualities and concentrate on professional traits: "I am always working on improving my communication skills to be a more effective presenter. I recently joined Toastmasters, which I find very helpful."

Why Should We Hire You?

Summarize your experiences: "With five years' experience working in the travel industry and my proven record of saving the company money, I could make a big difference in your company. I'm confident I would be a great addition to your team."

Why Do You Want to Work Here?

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought and are not sending out resumes just because there is an opening. For example, "I've selected key companies whose mission statements are in line with my values, where I know I could be excited about what the company does, and this company is very high on my list of desirable choices."

What Are Your Goals?

Sometimes it's best to talk about short-term and intermediate goals rather than locking yourself into the distant future. For example, "My immediate goal is to get a job in a growth-oriented company. My long-term goal will depend on where the company goes. I hope to eventually grow into a position of responsibility."

Why Did You Leave (Are You Leaving) Your Job?

If you're unemployed, state your reason for leaving in a positive context: "I managed to survive two rounds of corporate downsizing, but the third round was a 20 percent reduction in the workforce, which included me."

If you are employed, focus on what you want in your next job: "After two years, I made the decision to look for a company that is team-focused, where I can add my experience."

When Were You Most Satisfied in Your Job?

The interviewer wants to know what motivates you. If you can relate an example of a job or project when you were excited, the interviewer will get an idea of your preferences. "I was very satisfied in my last job, because I worked directly with the customers and their problems; that is an important part of the job for me."

What Can You Do for Us That Other Candidates Can't?

What makes you unique? This will take an assessment of your experiences, skills and traits. Summarize concisely: "I have a unique combination of strong technical skills, and the ability to build strong customer relationships. This allows me to use my knowledge and break down information to be more user-friendly."

What Are Three Positive Things Your Last Boss Would Say About You?

It's time to pull out your old performance appraisals and boss's quotes. This is a great way to brag about yourself through someone else's words: "My boss has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can rely on me, and he likes my sense of humor."

What Salary Are You Seeking?

It is to your advantage if the employer tells you the range first. Prepare by knowing the going rate in your area, and your bottom line or walk-away point.

One possible answer without cornering yourself would be: "I will give it some thought and ask my consultant to advise you what package I would consider"

If You Were an Animal, Which One Would You Want to Be?

Interviewers use this type of psychological question to see if you can think quickly. If you answer "a bunny," you will make a soft, passive impression. If you answer "a lion," you will be seen as aggressive. What type of personality would it take to get the job done? What impression do you want to make?