

# How to Prepare Yourself for a Job Interview

## You

Congratulations! You have made it to the interview stage. Your resume was impressive, your research and networking activities have paid off, and you have landed an interview with your company of choice. Now it is time to get prepared for your interview.

We have prepared a guide to help you succeed in the interview process. There are four different interview topics made available to you:

- Understanding the function of an interview.
- Preparing for an interview.
- Performing well during an interview.
- Following-up after an interview.

Feel free to read through these guidelines and pick up some useful tips that will help you through the interview process.

## What is an interview?

The interview is a two-way street with both you and the interviewer playing an active role. It is also an exciting opportunity to take a positive step in your career path. Previous experience or education is not enough to convince an employer that you are the right person. The outcome of a job interview is entirely dependent on how well you sell yourself.

## What is the purpose of an interview?

Remember, everything has a reason in life, including an interview. An interview is the employer's way of selecting the right applicant from a group of equally qualified candidates. An interview is an elimination process, whereby the winner receives a job offer.

In an interview there are four main objectives:

1. The employer wants to know if you are a good fit for his/her company. The interviewer is interested in three things:
  - o Can you do the job?
  - o Will you do the job?
  - o Will you fit in?
2. You want to sell yourself as the ideal candidate and you want to know if the company is suitable for you and your career goals.
3. An interview is your opportunity to present your skills and experience.
  - o What are your strengths?
  - o What are your weaknesses?
  - o How are you suitable for this job?
  - o How long do you plan to stay with the company?
  - o What is your ideal position?
  - o Why do you want to change jobs?

4. An interview is also your opportunity to assess the company:
  - o Is this the kind of place where you want to work?
  - o Can you contribute?
  - o Will you acquire new skills?
  - o Is there a possibility to advance?
  - o Will this position open doors for you?

### What to do before an interview

How do I prepare myself for an interview? Here are some things to do the day before an interview. Remember, first impressions usually last!

- Collect information about the company.
- Prepare what you plan to bring with you to the interview (including a list of references).
- Prepare what you are going to wear.
- Prepare for the interview questions, including topics about your:
  - . work experience
  - . academic history
  - . skills and abilities
  - . knowledge of the organization
  - . career goals and objectives
  - . accomplishments and achievements
  - . personal and motivational factors
  - . money and salary
- Prepare your interview responses.
- Rehearse your responses in front of a mirror, or role play with another person.
- Practice your introduction.
- Make sure you have the company's current address and the correct directions.
- Make your transportation arrangements ahead of time.
- BE PUNCTUAL! Get up early, giving yourself plenty of time to get ready and arrive before the actual interview begins.

### What to do during the interview

#### Make your entrance

Before you say your first word, the interviewer will make a judgment about you. There are a few key things that they will be looking for, including: a genuine smile, a firm handshake, a confident demeanor, good eye contact, and a friendly, enthusiastic introduction. They will notice instantly whether your hair is clean and neat, whether or not your attire is appropriate, whether or not your breath is fresh, and if your hands and fingernails are clean.

- Knock before you open the door.
- Carry your briefcase or portfolio in your left hand.
- Stick out your hand confidently.
- Smile.
- Relax and breathe deeply.
- Be natural.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Remember: Don't get too comfortable!

#### Getting started

One good way to kick off an interview is:

- To give a brief summary of your understanding of the position.
- Ask for any additions or clarifications.
- Ask the interviewer to share the points in your resume or letter that triggered their interest. Then you will know their priorities, making it easier for you to target your responses precisely to the position.

#### Attitude counts

This is the time to show your interpersonal skills. Employers are looking for key character traits and you need to demonstrate them at the interview. Keep the following things in mind:

1. Listening Skills: good listening skills and a pleasant demeanor are key attributes in any job.
  - o Make sure you let the interviewer complete his/her sentence, don't interrupt.
  - o Show interest in what he/she says. Encourage him/her to talk and ask questions.
  - o Speak and sit with confidence. The quality of your interview presentation is the key to its success.
  - o Silence. (Do you get rattled easily?)
2. Enthusiasm: you need to demonstrate to the employer that:
  - o You are extremely interested in the position.
  - o Enthusiasm is contagious and employers are always keen to add members to their team. Your positive attitude will also rub off on the others as long as it is genuine and not overplayed and he/she will leave the interview with a favorable "feeling" about you.
3. Eye Contact:
  - o Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Looking away continuously suggests distractibility and disinterest.
  - o Looking down makes you appear insecure and shy.
  - o By all means, keep it natural. Feel free to nod your head, smile, and even laugh where appropriate.
4. Flexibility:
  - o You need to demonstrate to the interviewer that you are willing and able to adapt readily to new environments, demands, personal styles, etc.
5. Professionalism:
  - o Above all, BE PROFESSIONAL! Respect the interviewer. Remember the interview boundaries at all times, don't behave in an either overly-casual fashion or in an overly-aggressive manner with the interviewer.

#### What to do after the interview is over

Congratulations! You made it through the interview!

What is the next step?

- Send the company a "Thank You" note regardless of the outcome of the interview.
- Wait for the company to respond to you. Nagging them with phone calls and visits is annoying and completely unprofessional.

- Follow up and phone the company a week or ten days later inquiring about the status of the job vacancy.
- If you get rejected for the job, consider it a valuable learning experience.

### Interview Do's and Don'ts

There are some basic tips and strategies to be aware of while being interviewed. The basic rules of thumb are:

#### Do

- Have a positive tone.
- Be prepared to face difficult questions.
- Collect information about the company before the interview.
- Focus on what you have to offer to a prospective employer, not what you want.
- Think about what you can do for the employer.
- Learn about your rights as an interviewee.
- Follow up with a note and/or phone call.
- Look directly at the interviewer.
- Elaborate briefly on your experience, your skills, and background.
- Be sincere.
- Sell yourself without bragging.
- Be natural, allowing your sense of humor to show.
- Think before you answer. It is quite acceptable to pause before responding in order to organize your thoughts.
- Be a good listener. Ask for clarification if you're not sure about what's being asked.
- Be calm and poised.
- Be aware of your nervous habits, and try to keep them under control.
- Shut the door on your troubles.
- Try to avoid discussions about family or financial problems.
- Thank the interviewer for taking the opportunity to talk to you.
- Leave as soon as the interview is over.
- Say good-bye to the receptionist. Being polite may provide you with the extra edge you needed to close the interview.

#### Don't

- Lie on your resume.
- Beg for a job!
- Exaggerate or compare yourself to others.
- Cross your arms across your chest. This gesture will make you seem defensive.
- Place anything on the desk between you and the interviewer, such as a briefcase or a portfolio. It can be misinterpreted as a barrier.
- Give just "yes" and "no" answers. One-liners are conversation stoppers.
- Use flattery, an interviewer will recognize flattery and consider you insincere.
- Argue with the interviewer.
- Criticize your old job or boss.
- Speak too loudly or too softly.
- Comment on politics, religious or other controversial topics dear to your heart.
- Stray from the interview topics unless you have a common interest such as golf and keep your tone factual, honest and professional.
- Start interviews with your fingers crossed hoping that they "give you the job"; nobody is going to "give you the job".
- Talk about money in the first interview.