

Interviews

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What are Interviews?

Job interviews involve meeting with employers to see if you match a position's qualifications and the organization's work culture. The interview is your opportunity to provide concrete examples of how you meet the organization's needs and to prove that you will be successful in that position. Therefore, you will need to make sure you master the art of interviewing and know what it takes to have an effective interviewing experience.

Basic Guidelines: Before the Interview

Research the Position

Find out as much as possible about the position, so if you do not already have a detailed job description, it is a good idea to request that one be sent to you. This will allow you to match your actual experience to the job qualifications.

Research the Employer

Most staffing professionals agree that being knowledgeable about the organization or company leaves a very positive impression with an interviewer. Therefore, do your homework. Be sure you know such information as: the organization's products and services, size and location(s), general financial status, the organization's goals, and latest news reports on the company. Good sources for this information include: the internet, an organizational newsletter or annual report, newspaper articles, employer websites, and the public library. You may also call or write the company directly to request information or to talk to a contact who works for the organization.

Know Yourself

Based on what you know about the job opening and the organization, list what traits and skills are needed for the position. Next, consider your experience, skills, and strengths in terms of the internship or job requirements. Prepare specific examples that illustrate how your skills meet those requirements, how you have demonstrated those skills, and how you could benefit the employer.

Practice Your Responses

Anticipate questions that you may be asked during the interview by reviewing the sample questions provided with this guide. Be able to articulate how your experience gained from your work, community service, internships, classroom, and extracurricular experiences match the employer's required skills and qualifications for the position.

Prepare Questions

Write down questions to ask the employer and bring them to the interview. Employers are impressed when they see that you took the time to prepare questions ahead of time. Review the sample questions at the end of this guide for a reference.

Be Prepared

Bring extra copies of your resume, a typed list of your three to five references, and a portfolio of examples of your work if relevant to position.

Dress Appropriately

Your clothes should reflect the position you are applying for. For a professional position, wear a business suit.

Print and Bring Extra Copies of Your Resume

You may be interviewed by a number of people ranging from only one to up to even eight or more. Before the interview, it is okay to ask how many people you will be meeting with, and be sure to bring enough extra resumes for everyone.

Relax

The trick is to keep the adrenaline and your nerves under reasonable control. Taking deep breaths to relax yourself may help. Keep in mind that the purpose of the interview is an exchange of information. Relax, be yourself, and remember that the more prepared you are, the less nervous you will be.

Arrive Early

Find out exactly how to get to the interview site. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early for an interview to accommodate any unforeseen delays. The interview starts as soon as you walk into the employer's work environment. Be polite and professional to everyone you encounter while there.

Basic Guidelines: During the Interview

Introduce Yourself

When you are introduced to your interviewer, smile, give a firm handshake, and maintain good eye contact. You may say something like, "Good morning Ms. Jones, my name is... It's nice to meet you." Refer to the interviewer by his/her correct title: Mr., Ms., Dr., etc.

Listen Carefully

Make sure you understand what the interviewer is asking of you. If you are not sure, clarify the question with the interviewer. Then pause a few seconds before answering to give yourself time to compose an answer which is concise but thoughtful.

Sell Yourself

Give examples of how you have used your skills and the accomplishments you have achieved. Avoid general statements such as; “I want to utilize my education and ability” and “I like to work with people.” You want to provide specific, concrete examples.

Know How to Answer Behavioral Questions using STAR

Many interviews now focus on behaviorally based interview questions, which means an interviewer wants to know how you reacted to a certain situation or what you did in a certain type of scenario. These behavioral questions help the employer to see how you react in certain situations and give an idea of how you would perform in the future. Examples of these questions may include:

- Describe a time where you had to resolve a conflict.
- Tell me about a time you had multiple assignments to complete and how did you prioritize them.
- Give me an example of an accomplishment you are proud of.
- Describe a situation where you had a work as part of a team to achieve a goal.

Answer these questions using the STAR method, which means that you should explain the:

S – situation you were in

T – task that you were presented with

A – action you took to accomplish the task

R – results that occurred

Never Say Negative Comments

Keep your conversation positive. Never speak poorly of your previous co-workers, supervisors, or even work experiences.

Pay Attention to Your Body Language

Sit comfortably, but do not sprawl, slump, or hold your body rigid. Do not smoke, chew gum, or fidget. Try to project enthusiasm, flexibility, an ease of communication, and a willingness to take on more than the duties in the job description. In addition, be sure to provide everyone in the room with eye contact.

Do Not Ask About Salary or Benefits

If the employer initiates a discussion about salary or benefits, then be sure to answer all of the questions. Otherwise, wait until an offer is made to discuss compensation. Do not bring up salary or benefits on your own during an interview.

Close the Interview

Summarize the skills you have to offer and your interest in the position. Offer the interviewer a list of your references. An employer is not likely to offer you the position unless he/she knows you want it, so if you are interested in the position, say so.

Clarify the Next Step to the Selection-Hiring Process

Find out how and when you can expect to be contacted. If you have not heard from your interviewer by the time frame indicated, follow-up with a phone call.

Basic Guidelines: After the Interview

Write a Thank You Note

Within one to two days following the interview, write a thank you note to everyone you interviewed with. This note conveys your gratitude for the interviewer's time and restates your key qualifications and sincere interest in the position. If you are not interested in the position, send a simple note or email of thanks for the interviewer's time.

Follow-Up

As long as the employer says the position is open, continue to follow-up.

Prepare for a Second Interview

When hiring for a professional position, usually the employer will bring back the top candidates for a second interview before deciding who to hire. You will want to prepare for this second interview just as you did for your first interview. Be prepared to answer more behavioral questions and bring your own questions to ask as well. In addition, after the first interview, you should have a better idea of what skills the employer is searching for, so be sure to address how you have those skills.

Evaluate Your Job Offer

When an organization makes you an offer, evaluate your options, and ask how much time you can have before they need a response. Gather information about the assignments, supervisors, co-workers, salary, benefits, and opportunities for promotion. Your decision will be the result of a very personal process. You will need to rely on both the facts and on your intuition.

Confirm Your Acceptance

After you have accepted a position, contact the other organizations to which you may have interviews with. Also, notify the people who wrote you letters of recommendation and thank them for their help.

Sample Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in the position?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What are your long and short-term career goals?
- What are your greatest strengths?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What qualifications do you have that will make you successful in this field/position?
- Why did you choose the career you are preparing for?
- How do you think a friend or a professor who knows you well would describe you?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What have you learned from participation from extracurricular activities?
- Why should I hire you?
- What is your ideal work environment?
- What is your greatest achievement and why?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Give me an example of your ability to make decisions.
- How do you manage stress in your daily work?
- Tell me about a recent problem you encountered and how did you solve it?
- Tell me about the worst decision you have made while on the job.
- Give me an example of your ability to be a self-starter.

Sample Questions to Ask Employers

- What are your organization's goals for the next five years? Ten years?
- What day-to-day duties are involved in the position?
- Describe the work culture in this department and/or organization.
- What have been the major accomplishments in the department/division during this past year?
- What is the biggest challenge facing the department now?
- Can you describe the clients you work with?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- How will I be evaluated?
- Is there a formal training program?
- What qualifications are you looking for in this position?
- What type of training is available?
- What is the hiring selection process from here?