



A Guide to Job Interview Preparation

The biggest mistake in interviewing is not being fully prepared. Understand that interviewing is a skill; as with all skills, preparation and practice enhance the quality of that skill. Preparation can make the difference between getting an offer and getting rejected.

There is no one "best" way to prepare for an interview. Rather, there are specific and important strategies to enhance one's chances for interview success. Every interview is a learning experience, so learning that takes place during the preparation and actual interview process is useful for future interviews.

Initial preparation requires:

- Recent assessment of skills, interests, values, and accomplishments
- A re-assessment and updating of one's resume
- Research on the targeted company/organization and position.
- Final preparation includes details of dress and appearance, knowledge of the location of the interview, what to expect, and protocols for follow-up.

Preparation also includes actual practice of typical and targeted interview questions. **General preparation before you begin the interview process:**

- *Self-assessment:* I recommend self-assessment annually, but most people resist this step. When one is unemployed or fearing lay-off, the time is right for reassessing current skills, talents, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, interests, and work values. In addition, it is clearly time to re-examine accomplishments and achievements, particularly those that may be relevant to a prospective employer.
- *Updating your resume:* An updated resume is the applicant's opportunity to introduce his or her own accomplishments in the interview. Use functional headings to help focus the reader on what you have done and what you can do for the prospective employer. Be absolutely certain it is error-free.

Let's now assume you have a specific interview lined up.

- ***Research, research, and research:*** Depending on available time, use every possible means to learn all you can about the company and position. Use the Internet or public library to locate and read information about the company/organization. Access books, journals, magazines, newspapers and any reference materials useful for investors -- and job seekers! Go online to the company's Web site as well as competitors' sites.
- ***Use networking to your best advantage:*** Use any networking resources available to you to help edge the interview in your direction (i.e. community referrals, friends, co-workers, etc...)
- ***Re-assessing your resume:*** Even if you have sent your best resume, which was obviously successful in making the cut, review it thoroughly and know everything that's on it. Use a Job Interview Prep Sheet to focus on experiences you feel are most relevant and match them to the employer's needs.

Be prepared to discuss anything on your resume. Be prepared to answer questions/issues you really *don't* want to answer. For example:

- Your greatest weakness
- Your lack of related experience
- Your low GPA
- Your lack of leadership experiences
- Your record of job-hopping

Tips to prepare for the Interview:

- Practice with a friend, career counselor or coach, or in front of a mirror.
- Video or audiotape your answers for future review. Scrutinize how you look and sound.
- Note inflection of your voice, mannerisms and gestures, facial expressions, poise, energy and enthusiasm in your answers as well as in your body language.
- Secure your references, find at least three key people — former supervisors, colleagues, or instructors — who are willing to serve as your professional references. Be sure to secure their permission beforehand, and be certain that they will speak highly of you if contacted by a potential employer.

How you can improve:

- Enhance, develop, or revise your answers and/or delivery?

Because interviewing is a skill, you can only improve your style and acumen with practice.

- Ask too for genuine feedback that will be helpful in working out the kinks.
- Practice is important in assuaging fears and nervousness. However, a degree of tension is beneficial toward maintaining a level of alertness that causes you to sit up straight and forward in your seat, leaning toward the interviewer.
- The ideal is to strike a balance between poise/calm and energy/enthusiasm.
- Prepare questions to ask. These questions should reflect your research on the company and position and should never include questions whose answers are readily available in company literature or Web site.
- Do NOT ask about salary or benefits!

Final preparations: Select appropriate attire long before the interview day. Know the culture of the organization for which you are interviewing and dress accordingly -- perhaps a notch above that -- especially if the company has espoused corporate casual. A business suit is always acceptable. Be certain that your clothing is clean and well pressed. Perform a test run to determine comfort level. Too short or too tight may cause you -- or others -- to be distracted or uncomfortable. Minimize accessories. Remember: less is more. You want to be memorable for the right reasons.

Know the location of your interview. Do a drive-by if possible. Plan to arrive at the designated office 10 minutes in advance. Allow ample time for traffic, the possibility of getting lost, and parking difficulties. Bring extra copies of your resume in a folder or portfolio. Bring a small notebook for notes, but keep note taking to a minimum.

Collect business cards from every individual with whom you interview. Ask about timeframes for filling the position, how and when you will be notified, and if they would like additional information or materials from you.

Follow-up: Send a thank-you note within 24-48 hours of your interview. Send one to *every* person who interviewed you. Email is OK, but follow protocols for formal business correspondence, which is always more formal than typical email. Use the thank you note to reiterate your interest and to emphasize your specific qualifications for the position. What do you want them to remember about you that will likely "sell" them on you as a viable candidate? Everything about the job search should be focused on what YOU can do for the company, what YOU

bring to the position, and why the employer should hire YOU! The interview may be your one shot -- so make it a good one!

Interview Questions to Ask the Interviewer

As the interview comes to a close, one of the final questions you may be asked is "What can I answer for you?" Have interview questions of your own ready to ask. You aren't simply trying to get this job - you are also interviewing the employer to assess whether this company and the position are a good fit for you.

Interview Questions to Ask ~

- How would you describe the responsibilities of the position?
- How would you describe a typical week/day in this position?
- Is this a new position? If not, what did the previous employee go on to do?
- What is the company's management style?
- Who does this position report to? If I am offered the position, can I meet him/her?
- How many people work in this office/department?
- How much travel is expected?
- Is relocation a possibility?
- What is the typical work week? Is overtime expected?
- What are the prospects for growth and advancement?
- How does one advance in the company?
- Are there any examples?
- What do you like about working here?
- What don't you like about working here and what would you change?
- Would you like a list of references?
- If I am extended a job offer, how soon would you like me to start?
- What can I tell you about my qualifications?
- When can I expect to hear from you?
- Are there any other questions I can answer for you?

Interview Questions NOT to Ask ~

- What does this company do? (Do your research ahead of time!)
- If I get the job when can I take time off for vacation? (Wait until you get the offer to mention prior commitments)

- Can I change my schedule if I get the job? (If you need to figure out the logistics of getting to work don't mention it now...)
- Did I get the job? (Don't be impatient).