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# Interviews

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## What You Need to Succeed in a Professional Interview

Hiring managers say that one of the biggest mistakes candidates make is coming to interviews unprepared. The candidates don't know the simplest of details: what the position entails, what the company provides, and what benefits they would bring to the company. You can greatly increase your chances of interview success by researching and practicing beforehand.

### Prepare

*Know the job, the company, and your value.*

#### Analyze the Position

- What is the primary function of the position? Sales? Service? Products? Planning?
- Who uses the services or products?
- What are the basic tasks?
- What are the required skills, abilities and education?
- Does the position function independently or as part of a team? Does it do both?

#### Research the Company

- Explore the company website and familiarize yourself with size, location, customers, products, services, names of decision makers, competitors, etc.
- Uncover needs, problems, and challenges, missions, and values.
- Where is the position located? What is the typical salary for the position in the geographical region?
- Research the company further: contact anyone you know in the business, read current or recent articles, visit Hoover's Guide and Career InfoNet.

#### Identify What You Have to Offer

- Inventory your skills and abilities and identify all the areas in which you have relevant strengths and experiences.
- Reflect on your successes and your experiences in previous jobs, group and individual projects, volunteer activities, and campus involvement.
- Develop a written list of examples that demonstrate your readiness to meet the needs stated in the job description.
- Review your resume and prepare to answer questions about anything that is mentioned.
- Think of stories and examples to tell to demonstrate your ability to handle various situations that might come up in your job.

### Practice

*Analysis and research alone are not enough. Practice is vital.*

- Obtain a list of potential interview questions and decide how you would answer them. Take the time to write the answers down and practice saying them out loud.
- Prepare two or three questions to ask the interviewer that show off your research and professional interest.
- Write a power greeting and practice saying it aloud until it sounds and feels natural to you.
- Practice talking about how you have successfully completed activities that demonstrate the skills and experiences employers seek.
- Practice shaking hands. A handshake should last no more than a few seconds and the grasp should be firm.
- Review common illegal questions and decide how you would answer them. Plan how you would respond if asked to provide your Facebook password.

### Perform

*You were invited to interview because the recruiter was impressed by your resume. Now, demonstrate that you are the best person for the job.*

- Arrive ten to fifteen minutes early.
- Carry a briefcase or professional portfolio, not a bookbag.
- Bring several extra copies of your resume.
- Maintain a professional image and treat everyone you meet with politeness and consideration. You never know who might be in the elevator or parking lot next to you or who might be asked for an opinion.
- Express a positive attitude; greet your interviewer(s) with a warm smile, direct eye contact, and a firm handshake.
- Be mindful of non-verbal communication. Maintain eye contact, sit up straight, and avoid crossing your arms across your chest.
- Keep your answers brief; no more than 2 minutes per question.

### Perform *(continued)*

- Most interviews begin with: “Tell me about yourself.” This is not a request for personal information; it is your first opportunity to highlight your education and experiences as they relate to the position in a well-prepared Power Greeting.
- Don’t try to memorize “the right answer” to interview questions. Instead, answer with the idea in mind that each question is a version of “Why are you the right person for the job?” which is best answered by giving examples of successes that align with the job needs.
- Answer questions to demonstrate what you can do for the company, not what the company can do for you.
- If you are interested in the position, say so. Surprisingly, many interviewees neglect to let the interviewer know that they truly want the position. “Thank you for inviting me to meet with you today. After meeting with you and learning more about the position I am sure that I would like to be a part of your team.”
- At the end of the interview, summarize why you are the best match for the position and thank the interviewer(s) for the opportunity to meet with them. Ask for business cards.

### Follow Up

- Send a thank you within 24 hours of the interview. You may call or phone, but a handwritten note or card is especially effective.
- Call within the week to ask if additional information is needed and to re-express your interest.

### Handling Phone and Skype Interviews

While face to face interviews are still the preferred interview model for final hiring decisions, some recruiters utilize phone and skype interviews to narrow the interview pool to a short list.

### Phone Interviews

- Schedule your phone interview at a time when you can be in a quiet space without interruption.
- Be available at the interview time to which you agreed.
- Speak clearly and maintain a reasonable volume and pace. If you are asked more than once to repeat an answer, you are probably speaking too softly or quickly, or both. Slow down and speak up.
- Your voice should convey energy and confidence. Some people find that smiling when answering questions helps them sound upbeat and positive.
- You might find it helpful to have your written answers handy, and/or the company’s website open on the computer. If you choose this route, glance at the answers now and again, but do not read the responses verbatim. Also, avoid using the keyboard as the keying will be obvious to the listeners.
- Dress as if you were meeting face to face. Wear a suit or professional business attire. You will be more likely to speak, move, and act professionally if you are professionally dressed. When you are lounging around in your sweats, your demeanor is likely to come across as too casual.

### Skype Interviews

- Practice operating the technology in advance until you are comfortable with it. Have a backup plan in place should the technology fail.
- Wear a suit or professional business attire.
- Be mindful of the background and location of your interview. The area should be uncluttered and project a professional image.
- Practice interviewing in front of the camera.
- Be careful not to fidget or bob in and out of the camera’s view.

# Questions

## Behavioral Questions

Many recruiters use a technique known as “behavioral interviewing” as part of the interview process. Instead of, or in addition to asking hypothetical questions about how you would behave in various situations, behavioral questions ask what you did or how you handled a particular situation.

Typically, behavioral interview questions revolve around work **experiences, initiative, planning, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and collaboration**. Anticipate that you might be asked to explain or talk about times when you demonstrated these behaviors and prepare and practice your answers in advance.

### The SAC Model

Use the **STAR Method** (Situation, Task(s), Action(s), Result(s)) to describe a **situation**, describe the **tasks** needed and **actions** you took, and the favorable **results** or outcome. Be specific; don't forget that you should be the hero of the story.

### Example: Tell me about a time that you had to work with a difficult person.

- S. *Last semester I was working on a group project. When we were at an important stage, one of the teammates stopped coming to meetings and doing his part. We called and texted and emailed him over and over but he never responded.*
- A. *One afternoon I went to his house to talk to him in person. I told him that the team was concerned about him and frustrated because we were counting on him. He said that he was sorry to let us down but he was failing Chemistry and was preoccupied. I got him in touch with one of my friends who is a Chemistry major, and they set up some tutoring sessions.*
- C. *Once my teammate started working with my friend and doing better in class he returned to the group and did his part and even more. The project was finished on time, we all got a good grade, and our teammate passed Chemistry.*

## Opening Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
- What do you know about our organization products or services?

## Experience

- What job-related skills have you developed?
- Did you work while going to school? In what positions?
- What did you learn from these work experiences?
- Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
- What did you enjoy most about your last employment least?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had to manage multiple deadlines?
- Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
- Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.

## Education-Oriented Questions

- How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Why did you choose to attend your college or university?
- Describe how your campus activities helped prepare you for this position.
- Which classes in your major did you like best? Least? Why?
- Which elective classes did you like best? Least? Why?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?

## Other Questions

- Describe your ideal job.
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- What motivates you most in a job?
- Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
- Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
- Describe your preferred style of supervision.
- Would you be successful working with a team?
- Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
- Tell me about a time when you worked in an unstructured environment.
- Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/co-worker? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?

## Questions to Ask Employers

- Specific questions about the job are better asked during second meetings or with Human Resources staff. Ask more general questions that show your interest in the industry or organization.
- What is the biggest challenge the industry will face over the next six months?
- Is there a service or product that you would like to offer your customers that is not currently being offered?
- What products are in the development stage?
- How would you describe the company culture?