

# Interview Preparation

A job interview is a two-way process between you and the interviewer. Your goals:

- To convince the employer that you are the best person for the job.
- To determine if this position and organization would be a good fit for you!

Planning and research are the keys to a successful interview experience. Good preparation will place you miles ahead of the other candidates and give you an opportunity to showcase your best strengths. Planning and practice will not only enhance your chances to respond to the interviewer's questions but also allow you to best present yourself and your career goals with confidence. Your Career Center may have already helped you with the self assessment process. If not, you should be prepared to answer the following questions....

## Questions to Ask Yourself...

1. What are my academic accomplishments, leadership qualities, activities, etc?
2. What transferable skills can I offer (e.g. organizational, analytical, problem solving, financial, communications skills)?
3. What knowledge base skills do I possess (e.g. languages, computer programs, math skills)?
4. What are my personal traits (e.g. flexibility, dependability, creativity, enthusiasm)?
5. What values are most important to me in the workplace?
6. What are my career goals?

## HOW TO BE AS SUCCESSFUL AS POSSIBLE IN YOUR INTERVIEW

- ☑ **Come to your interview about 10 minutes early.** This will allow you to be available should they be running a little early. It will also give you time to catch your breath and calm yourself. If you need to park your car, allow plenty of time.
- ☑ **Check your interview time and location.** They are always posted by Monday morning for the whole week, however, circumstances sometimes force us to change the location at the last minute.
- ☑ **Look prepared.** Ladies, make sure your hair is combed neatly or pulled back from your face. What is appropriate for classroom or social events is not necessarily correct for the interview. Watch the hemline on your skirt. If you are wearing slacks and a shirt, rather than a suit, you should have a jacket to coordinate the outfit. Shoes need to be polished. Nordstrom shines shoes for about \$2 – treat yourself! Ladies and gentlemen: shirts and blouses must be ironed, with collars lying flat against the jacket.
- ☑ **Make sure the objective on your resume matches the job you are interviewing for.** If you need to switch resumes because of new information, please do so at least two days before the interview. This allows us to fax the correct resume, if requested, and to prepare the interview folder in advance. You can always have more than one type of resume in your file – just “tag” it with a Post-It note to alert us.
- ☑ **Know your company.** Come in a couple of days before the interview and check the resource library for information. Also, look on the Internet and network with fellow interviewees.
- ☑ **Prepare a few questions to ask at the end of the interview.** It shows you are interested.
- ☑ **Know your short-term and long-term goals.**

## TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### PERSONAL

These questions are less directed at behavioral characteristics and aim more specifically at interests, hobbies, and future plans. Answer briefly and in context with the available job.

1. Tell me about yourself. *Usually, a warm-up question, so do not ramble. Cover education, work history, and recent college and career experiences.*
2. Are you applying to other companies? *If you are, say so. You will be perceived as honest and more in demand.*
3. What are your career goals? *Relate goals to company you are interviewing..: "in a firm like yours..."*
4. What do you want to be doing five years from now? *Let them know you'd like to be productive and increase your skills and then review your new options within the organization. This also is a version of #3.*
5. What are your interests outside of work? *Leisure activities and hobbies complete your profile. Highlight but do not overstate.*

### RESEARCH

Answers to these questions convey your interest, knowledge of, and enthusiasm about working for the particular company with which you are interviewing.

1. Why would you like to work for us?
2. What do you know about your organization?
3. What do you find most attractive about this position? *What seems least attractive? List three or four attractive factors, and mention a single, minor unattractive item.*
4. What do you look for in a job? *Focus answer towards opportunities available rather than your personal security.*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. Please tell me about your experience in this field.
3. What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in your field?
4. Why are you interested in this position?
5. What kind of boss do you prefer?
6. Can you take instruction without feeling upset?
7. How did your previous employers treat you?
8. What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?
9. Hypothetical situations that test a person's job knowledge and judgment, e.g. "What would you do if ...?"
10. Please tell me something about your own special abilities.
11. Why should we hire you for this job rather than someone else?
12. What are your long-range career objectives?
13. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
14. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
15. What one (or three) words would you use to describe yourself?
16. In what type of position are you most interested?
17. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
18. What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?
19. What job have you liked most? Least? Why?
20. Which of your job supervisors have you liked most? Least? Why?
21. Why do you think you would like this particular kind of job?
22. What are the most satisfying aspects of your present job? The most frustrating?
23. Describe a time when you felt ineffective in your job, why you felt ineffective, and what you did about it. What was the outcome?
24. Describe a time when you felt particularly effective.
25. Were your assignments handled individually or were they a team effort?

## Personal Traits & Attitudes

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Personal traits and attitudes are personality characteristics which describe your own personal style. Which ones do you have? Check all that apply to you. When writing letters and preparing for the interview, you will want to select the best words that fit with the job objective. Example:

Accountant: thorough, detailed, accurate, precise

Sales: self motivated, energetic, confident, competitive

Teacher: patient, resourceful, organized, creative

Accurate	Dependable	Initiative	Productive
Adaptive	Detailed	Innovative	Punctual
Adventurous	Determined	Intelligent	Reliable
Alert	Diplomatic	Logical	Resourceful
Ambitious	Direct	Loyal	Responsible
Analytical	Disciplined	Methodical	Results
Artistic	Efficient	Non-	Oriented
Articulate	Empathetic	judgmental	Risk-Taking
Assertive	Energetic	Objective	Secure
Athletic	Enthusiastic	Open-minded	Self-Motivated
Calm	Facilitative	Optimistic	Sensitive
Clear-headed	Fair-minded	Orderly	Spontaneous
Competitive	Flexible	Organized	Stable
Confidant	Friendly	Patient	Sympathetic
Considerate	Genuine	Perceptive	Talented
Conscientious	Honest	Perfectionist	Thorough
Cooperative	Humorous	Persistent	Trustworthy
Courageous	Imaginative	Personable	Willing to
Creative	Independent	Practical	Learn
Decisive	Industrious	Precise	

Optional Exercise: Copy this form and ask two or three friends and colleagues to provide their feedback on your personality. Helpful in clarifying your impact on others.

## ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENTS (EXAMPLES)

You want to create stories that highlight your skills. These stories become your "Kodak moments." Consider the job you are seeking and select the important factors – what it would take to get the job done.

Use the **PAR** (**P**roblem, **A**ction, and **R**esult) method to write stories illustrating your successes. Focus on the requirements of the position you are seeking.

**THE ACCOMPLISHMENT:** One sentence description of how skill was used.

*Wrote articles for school newspaper.*

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**PROBLEM (SITUATION or TASK):** Describe the situation or task in two or three sentences.

*Student dance club needed to promote membership and raise awareness of dance performances.*

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**ACTION:** Key transferable and personality skills used.  
[Describe what you did and how you did it.]

*Determined various media exposure opportunities requiring little or no club funding. Researched readership needs and writing style to best capture reader interest. Gathered human interest stories, edited content and organized newspaper placement.*

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**RESULT:** Describe how your actions solved the problem. Quantify or qualify results. This should always be a **positive outcome**.

*Articles increased student membership by 25% within first semester.*

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*Dance recitals performed to sold-out audiences during winter events.*

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## Questions To Ask In Interviews

Spend some time thinking about what additional information you need about the company/agency and the position, and write them in question form. Good questions are ones that have been formulated through your own insight. ***Be sure, however, that your questions are not answered somewhere in the company literature or the job description.*** If the interviewer answers all the questions you were prepared to ask, when asked if you have any questions, let the person know your questions were already answered during the interview. Prepare five good questions the night before the interview and write them out and keep them in your binder.

*Here are a few sample questions ...*

1. What qualities do you look for in people who join this company?
2. What are the main responsibilities of this job?
3. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this company?
4. Could you describe the type of training provided for this position? Do you have a formal training program?
5. How would my performance be evaluated, and how often?
6. What would be a typical career path for an employee like me entering your organization?
7. To whom would I report? Under whose supervision would I be assigned?
8. What is the management style of the department/area where I'll be assigned?
9. Does this position require much travel?
10. Would I be working independently or as part of a team?
11. How is the current economic situation affecting your organization?
12. What are your plans for expansion in terms of product lines, new branches, services?
13. How would you differentiate your company from your major competitors?
14. What do you consider to be the major problems facing this industry today?
15. How do you reward your successful employees?

**★** *Do not ask questions regarding salary. All questions about compensation should be discussed in final interviews after you have been offered the job.*



## **Research Pays Off During An Interview**

By Rob Kallick

Looking for a sure-fire way to nail a job interview? Try showing the interviewer that you know the company inside and out.

Candidates who can differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack will have the most success in a challenging job market. Researching a company is an essential step to the job search" and should be done prior to the interview and before accepting a job offer.

### **Best foot forward**

"When people go into a company and show that they've done the research, it puts them in a very positive position," says Dr. Judith T. Evans, vice president of Right Management Consultants in New York. "This is a very difficult job market and it's important to have candidates who are well-grounded. Doing research needs to be a habit."

Evans says a recent client hers was able to secure a job, with a pharmaceutical company by demonstrating knowledge that went beyond the norm. "He went to the library and looked up the drugs that the company had in its pipeline," Evans says. "When he went into the interview, it turned out he actually knew some things about the company the interviewer didn't even know."

### **Take advantage of resources**

Job candidates who interview without researching the company put themselves at an unnecessary disadvantage, especially when you consider how easy it has become to find out a company's essential information. In some cases, learning more about a company can be as easy as checking a few sites on the internet.

"Type the name of a company into a search engine and you'll get zillions of articles related to the company," says Don Sutaria, founder, president and career counselor for CareerQuest, an executive coaching firm in Union, N.J. "If someone really wants to study a hard copy, he or she can call the company ahead of time and request an annual report." Annual reports are sometimes available at East Bay libraries or on a company's Web site.

### **Information into action**

Once you've learned the necessary information, be sure to find a way to demonstrate that knowledge during the interview. In fact, talking like an insider during the interview is a great way to make a strong impression.

"Know the products, the dollar volume in sales and names of key executives," Sutaria says. "Know what the previous five years were like and what the company's mission is. Get familiar with the products. That way, you can also make a few suggestions."

### **After the job offer**

While it's necessary to familiarize yourself with a company before the interview, it's just as important to continue your research if you receive a job offer.

Evans says job seekers should learn the name of their new manager and then research his or her qualifications by using the Web, trade journals or word-of-mouth communication.

Also, research the company to get an idea of its corporate culture before making your final decision. How much overtime is expected? Is there a work-at-home policy? Are employees happy to work there?

If you do it discreetly, you can ask current workers for an opinion of their employer. "Ask them what it's like to work there," says Sutaria. "You want to know what you're getting into. You can't know 100 percent, but you want to know as much as humanly possible." Evans says that talking to people at the company can be beneficial in a financial way as well.

"I know someone who networked within the company and as a result was able to negotiate a higher salary," she says. "He found someone who said, 'This is what we pay in that spot.' You can find out who held the position before you and talk to them."

In a difficult market, it's important to cover every angle. Researching a company is one angle that shouldn't be missed. "Don't ever walk into an interview without doing your research," says Sutaria. And if you haven't had a chance to brief yourself on the company's products, accomplishments and goals? "Make any excuse possible to postpone the interview if you haven't done the research," Sutaria says. "It's that important."

### **Draw attention to yourself with essential information**

Before stepping into an interview with a new company, you should be able to answer all of these questions:

- Is it a domestic or international company?
- What is the total sales volume?
- What are the profit margins?
- How many employees are there?
- Are you familiar with the products?
- Have you read the president's report?
- What are the names of the key executives?
- What were the company's previous five years like?
- What is the company's mission?

—Source: Don Sutaria,  
CareerQuest

## WRITING A THANK YOU

A thank you letter should be sent after any professional contact has been made. Whether you are writing to express your appreciation for being given an interview for a job opportunity or just an informational interview, thank you notes are a very important step in your job search. Thank you letters should be written and mailed the day of the interview; it should be brief and personalized. Keep in mind the following as you create your letter:

- Express your appreciation for the time and consideration given to you by the interviewer.
- Emphasize significant information which might have been shared during the interview. Restate ideas or examples you shared in the interview that were well received. This helps the interviewer remember you. (Remember, they may have interviewed several candidates!)
- Your thank you letter is an additional sample of your communication and writing ability.
- Reiterate your interest in the position! Tell them specifically what impressed you about the position and organization.
- Take this opportunity to mention anything you may have overlooked in the interview. (You know, those things that occur to you in the car on the way home after the interview!)

### DID YOU KNOW...

Only 36% of students ever follow up an interview with any type of formal business communication. Recruiters tell us that a well-crafted and sincere thank you letter sent after an interview is always appreciated. More importantly, it also sets you apart from other candidates and can influence a hiring decision in your favor.

Do I have to write a letter to everyone I interviewed with?

Yes! Each of these individuals plays a role in the hiring decision. This is your opportunity to follow up with each of them.

### **Here is an outline to help you organize your thoughts:**

#### Opening Paragraph

Thank the interviewer and re-emphasize your interest in the position.

#### Middle Paragraph

Remind the employer why you are a great candidate for the position. Try to remember something specific about the interview to mention. Also, use this paragraph to mention additional qualifications you may have failed to discuss during the interview.

#### Closing Paragraph

Thank the employer and express your interest in learning of their decision. If you haven't already done so, offer to provide any additional information they may need to make the hiring decision (references, transcripts, etc.).

Do I have to type my letter?

A laser-printed letter on resume quality paper is standard for business communication.

If your contact is of a more personal nature, a handwritten note on a businesslike, simple note-card is acceptable.

## POST-INTERVIEW SELF-EVALUATION

**Rate Yourself:**

	<u>Could Be Better</u>			<u>Perfect</u>	
Preparation	1	2	3	4	5
Appearance	1	2	3	4	5
Hand Shake	1	2	3	4	5
Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5
Sincerity	1	2	3	4	5
Interest	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of company	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Qualifications	1	2	3	4	5
How well did I answer questions?	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Performance	1	2	3	4	5

What did I like about the interview?

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What could I have done, asked or said differently?

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What improvements do I need to make for the next interview?

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On the back, jot down as many questions you can remember from the interview.

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