



Hexagon

Architecting Careers

A Comprehensive Guide to Interviewing

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Interviewing

Your goal in an interview

Your resume and cover letter have gotten you in the door. Now is your chance to show the employer that you are the person for the job. Knock 'em dead by keeping a few simple tips in mind.

The interview is where you show an employer how you will get their job done. Your resume describes what you have done. Your cover letter has provided the introduction. Based on your resume and cover letter, you have been invited to interview with several companies. Now you can communicate your ability and skills directly to potential employers.

An interview is a two-way street. You can gain insight on the position and evaluate the organization to which you have applied. Simultaneously, the employer has a chance to describe the open position and to evaluate your abilities in light of that job description. It is a chance for both parties to get to know each other and to determine if there is potential for a match.

Anyone can learn to interview effectively. Most people find interviewing to be a daunting prospect. Just remember, the key to a successful interview is preparation and careful listening. Interviewing is a skill, not an art.

Employer Applications

Honesty and accuracy

Special note on filling out the employer's application: Be careful and accurate.

Most companies, especially financial institutions will do an extensive background check, including employment and salary verification. These checks will be based on the information you give on job applications that you fill out during interviews. Be accurate on all portions of the application. Pay particular attention to employment dates, salary history, education and criminal convictions.

Never lie on an application. You are better served by telling the truth and explaining the circumstances. People get fired months after they start new jobs for irregularities uncovered on their applications. Often, these irregularities would not have prevented their being employed by the firm, but because the candidate lied on the application, it cost that individual the job. Honesty and accuracy are the key ingredients in filling out these forms.

Before The Interview

How to prepare yourself

POLISH

- Dress in conservative business attire, composed of a dark suit, polished shoes, white shirt or blouse, and, for men, a conservative tie. Make sure your hair is neat - get a haircut if possible. Avoid excessive jewelry, makeup, cologne or perfume.
- Always keep two clean suits, two pressed dress shirts and polished dress shoes available at all times while interviewing. You may need to be ready to go to an interview at a moment's notice - and may have two or more interviews in two days. Be prepared.
- Pop a breath mint before going in, do not chew gum during an interview!
- Brush up on your table manners. Some interviews are held over lunch and are used to determine whether you are polished enough to interface with senior management or clients.

PREPARATION

- Research prospective employers - understand their business, recognize their competitors. This type of preparation will make an excellent impression.
- Know yourself - identify your past successes, interests, skills, values and strengths. Know your resume and be able to provide examples of your selling points and skills grounded in the details of your resume. Identify why you stand out in a crowd. Determine what makes you unique among the others who are interviewing for this position.
- Think about your short and long term goals. Prepare responses to interview questions that will advance these goals.
- Be sure to bring a pen and pad of paper for taking notes, and extra copies of your resumes (without creases, in a legal sized envelope or a binder).
- Go in with an enthusiastic attitude and a full night's sleep.
- Be sure to schedule enough time for your interview. Rushing through an interview is a mistake. Most interviews last at least an hour.
- Arrive roughly 5-10 minutes early, no later. If, for some unforeseen reason, you cannot arrive at the interview on time, call the hiring authority as soon as you realize that you will be late. Explain why you will be late and offer to reschedule.

During The Interview

- During the interview, sit up straight in the chair or lean forward slightly — no slouching! Keep your hands comfortably folded in your lap or loosely placed on the arms of your chair. Do not put your hands on the interviewer's desk.
- Offer a firm but not overwhelming handshake — 2 pumps. Be sure to make direct eye contact with the interviewer but do not stare. Establish yourself as being self confident without being confrontational, cocky or aggressive.
- Be yourself — the professional, polished version. Answer questions directly. Be confident without being arrogant. Admit to your weaknesses if they are brought up, but do not bring them up. Concentrate on your strengths.
- Demonstrate energy, determination, enthusiasm, motivation and passion for your work. Overcome any negatives or lapses in your experience by either stressing skills that compensate for them, or by demonstrating that you learn fast. Ground your claims in your past accomplishments. Express an eagerness to learn new things as part of the reason that you are searching for a new opportunity.
- Show that you are genuinely interested in the company. Research the company. Then make pertinent points that tie your background and interests to the company's history and direction. Always ask questions.
- You should always have a few good questions ready to ask the interviewer. Most interviewers will ask if you have any questions at some point in the interview. If they do not, ask permission to pose a few at the end of the interview. Thoughtful, insightful questions reflect well on both your analytical and your communication skills.
- During the closing segment of the interview, offer the interviewer a short, concise summary of your qualifications and stress your interest in the position. Thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you. Keep the dialogue open by asking what the next step in their interviewing process is.

Answering Questions

Tips and common mistakes

- Answer questions honestly and completely — but be wary. There is no need to dwell on negatives. If you can, avoid mentioning them. Sell yourself on your true capabilities and qualifications without exaggerating your abilities. If you are asked a technical question that you do not know the answer to, do not bluff. If your bluff fails, your candidacy is seriously threatened. Instead, say "I don't know the answer, but if I were to venture an educated guess I would say..."

- Never speak negatively about another person or company.
- Your responses to questions must be succinct and informative. You do not want to give yes or no answers. Elaborate. On the other hand, try not to dominate the interview. Do not speak for more than 60 seconds without re-involving the interviewer in the dialogue. Studies show that the average attention span for an uninterrupted, lengthy answer is between 45 to 90 seconds.
- Allow the interviewer to guide the course of your interview. Don't lose the person on the other side of the desk. Re-involving the interviewer is a technique which expands and distills the content of your conversation. Use tactical questions to make sure that your answers are geared towards your audience. Here are some sample statements to consider:

"That is a quick summary of the three solutions that I provided. Which one would you like me to elaborate on further?"

"Does this answer your question? If not, tell me which direction you would like me to go in."

"That is a quick overview of the project I manage. Would you like more details? Which do you want to hear about first? How I dealt with the users? Managed my staff? Employed technology?"

- Use questions and statements like these to help direct your answer and keep the attention of the interviewer. These interactive conversation techniques will help you quickly determine what information the interviewer needs and wants, and will allow you to respond quickly, intelligently and with increasing focus as the interview progresses. Match your qualifications to the direction of the interviewer's questions -- point for point. Using interactive conversation techniques will eliminate tangential answers, demonstrate that you are an extremely effective communicator and allow you to stress why your experience qualifies you for this specific opportunity.
- Do not be afraid of silence. Take a few seconds to gather your thoughts before launching into an answer. A few seconds of silence followed by a well thought out answer reflects very well on you. If you are finished answering and the interviewer does not ask another question immediately, you may ask if you should elaborate on part of your answer or just wait. Just as you may need a few seconds to phrase your answers, the hiring manager will often have to spend time gathering thoughts in order to phrase intelligent questions.
 - Emphasize the results of your work. How did your experience and labor create something positive? Reduce costs? Increase Productivity? Streamline workflow? State, clearly and concisely, your duties and responsibilities on each job, focusing on:
 - Particular problems/challenges you encountered.
 - Your solution.
 - How you implemented those solutions.
 - How you will bring the same skills to bear for a new employer.

Sample Questions

Questions you should expect

PERSONAL

These questions help the hiring authority determine what makes you tick. Answer thoroughly; using organic conversation techniques to determine if the direction of your answer is correct. Remember to stay positive.

- What makes you unique?
- Tell me about yourself.
- What goals have you set for yourself? How are you planning to achieve them?
- To what do you owe your present success?
- What is your favorite hobby and tell me why?
- What motivates you?
- What type of work environment appeals to you most?

- Are you willing to travel?
- Why have you chosen this particular profession?
- What do you like most about your current job?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- What work experiences have been most valuable to you and why?
- Tell me about a situation in which you were under tremendous pressure and how you dealt with it.
- Give me an example of a time in your life in which you had to overcome great adversity to get the job done.
- Tell me about your most difficult decision and how you went about making it.
- Where do you think your interest in this career comes from?
- Give me a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it.

PEOPLE SKILLS

These questions will be used to determine how you interact with others, both your team members and users. Show yourself as a team player who can take initiative and drive projects.

- Have you ever supervised people?
- What is your management style?
- How do you interface with users?
- How do you handle a customer or user who becomes irate?
- What would your management say about you?
- In this particular leadership role, what was your greatest challenge?
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your management/supervisory skills.
- Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud and your contribution.
- Have you taken/How do you take specifications from users?
- Describe a situation where you had to work with someone who was difficult, how did you handle it?
- Tell me about a problem you have with one of your work associates.
- Which area of technical expertise do you feel is your strongest?
- Describe the type of manager you prefer.
- What are your team-player qualities? Give examples.
- When you take on a project do you like to attack the project in a group or individually?
- Tell me about your relationship with your previous boss.
- How do you take direction?
-

WORK HABITS AND ANALYTICAL SKILLS

These questions will be used to determine not only your background experience and skills, but also your suitability for the discussed position. Don't be bashful. Thoroughly explain your background, experience and skills.

- What accomplishments are you most proud of?
- What part of the project life cycle have you worked on?
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your coding skills.
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities.
- Give me an example of a problem you solved and the process you used.
- Give me an example of an idea that has come to you and what you did with it.
- Tell me about a project you initiated.
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- What is your most significant accomplishment?

QUESTIONS THAT SET THE STAGE FOR SELLING YOURSELF

Use these questions to explore why you are the perfect candidate for the vacant spot. Match your strengths to the job requirements, point for point.

- Why are you interested in our organization?
- Give me an example of the most creative project that you have worked on.
- What type of position are you seeking?
- What makes you think you can handle this position?
- Why should my company be interested in you?

- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- What interests you about this job?

DANGER QUESTIONS

Be careful. The only reason to ask these questions is to determine why NOT to hire you. Make your answers as short and bland as possible. Remember not to disparage any past employers, companies or co-workers.

- What turns you off at your current employer?
- What pisses you off?
- What interests you least about your current job?
- What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
- What industry besides this one are you looking into?
- With which other companies are you interviewing?

Tough Questions - Well-Framed Responses

EXPLAINING YOUR WORK HISTORY:

Question: *"Can you explain why there is a 6 month gap between Company A and Company B?", "Why were you out of work for so long?" or "Can you explain why you had 3 different employers in 5 years?"*

Answer: Have a sound explanation for your work history. Whether you have a gap in your employment or have held several jobs in short period of time, emphasize that you were looking for a company to settle into where you could make a long-term commitment/contribution. Stress that you are not just looking for a higher paycheck.

Question: *"Why are you leaving your current employer?"*

Answer: Focus on positive reasons for leaving. Talk about limitations in growth potential and learning at your current job. Do not dwell on negative reasons, such as not getting a raise or not getting along with your boss or co-workers. Point out that the prospective position provides the additional growth, training or responsibilities that you are seeking.

WHY YOU ARE THE RIGHT CANDIDATE:

Question: *"Why should I hire you?"*

Answer: Stress the areas in your background that relate to the challenges inherent in the new position. Meet the employer's description of the position point for point with your skills and experience. Emphasize your qualifications and your dedication to success. Discuss how you will bring this to bear for the employer's company.

Question: *"What are your weaknesses?" or "With regards to the job description, where do you feel your weakness are?"*

Answer: Turn the question around and get the interviewer to disclose what he believes your weaknesses are. Use this opportunity to change the interviewer's mind. Give specific proof why the weakness does not exist or is not a factor in performing on the job. Describe strengths that compensate for any weaknesses that could affect your performance.

Question: *"Give me an example of how you could help my company."*

Answer: Describe a project where you made a significant contribution and how it effected the bottom line. Emphasize results. Show how this ability transfers from your past positions to the one being discussed during the interview.

COMPENSATION NEGOTIATION:

Question: "Tell me about your salary expectations."

Answer: Turn the question around. Ask the interviewer to discuss the approximate pay range for the position. "Based on our discussion, what do you feel an employee with my skills is worth?"

Describe your current compensation package in detail. Avoid giving a specific desired salary in the opening stages of discussion. If you give a number too high you may come across as greedy. If you give a number too low, you can lose out. Show genuine interest in the position. Inform the hiring authority that you will consider the strongest offer based on the skills you bring to the table.

TOUGH TECHNICAL QUESTIONS:

Question: "How do you _____?" (You are not sure what the answer is)

Advice: Never exaggerate or lie. Honesty will go a long way here. Some interviewers ask questions with no correct answer just to determine if you will try to bluff your way through them. Instead of bluffing, use this opportunity to stress your desire to learn and give examples of why you are a fast learner. If you think you know the answer, but are not positive, respond by stating:

"I have never encountered that situation exactly, but if I had to give an answer based on past situations that I have encountered I would say that..." or

"In this situation, I can't base the answer on my current experience. Here is how I would find the answer..."

STRESS QUESTIONS:

Question: "How would you improve a Yo-Yo?", "How would you sell me this pen?" or "If you were throwing a party and could invite one famous person, tell me who you would invite and why."

Advice: These types of questions are meant to test your poise, measure your confidence and elicit an honest reaction to a stressful situation. Many people damage their chances of winning a position by reacting to the questions as if they were personal insults or as if the interviewer was odd or stupid. The interviewer is attempting to throw you off balance and trying to have you reveal the "real you" behind last night's rehearsed answers to six or seven stock interviewing questions.

Take this opportunity to show the employer your grace under fire. An interesting answer to these questions may mean the difference between an offer and a rejection.

Asking Questions

But enough about me . . .

The questions that you ask are just as critical as the responses that you give. Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates your intelligence, common sense and your interest in the position to the employer. By posing good questions to the hiring manager, you will gain additional useful information about the opportunity.

Concentrate on both the broad view of the company, and on specific details about the position at hand. Focus on four areas:

The Company

- What is the history/growth of the company vs. its competition?

- How does the company stand in comparison with its main competitors?
- Historically, what are the effects of a recession on the company?
- What major problems/challenges does the company face today? What is being done about it?
- What type of training does the company offer?
- In what ways has this organization's products and services been most successful over the years?
- What significant changes do you foresee in the near future for the company?

The Job Opportunity

- What will be expected of me in the first 2-6 months?
- What was the background of the last two or three employees who held this position? Where are they now?
- What skills/attributes are most needed to get ahead in the company?
- What new projects has this department undertaken lately?
- How is success measured and determined?
- What are some of the more difficult problems facing someone in this position?
- Where can this position lead? What would be a typical career path?
- Where is the job located? Is there any travel involved?

The Interviewer

- What is your background and how did you progress to your present position?
- What management style/philosophy do you subscribe to?
- Why did you decide to take a position within the company?
- Why do you like working for the company?
- If you could change one thing about this company what would it be?
- How long have you been at the company?

Closing

- Do you see me as a fit for this position?
- Do you have any concerns?
- How do my qualifications compare with other candidates that you have interviewed?
- What is the next step in the process?
- Always state "I want this job!"

After The Interview

Keeping them interested

After the interview, you should send a short thank you letter to refresh the employer's memory of your candidacy and to reaffirm your interest in the position.

Allow the employer five to ten days to contact you after receiving your letter. If you still have not heard anything, you should follow up with a phone call.

Express your continued interest in the firm and in the position. Inquire as to whether any decisions have been made. Ask to be notified about the outcome, regardless of whether it is in your favor.