



Interview Preparation

Odette School of Business

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**Odette School
of Business**
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Introduction

The interview is the single most important step in the job search process, therefore, thorough preparation is essential. The purpose of the job interview is to determine whether you are right for the job and whether the job is right for you. The interview also provides you with an opportunity to ask questions about the organization/company and the position.

Your ability to answer questions with relevant detail and in a conversational manner is key in an interview. Often it is the person most skilled at interviewing, not the most qualified person, who gets the job. The interview is your opportunity to shine, to sell your strengths and to present yourself as a unique candidate for the position. Your role in an interview is to leave a clear and convincing impression of who you are, what you can do to contribute to the organization/company, and why you should be hired for the position instead of another candidate. The interviewer's role is to determine whether you have the skills, knowledge and personality needed to be an effective member of the organization/company.

Interviewing Goals:

- Demonstrate how your experience, knowledge and accomplishments match the qualities and skills the organization/company is seeking.
- Convince the interviewer that you will “fit in” and contribute to the needs of the organization/company and the position.
- Gather information that will help you decide whether you can be successful in the position and whether the organization/company will give you the opportunity for growth and development.

When you receive the call to come in for an interview, be sure to politely request the following information:

- Time, date, location and confirm the specific job
- Name(s) and position(s) of the interviewer(s)
- Detailed job description (if you do not already have one)
- Contact number in the event you need to contact the organization/company
- Number of candidates being interviewed (optional)

Once you accept the interview, follow through with that commitment. Nothing can be more frustrating to an employer than to have a candidate fail to show up for an interview.

If you have to cancel an interview, for whatever reason, do so as quickly as you can, providing a brief explanation for this decision. Cancelling your interview within 24 hours can leave the same impression as not showing up. Employers may not be able to change their schedule, if flights are involved for example, and there may not be enough time to fill the void with another candidate. For example, if you have to decline your interview because you have accepted another position, call the employer and follow up with a brief note explaining your decision and thanking them for considering your application. This small act of professionalism may help leave a more favourable impression of you, should the need arise to approach this employer in the future. If, however, your reason to cancel your interview relates to some unforeseen circumstance, notify the employer as soon as possible and

Competencies and Qualities that Employers Seek

Accountability

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Credibility and substance
- Results-oriented

Interpersonal Skills


- Strong verbal and written communication skills
- Leadership ability
- Ability to work independently and as a team member

Attitude & Character

- Positive attitude
- Confidence
- Enthusiasm (but not overwhelming)
- Professionalism
- Maturity

Knowledge & Experience

- Track record of achievement/success
- Relevant education and experience
- Analytical/logical thinking
- Problem-solving skills



make the effort to reschedule the interview for another time. Employers can be left wondering about your motives for applying and initially accepting an interview, if there was not an attempt made to explain or to reschedule your time.

Preparing for the Interview

Careful preparation is critical to conveying a polished image. You never know when the call will come, so do not wait until after you have been contacted to prepare for an interview. You might drop off an application and have the employer interview you on the spot, or you may receive a call for an interview the next day. Whenever it occurs, employers will be impressed with how much you know when you give specific examples of how your skills and achievements are right for the job. You will stand out from other candidates if you take the time to properly prepare for an interview.

Step By Step Guide

To help you get ready for an interview, follow this step by step guide.

Step 1: Know Yourself

The first step in preparing for an interview is to examine yourself. Having a strong understanding of your abilities, skills, interests, goals, personality preferences and experiences will help you present yourself more effectively. By improving your self-knowledge, you can demonstrate maturity and insight and enhance your ability to communicate your qualifications in an interview.

Evaluate yourself in terms of your strengths and how you can translate these strengths into skills the prospective employer can use. It can also be helpful to know your weaknesses. If you do not meet all the requirements for a specific position, do not elaborate on these shortcomings. Rather, concentrate on your potential strengths for the organization. Know why you want the position and why you are the best candidate.

Consider writing down specific examples of how you have used your skills to achieve tangible and measurable results. Then, relate your accomplishments to the requirements of the position. Be ready to talk about your career objectives, goals and interests. Study your resume and be familiar with your education and experiences. Be prepared to tell the interviewer why you should be hired for the position and to specifically relate your skills to what the employer is seeking.

Step 2: Do Your Research

Research the Employer/Organization

Researching the employer conveys interest and professionalism. You will make a positive impression if you have done your homework. The more you know about the organization, the more effectively you will communicate what you can contribute and how you will “fit” into the organization/company. Employers expect you to know about the organization.

Conducting Interview Research: Places To Start

Personal Contacts

- Professors, friends, relatives and acquaintances

Industry Contacts

- Telephone book
- People within your field of interest
- The organization and/or company's public relations or human resources departments

Internet

- Company websites
- Community information
- Newspapers/journals/trade journals
- Directories



Research the following areas prior to the interview:

- What are the major products/services provided by the organization?
- What is the history of the organization and who are its key competitors?
- What are the latest trends/issues in this field?
- What are the organization's goals?
- How large is the organization? Where is it located? Does it have branches? If so, where are they located?
- How can your skills fit with the stated goals for the organization?
- What are the organization's community interests and involvements?
- What skills are required and valued?
- What is the staff turnover rate? What are the available positions and advancement avenues?
- Is salary determined by wage or commission? Is there a bonus structure or an incentive package?

Your knowledge about the organization will help you respond to interview questions and develop appropriate questions to ask at the end of the interview. Interviewers expect you to have knowledgeable and insightful questions for them. You may be judged as much by the quality of the questions you ask as by your responses to the questions the interviewer(s) ask you.

Research the Position

Researching the position provides valuable clues to the kinds of questions you will be asked at the interview. The better you understand the position, the better you will be able to communicate your interest in the job and evaluate its impact on your career goals. Knowledge of the position will help you present relevant information to a potential employer. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the position by:

- Researching the general tasks and responsibilities that the job requires
- Researching other aspects of the job that may affect your decision (travel, overtime, shift work, evening work)
- Becoming aware of future job trends in the field
- Researching salary ranges and non-monetary benefits related to this occupation

Step 3: Consider Interview Formats

Interview Formats

- Basic/Traditional
- Behavioural Based
- Case Style
- Telephone
- Assessment/Testing
- Second and Subsequent Interviews

You should consider the different interview formats when preparing for your interview. Because you may not know what kind of interview to expect until you get there, it is important that you anticipate how you will handle all situations. Knowledge about the different components of interviews will help you prepare. Within the different interview styles, interview questions may be structured or unstructured. Structured interview questions are a prescribed set of questions determined prior to the interview.

Unstructured interview questions are developed by the interviewer(s) as the interview progresses. Further, probing questions are typically unstructured in nature. Interview formats can range from employer to employer, and can be presented in combination with one another.



Basic/Traditional

These types of interviews will typically begin with open-ended questions designed to get to know you better. Examples of open-ended questions include, “Tell me about yourself” or “Why should we hire you for this position?”

Behavioural Based

Behavioural based interviewing has become an industry standard for many companies recruiting on campus. It builds upon the basic premise that future performance is best predicted by past behaviour. Interviewers develop their line of questioning around the traits and skills deemed important in the position and organization. Questions focus on “real life” experiences and actions. Questions usually begin with such phrases as “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me an example of a situation where you demonstrated...”

| Common Skills Targeted During Behavioural Based Interviews | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Accountability | Coping | Leadership/Initiative | Problem Solving |
| Accountability | Creativity/Innovation | Listening | Planning |
| Alertness | Decision Making | Management | Supervision |
| Assertiveness | Goal Setting | Organization | Team Building |
| Communication | Integrity/Honesty | Perception | Work Standards |

Behavioural based answers require you to have a repertoire of detailed examples that showcase the skills in question. Look to the above list to generate situations exemplifying each skill. Begin your preparation by analyzing the job and determining the type of skills required. Next, review and categorize your background (education and training, work experience, volunteer activities, etc.) to determine which of the necessary skills you possess. Think of situations within your background and experiences to formulate potential responses to questions.

One technique for formulating strong answers to behavioural questions is the **STAR** technique. Be prepared for probing questions that an interviewer will use to further explore your answer.

STAR Technique


Situation _____ Provide a brief overview of the situation.


Task _____ Outline the specific task or responsibility that you were asked to accomplish.

Action _____ Explain the action or activities you took and why.

Result _____ Describe the positive result or outcome of your actions; if you are asked about a negative situation, indicate what you learned and/or how you would act differently.

When answering, make sure that you understand the question. If not, ask for clarification. The situation/example you choose can make or break an interview, so take a moment to think of an appropriate example to fit that interview situation. When answering behavioural based questions, use the pronoun “I”, as interviewers are interested in what your role was. For example, it is appropriate to describe the Situation using “we,” but when you describe the Task, Action and Result steps, you must talk about what you (“I”) did specifically. Do not be modest!





Talk honestly about what you did and sell yourself during the interview, but above all never lie. If you are unable to think of an answer do not make one up. Probing questions asked by the interviewer will expose dishonesty.

If you find that you are having difficulty responding to a question, seek clarification or ask the interviewer for the possibility of revisiting the question at a later point in the interview. If you find that you do not have any experience on which to base your answer, you can admit that you have never experienced such a situation, but explain how you would handle the situation if it did occur.

Tips for Preparing for Behavioural Based Interviews:

- Research the skills required for the position and choose the most appropriate and strongest examples from your experiences
- Prepare short descriptions of situations that demonstrate positive behaviours and actions based on positive and negative experiences
- Prepare to discuss several examples from your list of accomplishments for each of the desired qualities
- Prepare hard evidence that will demonstrate specific skills and abilities
- Draw upon your most relevant and recent professional experiences; these can come from your work, academic and personal life

Telephone Interviews

An increasing number of employers are relying on telephone interviews in their recruiting and hiring decisions. Employers may also use the telephone interview as a screening tool in order to narrow down a pool of applicants. Most employers will formally schedule the time of the interview in advance; however, it is not unheard of for employers to call without warning.

Telephone interviews can pose a unique challenge. In a telephone interview, it can be difficult to gain rapport with the interviewer because you cannot see the interviewer's non-verbal reactions.

You have to be able to sell yourself only with the tone of your voice and word choice. During a telephone interview, it is important to speak in a confident and positive tone—consider smiling when you speak so that you sound positive and upbeat.

Tips for Telephone Interviews:

Preparation

- Avoid interruptions—ensure you are in a quiet place and ignore call waiting
- Make sure you are wide awake. Provide ample time to feel refreshed and ready. (Applicants sometimes dress like it is an in-person interview to be in the right frame of mind.)

Types of Interviews:

One-on-one

- One job seeker, one interviewer

Panel

- One job seeker, two or more interviewers present

Telephone/Teleconference

- One job seeker, one or more interviewers not physically present

Presentation

- Job seeker requested to prepare (typically in advance) a presentation to an audience throughout the course of the interview—the audience may include interviewers and/or a variety of stakeholders from other areas

Reception/Dining

- One or more job seekers, one or more interviewers. The interview is conducted over a meal or beverages

“Cattle Call”


- Groups of candidates placed together, allowing interviewers to find dynamic and outgoing employees

Role Play

- Involves the job seeker participating in a fictional situation, designed to replicate a scenario that might occur in the position sought

Video Conference

- One job seeker, one or more interviewers conducting the interview via camera and monitor

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- Have a copy of what you sent the company so you can refer to it during the interview
 - Make some notes from which you can draw examples
 - Have a pad of paper and pen available for taking notes

Answering the Call

- Always answer the telephone with: “Hello, <your name> speaking.” Since the interviewer cannot see you, introducing yourself confirms that the interviewer is speaking with the right person

During the Call

- Stand while talking—this keeps your diaphragm upright and enables greater voice projection
- Avoid smoking, eating, drinking or chewing gum while on the telephone
- Allow the interviewer to finish talking before you begin—interruptions are more emphasized over the telephone
- Keep the mouthpiece about one inch away from your mouth. If you have to cough, clear your throat or sneeze, cover the receiver and move it up (away from your voice box) instead of down
- Refrain from using verbal tics such as: “ah,” “er,” “like,” or “um”—these are especially noticeable on the telephone

Ending the Call

- Before hanging up the telephone, be sure you know the next steps in the hiring process.
- Hang up the telephone only after the interviewer has hung up


Assessment/Testing


This format can be administered prior, during or following any interview situation. These assessments can be used as a screening tool or can complement your interview. They can be administered online, in an individual or group setting or throughout the course of the interview. Many are designed to assess general aptitude, personality or your knowledge of the organization. Enquire with the company/organization on how to prepare and to see if sample questions are available. As an example, many government agencies provide online sample questions to give you a better idea of what to expect.

Second and Subsequent Interviews

Many employment offers do not occur until after a second interview. This can be especially true of on-campus recruiting interviews. Second interviews can vary in terms of content, purpose and structure. If you have been granted a second interview you are one step closer to receiving the job offer. The second interview can be more intense because you may be meeting with people who are more closely involved in making the final hiring decision. However, a second interview is not a sure sign that you will be offered the position.

Second interviews can serve a variety of purposes. They can:

- Provide the organization with the opportunity to assess candidates more thoroughly
 - Permit the organization to reaffirm information already presented in the previous interview
 - Allow the organization to sell itself to the candidate so that an offer of employment will be accepted
 - Allow you to evaluate the organization and what it has to offer
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As with the first interview, it is both acceptable and recommended that you enquire about the name(s) and position(s) of the interviewer(s), the length and format of the interview, and any specifics regarding any other requests. Ask about the itinerary for the interview, so you know what to expect, including what to wear.

Second interviews are often held at the employer's site. This may mean travelling to their location. Always confirm travel and accommodation arrangements prior to the interview, such as who will make the arrangements and who will be covering the expenses. Some organizations may reimburse candidates for any travel, lodging and meal expenses incurred by attending the second interview. It is recommended that you keep these expenses to a minimum. Keep all receipts for the expenses you incurred throughout the interviewing process. Submit your receipts promptly and always include a thank- you letter.

Expect a longer and more in-depth interview. The interview may be with two or more people; it may last for a few hours or up to one or more days. The interviewers may be executives, supervisors and/or peers. Remember that the interviewers may or may not have met you before, so you need to impress each of them. Some of the interviewers may not have formal interview training; they may be more subjective in their evaluation. It may not necessarily be just what you say, but how you say it and how you present yourself.

Each interviewer will have the task of determining your “fit” within the organization. The focus of the questions may change with the level of seniority of the interviewer. You could be asked the same questions that you were asked in the previous interview. If so, the interviewers could evaluate your views/responses from different perspectives. Be sure to request a business card from each interviewer, or their name and contact information, so that you will be able to write a thank-you letter.

Keep in Mind, This is a Competition:

- The company may be bringing in the “best of the best” or only talking to you
- If the best candidates are brought together, they may be assessed on a teamwork project or may be compared through interviews and meetings against each other
- The interview starts at the moment you arrive, which can include arrival at the airport, hotel or reception desk
- You may be invited to a staff function/social or for a meal with the company executives – never underestimate the importance of attending and participating

Step 4: Prepare & Polish


Responses to Questions

If you know what you will say and how you will respond to typical interview questions, you will feel and appear more confident, organized and focused. Review and practice your responses to possible questions interviewers may ask. It is imperative that you are able to communicate your knowledge clearly and concisely. An excellent way to improve communication skills is to practice role-playing before the interview. Consider asking a friend or relative to simulate an interview. Make sure you are critiqued on the strength of your voice and eye contact. Try to avoid memorizing what you want to say, instead, have key points prepared.

Take time to review sample interview questions and rehearse your responses. Keep your answers brief and concise, unless asked to provide more details.

Tips for Answering Questions at Interviews

- Share information that is pertinent to the situation and be concise when answering questions
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- Provide answers that are more than one word, however, do not be too wordy that interviewers lose interest
 - Practice in front of a mirror or with a tape recorder. Pay attention to any mannerisms, slang, posture, gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions you are communicating
 - Stay focused on the subject and respond to the question asked
 - Elaborate on your answers—provide supporting details
 - Remember to highlight what you will be bringing to the position/company, not what they will bring to you

Questions to Ask at the Interview

Potential Questions to ask at an interview:

Employee Characteristics

- What characteristics would the ideal job candidate have for this position?
- What skills and attributes, if any, are you seeking in a candidate that I have not addressed?
- What are the characteristics of your most outstanding employees in a similar position?

Position

- Can you describe the type of work I would be doing or the types of projects I will be working on?
- What do you see as the most challenging aspects of the position?
- What would a normal day be like?
- How much travel is expected?
- What percentage of time would be devoted to each of the responsibilities of the position?

Organization – Structure

- Can you tell me about the people/positions to whom/which I would be reporting?
- Will I be able to work with the person whom I am replacing, before he/she vacate the position?
- How does this position contribute to the whole picture of your organization?
- How long have you been with the organization and what are the highlights for you?
- How many interns are typically employed by the company at one time?
- What percentage of your employees are hired immediately after graduation?

Organization – Direction and Mandate

- What makes this organization unique?
- What are the short-term and long-term objectives of the organization?
- What are the areas of anticipated growth for the company?
- Why was the position created?
- Does the organization have any plans for expansion?
- What are the company's values and how do you incorporate them into your business practices?


Training/Employee Education

- How is the training or orientation program for new employees structured?
- What is the nature of the training program and supervision provided to new employees?
- What kind of training will be provided? How long is the training period?
- What opportunities exist for employee education or professional development?
- Are employees encouraged to be active in professional organizations?

Opportunities for Advancement

- How much decision-making authority is granted after one year?
- Does the organization promote from within?
- What opportunities exist for advancement?

Evaluation

- How does the company measure performance? When are evaluations scheduled?
 - How often are performance reviews given?
 - When and how will job evaluations take place?
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At the end of an interview, the interviewer will expect you to ask questions, therefore it is essential you arrive prepared. This is your opportunity to show your interest and knowledge of the organization and to clarify any information about the company and/or position to which you are applying.

A Polished Performance in an Interview Includes:

- Professional appearance
- Positive body language
- Verbal ability
- Poise/Confidence
- Self-understanding
- Knowledge of the organization
- Understanding of job responsibilities
- Ability to relate skills and experience to job
- Enthusiasm
- Quality of answers

The questions you ask the interviewer should give you a better understanding of the organization and the duties of the position. This is also your opportunity to ask questions that will help you evaluate the position, should an offer be presented following the interview process. It is, in some ways, your chance to interview the company. Your questions should be valid and you should be able to explain the purpose behind the questions, if asked. Ideally, your questions should demonstrate research into the organization and/or the position. Be aware of an interviewer's reactions and do not ask questions that could put an interviewer on the spot.

Strong questions relate to tasks, priorities, development, employee education/training, organizational structure and growth opportunities. Paraphrase your knowledge of the position as you relate your potential question to the employer. Questions relating to salary, benefits and job security should be avoided and saved for the negotiation phase following a formal job offer. You should avoid questions that might indicate that you are not really interested in the position. As well, never lead interviewers to think that you are using the organization as a stepping stone in order to further your career.

Answer Tough Questions

Anticipate that you may be asked tough questions. You can reduce your anxiety level if you are ready to field the types of questions most likely to cause you problems.

One common challenging question is, "What are your weaknesses?" When answering this question, you need to be honest without providing interviewers with a detailed analysis of all of your shortcomings. The best way to handle this question is:

- Turn your weakness into a potential strength, and/or explain how you have learned to compensate for the weakness, and/or put it in the past tense. Always end your answer on a positive note
- Avoid mentioning any personal qualities which can hamper job performance such as laziness or a bad temperament
- Think of a "weakness" as a challenge you will face during the first few months of starting this new job (learning the computer software and programming for the organization/company)
- Select a knowledge or skill base which can be easily/quickly improved if you choose a job-related example



Another question often found difficult, is the question regarding salary. Prior to the interview, you should have researched expected salary ranges for the position. If you are asked, “What salary are you expecting?” it is best to have a range in mind based upon similar positions in the labour market. Be prepared to provide specific information about your education and experience. You could say, “After doing some homework, I have an idea of the salary range I think is appropriate...”. Another possibility would be to direct the question back to the interviewer and say, “I am open to negotiation; however, do you have a range of what the position is worth?” Keep in mind that salary negotiation is best discussed after the position has been offered to you.

Deal with Inappropriate Questions

Employers are obligated to follow rules and regulations regarding the types of interview questions they can and cannot ask in the interview process. If the interviewer poses tricky political or social questions, try not to say more than necessary. As well, certain questions cannot be asked under the Canadian Human Rights Act. Each province may be governed by different legislation. It is a good idea to develop a strategy to handle a situation where you are faced with an inappropriate question. Here are four possible options:

1. Ask for clarification on how the information being asked relates to the position
2. Refuse to answer the question, running the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational, and possibly harming your chances of getting the position
3. Answer the question, but remember that you are providing information that is not relevant and it may cost you the position if you give the wrong answer
4. Answer the question by addressing what you believe to be the underlying concern(s); clarify the intent of the question and respond with an answer as it might apply to the position

According to the Human Rights *Code* it is against the law to discriminate in the workplace on the basis of: Ancestry (includes colour and perceived race); nationality or place of origin; religion and religious creed; physical or mental disability; sex (includes pregnancy and sexual harassment); marital status; family status (parent-child relationships); receipt of public assistance; sexual orientation; or age (18 – 64 years).

Example of an Appropriate Response to an Inappropriate Question:

Interviewer: “Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?”

Interviewee: “I can meet the travel and work demands that this job requires.”


Reconnect with Your References

It is a good idea to reconnect with your references to update them on the status of the position for which you are being interviewed. In the event they are contacted for a reference, provide them with an updated resume and a copy of the job description. Discuss the specific details of the position beforehand, so that he/she will be prepared to solidify your qualifications for the position.

Polish Your Communication Skills

When you are able to communicate effectively, employers will be able to recognize your value to their organization. Superior communication abilities include verbal and written communication and problem-solving skills, the ability to think critically and work effectively with others.

Assess key ways in which you will need to communicate on the job, from the job description. For example, will you be facilitating presentations? Chairing meetings? Leading teams? Or representing the company in different venues? Your ability to know your audience, think on the spot, organize and articulate your thoughts is critical.



How well you demonstrate your communication skills in the interview will impact the employer's impression of how well you can perform in the job.

Communicating effectively is one of the most valuable assets any job seeker can possess in terms of career advancement and long-term career success.


How to Dress for Success

Dress for the occupation; wear to the interview what you would wear on the job. You may even want to dress one step above that depending on the position. If possible, call and ask or visit the organization and observe what others in similar positions are wearing. Remember it is always better to overdress than underdress. Do not give interviewers a chance to rule you out because you did not feel like ironing your shirt. Remember that you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Although some companies may feel jeans and a clean shirt may be appropriate, others may feel this is far too casual. Casual attire may mean something different to each organization. What one organization accepts as casual attire, may be unacceptable for another. How you dress will always play a role in an interview. If in doubt, dress at least one step above the required dress code.

- Dress comfortably, but respectfully
- Ensure you are clean and neat in appearance
- Avoid ripped clothing, large logos, designs, etc.

Tips – Dressing for Interviews

- Dress one step above the appropriate attire for the job
 - Dress conservatively for the field or organization
 - Pay attention to personal grooming—neat hair, clean nails, etc.
 - Be certain all clothes are clean, well pressed, tucked in and shoes polished
 - Avoid busy prints
 - Avoid excessive make-up and heavy fragrances—remember, more is not always better
 - Wear comfortable—yet still appropriate—clothing and shoes, so that you do not “fidget” during the interview
 - Wear jewellery that is simple and conservative
 - Have fresh breath—do not eat or drink anything before the interview that will give you bad breath (including coffee)
 - Bring a career portfolio or briefcase to help complete the look of professionalism
 - Match your belt with your polished shoes
- 



How to Dress for an Interview

| | Women | Men |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Business Professional | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two piece business suit (either tailored pants or skirt) Blouse Skirt (knee length or longer) with nylons Polished, closed-toe shoes with sensible heels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two piece business suit Dress shirt (tucked in) Tie (professional!) Dark socks Polished dress shoes with matching belt |
| Business Casual – Conservative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blouse, shirt or sweater Skirt (knee length or longer) with nylons Dress pants Polished, closed-toe shoes with sensible heels Coordinating hosiery Simple jewelry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-sleeved solid or striped button-down shirt No tie required Dress pants Blazer is appropriate, but not required Matching belt and polished shoes Dark socks |
| Business Casual – Contemporary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate shirt or sweater Polo/golf shirt or other collared shirt Dress/cotton pants or skirt Shoes (no sandals or running shoes) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sweater Dress/cotton pants Shoes (no sandals or running shoes) |

What to Take to an Interview

What you take to an interview should be guided by what you are asked to bring and what you feel is important. You may not be asked for this documentation but, your preparation will not go unnoticed. Consider:

- Extra copies of your resume
- List of professional references (if references were not included in your resume/application)
- Piece of paper with your key agenda points (in point form)
- Career portfolio or examples of past work
- Letters of recommendation/reference
- Business folder including a pad and pen
- List of questions to ask the interviewer
- Original and photocopies of your current transcript (if indicated)
- Your own business/calling card

During the Interview

Now that you have taken the necessary steps to prepare for the interview, what can you expect during the interview? The following sections will provide you with some information on the basic format and structure of an interview and how to effectively present yourself in an interview.





Arrival & Greetings

Be Punctual

Arrive at least 10–15 minutes prior to the interview. If you are unsure of the exact location of the interview, take a trial run at a similar time of day to determine how best to get there, how long it takes, where to park your vehicle, etc. Being early reflects your promptness and interest. If you are unavoidably detained, call as soon as possible to briefly explain your situation. Offer your apologies, and if the employer is willing, try to reschedule for a more convenient time.

Be Friendly and Courteous

Be friendly and courteous to all you meet. You have to be able to fit into the team at this organization/company. Keep in mind that receptionists and other employees may be asked for their opinion on their interactions with you. Assume that everyone you meet has input into the hiring decision. The interview begins the moment you arrive.

Interview Structure

Introduction

Within the first few minutes of the interview, it is essential to establish a positive rapport with the interviewers. Greet all interviewers by their formal name (i.e. Mr. Job, Ms. Employer) unless otherwise directed, and offer a firm handshake. A firm handshake is often preferred by interviewers—it reflects confidence. Your handshake should never be too firm or too limp. Do not hesitate to initiate the handshake. Direct eye contact and a warm smile complement a strong introduction. Once in the interview room, wait to be seated until invited to do so.

An interview may begin with a few minutes of small talk to help you relax and to get a sense of your personality. Small talk is an important part of the interview process because the interviewers are getting their first impression of you. Show the interviewers that you are friendly and confident. Remember, the interviewers have already started to evaluate you.

Overview

Interviewers will typically provide some structure for the interview process. They may briefly tell you about the organization and about the position for which you are interviewing. Show your interest through your body language and listening skills.

Questions

Interviewers will ask questions and evaluate your answers, assessing your fit for the position. In your answers, provide information that will convince the interviewers that you have the skills and qualifications for the position.

Tips on Answering Questions

What to say:

- Tailor your answers in a way that matches the job – draw parallels between your skills and experience with the current position
- When finished answering the question, stop talking. Do not ramble when there is silence in the room
- Quantify your answers when appropriate
- Always be honest
- Never criticize a previous employer, supervisor, etc.
- Formulate positive experiences throughout the interview
- Give details and examples that are specific
- Highlight your strengths

How to say it:

- There is no single right answer. It is often how you answer that is more important than the exact content • Ask for clarification if you are unsure of the question
- Use the STAR technique in preparing your responses
- Wait until the interviewer is finished asking the question before you begin to answer
- Avoid using any slang or unprofessional words (i.e. 'kinda', 'yah', 'stuff like that', etc.)
- Avoid phrases such as 'just did' and 'only did'
- Stay focused
- Talk confidently about your achievements
- Show enthusiasm
- Your answers should be clear, concise, and well organized



As the interview continues, you will be asked to fill in details. Near the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions.

Closing

The interviewers will typically explain the next steps in the hiring process and how and when a final decision or additional contact will be made.

Presenting Yourself in the Interview

Behaviour

Throughout the interview, sit up straight, look alert and speak clearly. Maintain eye contact and avoid any nervous mannerisms. Maintaining proper posture throughout the interview is very important. Slouching and leaning down in your chair may reflect laziness, a lack of interest or a lack of confidence. In contrast, if you are too rigid and tense it may convey inflexibility and nervousness. Your attitude tells a lot to the interviewer—it should reflect an optimistic, self-confident person who enjoys learning and challenges. If you have a negative attitude, it will be reflected during the interview. Focus on the positive aspects of your life and past work experience. If you had a bad night before the interview, do not let it show. Gear yourself up for the 30–60 minutes and be positive.


A little bit of nervousness is healthy; it keeps you alert and shows you care about what you are doing. However, being too nervous, tense, shy, withdrawn or anxious may be a barrier to a successful interview. If you feel this may be a problem, read some books or seek assistance on stress and anxiety management. Approach the interview as a “two-way street;” the interviewer is assessing you and you are assessing the interviewer as a representative of the company/organization. This approach can sometimes reduce some nervousness. Also consider that you may not be the only individual in the room who is nervous, as many interviewers may feel nervous about meeting with candidates and/or making an appropriate decision. A mistake in hiring the wrong individual could be very costly to the organization (wasted recruitment and training time).

Answering Questions

Give complete and descriptive answers, but keep them concise and direct. Be concrete, detailed, truthful and frank in your answers. Remember that the interviewer chose each question for a reason. Ask yourself why the interviewer chose that question so you can provide a relevant answer. Frame your answers in terms of your past experiences rather than just opinions. Offer examples of work and references that document your best qualities. If you are asked a question that you are unsure of, pause to think about an answer or seek clarification. It is better to pause and organize your thoughts than to ramble through an answer.

Communication Skills

Interviewers will be evaluating your communication skills. It is important to be a good listener as well as a good speaker. Do not try to guess what the next question will be or only listen to the first part of a two part question. If you relax and listen well during the interview, you can formulate additional questions to the ones you have already prepared before the interview. What you say in an interview can clearly have an impact. Grammar usage is very important during the interview. If grammar is used incorrectly even the best answer can sound uneducated. Spend some time analyzing how you say things in addition to planning what you say in the interview. Review your answers before delivering them in a live interview.



Interviewers will listen to what you verbalize, but also what you communicate non-verbally. Non-verbal behaviours convey just as much as verbal communication. Maintain eye contact with the people who are interviewing you. Do not stare at them and do not look down, up or to the side of them; this can suggest a lack of confidence or that you are hiding something. It is okay to look away for a few seconds, especially when you may need to think about a response to a tough question. Look away for a few seconds and then return your focus to the interviewer. If you are in a panel interview, be sure to address all interviewers equally.

Closing

Be sensitive to signs that the interview has run its course. Some interviewers may look at their watches, while other interviewers stand up, extend a hand and thank you for coming. Stay positive and remain confident even if you get the impression that the interview is not going well and that you have already been rejected. The interviewer may be interested, but is challenging you to test your reaction. When the interview is over, be sure to thank the interviewers for taking the time to talk with you. Re-emphasize your interest in the position and your appreciation for being considered. This is also your opportunity to make a strong lasting impression by summarizing your qualifications and expressing your interest in the position.

The interviewer will usually provide information regarding the next steps in the selection process and/or when they will be making a decision. If the interviewer does not disclose this information, be sure to ask about the next steps in the selection process and when you can expect to hear from the employer. Be sure to ask the interviewer(s) for his or her business cards(s) in order that you can send a follow-up correspondence.

Following the Interview

Following the interview, there are a few tasks to perform. This section will review the steps and the timeline for each task.

Within a Few Hours: Analyze the Interview

Evaluating your interview as soon as it is over can help you to understand your interviewing strengths and identify areas for improvement. To serve as a reference for future interviews, write down any details about the interview itself, including the questions that were asked and the answers you provided, to help you analyze your performance. To be objective, try assessing yourself from the employer's perspective.

Consider these questions when evaluating your performance:

Presentation/Performance

- Was I on time?
- Did I perform adequate research prior to the interview?
- How was my body posture? My nonverbal communication? How were my mannerisms?
- Was I too tense? Was I too assertive? Not assertive enough?
- Did I respond to the interviewer's key concerns?
- What points did I make that seemed to interest the interviewer?
- Was I relaxed enough to feel confident?
- Were there things I wish I would have and would not have said?
- Did I take the lead from time to time instead of letting the interviewer control the interview?
- What can I do to improve my next interview?

Responses to Questions

- Were there any questions for which I felt unprepared?
- Were there questions or information I forgot to ask or mention?
- Did I stick to the main facts or did I ramble?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I concise and focused in my responses?
- Did I provide sufficient information and examples?
- Did I present my qualifications well?
- What questions made me feel uncomfortable?
- How could I have better illustrated my skills and abilities?

Company/Organization

- How do I feel about the company and position?
- What impressed me about the organization and its representatives?
- Was I confident in describing my desire to work for the organization?
- Did the interviewers sell their organization to me?
- Did I obtain contact information?
- Did I note the date the interviewer stated I would be notified?



Sample Closing Statement

“This position sounds like an exciting opportunity. I believe my (relate to your most relevant strengths/experience) makes me an ideal candidate for this position. I am looking forward to the next step in your selection process.”

Within 24–48 Hours: Send a Thank-you Letter

Even if you do not get a job offer, keeping in contact with the interviewer may lead to further referrals, more interviews and ultimately a job offer. Send a brief thank you (in the form of a formal business letter, thank-you card, or e-mail) to the interviewer, indicating your continued interest in the position and your appreciation to the interviewer for having met with you. It is a professional courtesy and demonstrates your consideration, enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity to interview.

A brief letter can be an effective tool and could make or break a job offer. Attention to detail is critical; remember your written communication ability will be analyzed. Misspelling the interviewer's name /company name could cost you the job! Thank the interviewer(s) for the interview opportunity. Mention any points that you feel are particularly relevant and emphasize the skills, strengths and abilities you can bring to the organization and/or position. If, during the interview, you were unable to demonstrate some of your strengths that make you a good match for the position, use the follow-up as an opportunity to introduce these strengths.

Within Several Days: Check the Status

If you have not heard from the company within the time frame given, do not hesitate to contact the interviewer directly. If you were not given a date, a general guideline is to wait 8–10 working days before contacting the interviewer. If you telephone or e-mail, confirm that the thank-you correspondence you sent was received and enquire about the status of the interviewer's decision.

When contacting the employer on the status of the hiring decision, ensure that you introduce yourself and state the position for which you interviewed. Express your continued interest in the organization and the position. If no decision has been made, enquire when a decision will be forthcoming. It is acceptable to make a follow-up contact as long as you make it in a friendly and courteous manner and at appropriate intervals—do not pester the employer.

In Conclusion

View all interviews as opportunities to further develop your interviewing skills. Try not to be too hard on yourself—job offers can come from the toughest of interviews. With the proper preparation, adequate experiences and controlled confidence, you will continue to improve your interview skills.

