

# INTERVIEWING BASICS

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The selection process for any job culminates in the interview process. This is typically where the hiring decision is made, and is, therefore, the best opportunity for candidates to sell themselves. Unfortunately, interviewing appears to be one of the least understood and least developed skill for many job seekers. In fact, the number one complaint from employers is that candidates are often unprepared for the interview.

## Content of Your Answers

- You must be prepared to answer the interview questions you are likely to be asked. Review the “Common Interview Questions” part of this guide. In addition, use the Internet to gather sample interview questions specific to your field.
- Examine the job posting closely. Circle each of the required qualifications and parts of the job description. Be prepared to elaborate on each area.
- Relate your answers to what they are looking for in candidates for this position. For example, if the interviewer asks what your strongest skills are, your answer should include some of the skills ones that listed as requirements on the job posting (assuming that those are skills you actually have!)
- Watch for clues from the interviewer. Throughout the discussion, they may provide useful clues as to what they are looking for in candidates. For example, if he/she mentions the company’s goal is to provide better supervision of the staff, make sure to talk about your supervision and leadership experience.
- Most candidates say too little in the interview. Be thorough in your responses and give examples to support your comments. For most interview questions, plan on spending at least one minute answering the question. That doesn’t mean ramble unnecessarily. If you can’t fill one minute, you probably didn’t prepare well enough.
- The interview is your opportunity to sell yourself. You need to overcome any shyness about talking about yourself and even “tooting your own horn.” It’s difficult to convince someone that you are the person they want if you can’t promote your qualifications.
- Thoroughly research the employer. Go to the company website and learn as much as you can about the company, its history, culture, competitors, and performance. Use the “Employer Research Worksheet” in this guide to help with this. Also, become more familiar with the industry in which this company operates.
- Never badmouth previous employers, supervisors, or colleagues.
- If you don’t know the answer to question, acknowledge it (“That’s a good question.”) and ask for a moment to compose your thoughts.
- Relax and let your true personality come out. In most cases, interviewers WANT to like you (or they wouldn’t have called you in and spent time interviewing you!)

At the conclusion of the interview, you should ask what the next steps in the process are and the timeframes involved. That way you will know when it is appropriate to follow-up if you have not heard back. Your follow-up may consist of a friendly call to the recruiter to see if there is anything else they need from you and check on the status of the process.

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## Demonstrating Professionalism and Making a Good Impression

- ❑ Have your professional wardrobe ready. The fastest way to undermine your credibility is to arrive dressed inappropriately for the interview. Refer to the “Dress for Success” in this guide. As a rule of thumb, you should always plan on wearing professional business attire, even if the employees of that company don’t wear suits.
- ❑ It is **critical** that you are not late for your interview. Plan on arriving 10 minutes early so you can relax and compose yourself prior to the interview. Make sure you know EXACTLY how to get to your interview location. Get directions from the company website (if available) and confirm with MapQuest. Plan extra time if you have never been to the location before (in case you get lost) and to account for unexpected traffic. If you are going to be late, call and let them know when you anticipate arriving.
- ❑ Don’t arrive too early (more than 20 minutes), otherwise they may think you can’t manage your time effectively or feel obligated to entertain you. If you arrive substantially early, wait in your car and review your notes, or take a walk to clear your head. Depending on the company and where you are interviewing (for example, a resort or college campus), if it is appropriate you may even want to walk around and observe.
- ❑ Be pleasant and professional with whomever you encounter, even receptionists. When meeting someone or being introduced, make eye contact, offer a firm handshake, and have a friendly greeting.
- ❑ During the interview, relax and let your true personality come out. Convey a professional, positive, confident, and energetic attitude. The interviewer may be evaluating your potential as a coworker – demonstrate the qualities of someone who is agreeable to work with.
- ❑ Carry your materials (extra resumes and list of professional references) in a professional looking portfolio that has a notepad for you to take notes. If necessary, you can also bring a “cheat sheet” with key points to remember during the interview. Write down the questions you want to ask and bring them along.
- ❑ If possible, avoid bringing anything that could be cumbersome to carry, such as a pocketbook. Most of the time, it will be a nuisance. Bring only what you absolutely need for that interview! Turn your cell phone off. Even better, leave it in the car. No texting while you wait for the recruiter.
- ❑ Collect the business cards of all you interview with so you have their names, titles, and contact information.

## Non-Verbal Communication

- ❑ Maintain consistent eye contact with the recruiter(s) throughout the interview.
- ❑ Smile frequently to demonstrate your positive attitude.
- ❑ Maintain proper posture – sit up straight with feet on the floor.
- ❑ Maintain positive body language – avoid crossing arms in front of you.
- ❑ Limit the amount of gesturing, such as using your hands when you speak.

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## Using Your Voice

- ❑ **Tone** – Enthusiastic, expressive, but warm. Avoid monotone!
- ❑ **Pitch** – Try to end sentences on an “up” tone.
- ❑ **Tempo** – Watch your pacing. Try to get in a rhythm and be conversational.
- ❑ **Clarity** – Concentrate on proper enunciation. Avoid mumbling.
- ❑ **Hesitation** – Answer the questions confidently without starting and stopping.
- ❑ **Pauses** – It is acceptable to briefly pause for emphasis or dramatic effect.
- ❑ **Language** – Absolutely no slang or profanity. Avoid clichés and colloquialisms.

## After the Interview and Following-up

- ❑ As soon as possible, write a brief summary of what happened. Note any follow-up actions you should take and put it on your calendar. Evaluate your performance. Were there any questions you didn’t know how to answer or need to answer more effectively? What do you need to improve on? What do you need to prepare (such as additional research) if you get called for a second interview with the company?
- ❑ Send a thank you note within 48 hours to express your appreciation for the opportunity to interview for the position, highlight one or two areas in which you think you are an excellent fit for the position, and reiterate your desire to work for the company. In terms of emailing or mailing a thank you letter, do what you feel is most appropriate. (It is likely a good idea to email a thank you if they plan on making a decision within a week.) Some people prefer to send hand-written notes, while for more executive-level positions a typed letter may be more appropriate. A sample “Thank you Letter” is available in the “Resume and Letter Writing Guide.”

