



Preparing For Your Interview

The key to a successful interview is planning. The more planning you do in advance of the interview, the more likely it is that you'll walk away leaving a good impression and accomplishing your goals. So what are the steps you can take to plan for an ultimate interview?

1. Do your homework. Spend as much time as you can studying and learning about the company, the people, the products and, if possible, the position you are hoping to get. A wealth of public data is available on the Internet. But you can also visit the library and search newspapers and trade publications. Double check all your resources and make sure that the facts you gather are current and correct.
2. Be positive. Your attitude can mean the difference between success and failure. Stay focused on good things, and find ways to avoid saying anything negative about former employers or previous jobs.
3. Be flexible. Gear your mindset to adapting to the changing pace and direction of your interview. In many cases, all of the advance preparation you do will fly right out the window the moment your interview begins, so make sure you are able and prepared to be agile and adept. This can show your comfort with change and ability to respond to quickly shifting conditions.
4. Notice the details. Be sensitive to your surroundings and the style of your interviewer. Things you notice like office décor and general atmosphere can be clues to how you should best present yourself in tailoring your presentation.
5. Do advance role-playing. Rehearse as much as you can in advance. Write down all the questions you think you might be asked and have answers prepared. Keep your responses focused on the target and be clear and concise. Stay within the bounds of your discussion topic and avoid providing a great deal of information that isn't relevant.
6. Listen and ask. Show interest to your interviewer. Encourage him or her to share as many details as possible with you about the company and the job. Maintain eye contact and use body language that shows that you are relaxed and in-tune with your surroundings. Be engaging.
7. Be relevant. Focus on your work history and personal experience that directly applies to the opportunity at hand. Make sure that you present a complete picture of your qualifications for the job. Avoid sharing personal details like religious affiliation or marital status that do not directly relate to your ability to perform in the position you are applying for

Questions to Ask

Your interview is a two-way exchange of information. It's a company's chance to learn about you, but also your chance to learn about the company and the position you hope to occupy. The key to learning what you need to know is to remain focused on appropriate questions while avoiding questions that fall outside the boundaries.

While there is no definitive list of questions to ask or not to ask, your common sense should provide a starting point.

Generally, questions that pertain to job responsibilities and work parameters are okay, while questions that are not relevant or make you appear ill-informed are not.

What kind of questions should you ask?

- What are the specific responsibilities associated with the job under discussion?
- What is the scope of the work – how many people are involved?
- Who does the position report to?
- What is a typical workweek? Is there weekend work involved? Is overtime expected?
- Is travel or relocation a potential part of the job?
- What is the company or unit management style? Who are the personalities?
- Is the position a new one? If not, did the previous person move up?
- What is the potential for advancement?
- Are there examples of successful employees moving up?

- When does the job begin? How soon will a decision be made?
- What additional information is needed in order to make a decision

How to Answer Interview Questions

Your objective in your interview is to give your interviewer exactly the information that he or she needs to know to make a decision to advance you to the next stage of the recruitment process. This means giving them a complete and well-rounded understanding of who you are, what you do, and what advantages you can bring to the organization. So long as you remain focused on that overall objective and keep your answers closely aligned with the information your interviewer seeks, then you are holding up your side of the interview process.

What's the best way to stay focused? By preparing yourself in advance and staying true to the substance of the interview. In other words, the more you know going in to the interview, the more comfortable you will be answering the questions that come your way. And the more easily you will stay in touch with the information the recruiter wants – and only that information.

You will most likely face challenging or difficult questions in your interview. That's part of the process. The interviewer is seeking in-depth information – not only about what you do, but also about how you communicate your thoughts and ideas. The best answers are always the simple ones. Keep it short and simple. Stay focused. Avoid embellishment. Try to make your answers relevant and distinctive. Remember that the more open-ended a question is, the more likely you are to stumble around for an answer. Funnel down your responses in advance.

Here's the key idea: use every question as an opportunity to convey information that is pertinent to the job. Use "bridging" techniques to answer the questions that come your way – assuming they are legitimate questions – and then quickly relate your answer back to some component of the job and your qualifications. In this way, you'll continually reinforce the idea that you are well-suited and capable for the job.

- Be forward thinking. Answer questions in terms of how you intend to become the very best at what you do in order to benefit the organization and yourself.
- Be empathetic. Answer questions in a way that is relevant, meaningful and memorable for the interviewer.
- Use examples. Without going into lengthy stories, try to use examples from your past work history to illustrate your experiences and qualifications.
- A good story needs no embellishment. Tell the story based on facts and results. Let the interviewer draw his or her own conclusions.
- Sell yourself, but gently.

In terms of communication style, it is good to remember that understatement can be the most elegant form of overstatement. If you keep your answers focused on showing the interviewer that you are aiming at helping the organization to achieve its results, and that you have the experience and qualifications to reach those goals efficiently, then he or she can draw their own conclusion – hopefully a positive one – about your suitability for the job.

Keep in mind that there are certain questions that your interviewer should not ask. In some cases these are inappropriate, and in others, they are illegal. All questions should be job-related and focused on your qualifications and ability to do the job, and not about your personal life.

Employers should never ask about your race, gender, religious preference, marital status, age, disabilities, ethnic background, sexual preferences or country of origin. To make hiring decisions based on any of this information is discriminatory.

What can you do if you are asked these questions? A good idea is to try to address the focus of the question. Answer the question based on the interviewer's intent – whether or not you are capable of doing the job. The interviewer may really be trying to find out if you are authorized to work on sensitive information that may require a security clearance or able to travel freely. So try to get underneath the question and address those needs.

The most important thing to remember about answering questions is to be open and honest. Interviewers will gather information about you from a number of sources, so any hint at deception or dishonesty can come back to harm you later.

Closing the Interview

Job candidates often second-guess themselves after interviews. By asking good questions and closing strongly, you can reduce post-interview doubts. If you feel that the interview went well and you want to take the next step, express your interest to the interviewer.

Try an approach like the following: "After learning more about your company, the position and responsibilities, I believe that I have the qualities you are looking for. Are there any issues or concerns that would lead you to believe otherwise?"

This is an effective closing question because it opens the door for the hiring authority to be honest with you about his or her feelings. If concerns do exist, you may be able to create an opportunity to overcome them, and have one final chance to dispel the concerns, sell your strengths and end the interview on a positive note.

A few things to remember during the closing process

- Don't be discouraged if an offer is not made or a specific salary is not discussed. The interviewer may want to communicate with colleagues or conduct other scheduled interviews before making a decision.
- Make sure that you have thoroughly answered these questions during the interview: "Why are you interested in our company?" and "What can you offer?" Express appreciation for the interviewer's time and consideration.
- Ask for the interviewer's business card so you can write a thank you letter as soon as possible.

Follow-up

After your interview, follow-up is critical. When you get in your car, immediately write down key issues uncovered in the interview. Think of the qualifications the employer is looking for and match your strengths to them. A "thank you" letter should be written no later than 24 hours after the interview. Be sure to call your recruiter to discuss your interview and your next steps, as well.