

INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Research

Company: This will help you prepare to talk with employers. Know the company products, services, mission, ownership (public/private), industry, reputation, competitors, size, news items, current trends and issues, management, and organizational structure.

Job: Study the job description and match the skills and experiences required for the position to your own skills and experiences. Prepare questions about the company and job to ask during the interview.

Résumé: Review your own résumé and ensure that you have specific examples from your work history to show how you meet the requirements for the position.

Dress Properly

Dress according to the standards of the industry/organization. It is always better to dress too formally than too casually. Be sure your clothes are clean, pressed, and well-fitting, and that your shoes are polished. Hair should be neat and business-like, and your nails should be clean and trimmed. Do not use cologne or perfume, as the person interviewing you may be allergic to the fragrance you are wearing. Here are some examples of classic interview outfits, but find out what the standards are in your industry:

Women: A professional-looking black or navy blue suit with no prints and a white or off-white blouse. Pants and skirts are both acceptable – skirts tend to be more appropriate in more conservative environments, and should go to your knees when seated. Shoes should be low-heeled. Be sure to avoid excess jewelry, make-up, or bright fingernail polish. Avoid bringing a purse unless unnecessary.

Men: A professional-looking gray, black or navy blue, two-piece, single-breasted suit with a white shirt and a conservative tie (no bright, colorful prints). Black belt, socks, and shoes for black and gray suits, or brown belt, socks, and shoes for a blue suit. Wedding rings and a professional watch are the only acceptable jewelry. To be safe, it is recommended that you be clean-shaven for an interview.

Practice Interviewing Skills

Know yourself. Practice, practice, practice! Prepare for and practice answering questions before every interview. A mock interview is strongly recommended.

Be On-Time

Know how to get there and plan to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early. If you have never been to the interview location, visit it the day before so you know exactly how to get there, how to access the building, and where to park. If you cannot get there the day before, plan to arrive even earlier and wait in the parking lot.

What to Bring with You

- A leather-bound folder/portfolio
- Telephone numbers and names of the people who will be interviewing you
- 5-10 unfolded copies of your résumé and cover letter
- A pen
- A list of professional references
- Examples of your work, if appropriate
- Questions you may want to ask the recruiter

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Be Friendly and Positive

Where possible, greet the interviewer by name and give a firm handshake while looking them in the eye. Treat all employees you come in contact with courtesy and professionalism. Handshakes should be firm, but not too hard or aggressive. Smile, be polite, and avoid being critical or negative.

Be Aware of Your Body Language

The first minutes of the interview are the most important. As we all do, a recruiter begins evaluating your potential the instant you walk into the room. Your tone of voice, posture, expressions and reactions all give clues to your true feelings and attitudes. Be sure to face your interviewer in a relaxed, open and attentive manner. Speak clearly and audibly. Use complete sentences, avoid one-word answers and never use slang terms. Don't be afraid of small talk prior to the interview starting, but be mindful of what you are saying. Do not be overly formal, but don't speak about inappropriate topics.

Use the STAR Method to Answer Questions

The STAR Method is a structured manner of responding to behavioral-based interview questions by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing.

- *Situation*: Describe a specific situation that you were in that relates to the question being asked. The example should be specific, not a generalized explanation of something you've done in the past.
- *Task*: Identify what the goal or conflict was in what you were trying to accomplish.
- *Action*: Detail what steps you took to address the problem, specifically focusing on what your contribution was. Describe what knowledge, skills, and abilities you exhibited.
- *Result*: Describe the outcome of your intervention in the situation. Focus on your specific, measurable successes, and identify what positive results and learnings came out of it.

Listen

Listen carefully to your interviewer. Be alert to non-verbal cues indicating when you should start or stop talking. Do not think about your response while the interviewer is still talking.

Ask Questions

Ask questions about the job and the organization. Prepare at least five questions, which could include topics concerning the job, management, training, and staff. Do not ask questions that could easily be found by looking on their webpage (i.e., "what is your mission statement?"), or questions about salary and benefits unless they bring it up first.

Examples may include:

- How would you describe a typical work day for someone in this position?
- Why is this position open? What are you looking for in a candidate beyond what is detailed in the job description?
- What kind of training would be provided during the first day/week/month?
- What are the department's major goals for this year? How does it relate to the company's major initiatives?
- When can I expect to hear back regarding this opportunity?

Most importantly: Be yourself

Do not try to be what you are not. Give the interviewer a chance to see that you are both capable and sincere. If you have prepared properly for an interview, the only other thing you have to be able to do is show yourself in a professional light, and make it clear what you can contribute to the place you are applying.