

# **Interview Skills and Tips**

# How to Prepare for the Interview

## Before the Interview

*\*\* Interviews don't have to be scary if you prepare for them \*\**

### PREPARE

You should go over your resume to refresh your memory as to how the job you are after relates to your abilities. A good understanding of these can mean the difference between a confident and articulate, or confused and hesitant answer to a question about your personal strengths and weaknesses.

### RESEARCH

Your company research gives you information on the company, its products and services. Review this information before the interview. Remember, the facts you have learned from your company research will demonstrate your interest in the organization, its products and services.

### GOAL

Combine your self-assessment and employer research to create a clear focus for the upcoming interview. You now know what you have to offer, why a particular employer might be interested in you, and how much information you still need about the employer.

### REHEARSE

By yourself, in the company of friends, or with the assistance of an employment counselor, run through the questions that might be asked of you in an interview. Be sure to include sensitive areas that you hope won't be asked. Your goal is to be able to answer any question put to you effectively and positively. Rehearsals also prepare you to show the confidence that comes from knowing you've covered all the important elements of your background.



# The Day of the Interview Has Arrived!

## DRESS FOR SUCCESS

First impressions are very important . . . people might be judging you on your appearance. Sometimes how you dress can show the employer how much you do or do not know about the job. **Dress in a business-like manner** – even conservative in style. Your clothing has to be acceptable to the profession, business, or industry you are applying. Avoid heavy perfumes. Do not wear lavish jewelry or accessories. No heavy eating of spicy or strong odor foods the night or morning before the interview. Shower, shave and brush teeth.

## RESUMES

Be sure to bring extra copies of your resume to the interview. There could be more than one person interviewing you. Make sure you also have copies of your **references**, on a separate sheet of paper, ready to give to your interviewer(s), when requested.

## BE ON TIME

Arrive 10 minutes early. This allows extra time in case of traffic. You may have to fill out forms before the interview starts. There is no acceptable excuse for being late for an interview. Make sure you plan ahead and even make a practice run to the location. Allow extra time for traffic or unforeseen circumstances that could slow you down.

If ever you are going to be late, try to salvage the interview by calling before the time of the interview to apologize and explain yourself.

## SMILE!

Be positive, friendly, enthusiastic, **smile**, and maintain eye contact. Shake hands if offered to you. Have a good, **firm handshake**. It exudes self confidence and competency. Watch for the employer to offer to shake hands at the beginning and at the end of the interview. If you have more than one interviewer, shake each person's hand.

## EXTRAS

Let the interviewer take the lead on seating. Let them show you where to sit and do not sit until the interviewer has pointed out where you will be sitting.

You may be offered coffee or tea. The employer is likely being polite and trying to put you at ease. You probably won't lose points by either politely accepting or turning down the offer with a thank you.

Remember the messages that you may be sending in your body language. Are you sitting properly and straight, not slouched? What are your hands doing? Are you playing with your hair? Never chew gum during an interview.

# During the Interview

Good eye contact is important. It indicates that you are paying attention to the interviewer and that you are listening to what is being asked.

***Be clear, concise, and confident in your answers – do not get off topic. Avoid long windedness and try to get to the point.***

Answer the interviewer's questions fully and to the best of your ability. Avoid giving short yes or no answers. This is your chance to **sell yourself**. Avoid exposing weaknesses. Always turn a negative into a positive.

◆ For example, if you are asked if you have ever done this type of work and you haven't, don't lie, but say something like: "I am very enthusiastic about this opportunity, I have a lot of transferrable skills from my past experiences, I know that I can do this type of work and I am eager and willing to learn all the skills that I will need for this position" Someone with the right attitude and less experience is far more likely to be hired than someone with the right experience and wrong attitude!



***Listen carefully to questions, and don't be afraid to clarify their meanings***

Don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you are not certain what the employer means by a particular question. It is important to politely ask for clarification. Asking, "Could you repeat that please?" is fine. Saying "What?" is not fine. Good listening skills are important during an interview, so pay attention to what is being asked.

Express your interest in the position, and make sure you highlight any skills you did not get to mention during the question period

***Ask questions of the employer***

When the employer asks if you have any questions for them – say yes. Prepare this ahead of time. Having questions for the interviewer shows that you are eager and interested and also that you are not dying to get out of the interview room. (Please see p. 10 for sample questions you can ask) ***\*\* Avoid questions about pay here. That will come later, usually when an offer of employment is made to you \*\****

Take your cue from the interviewer as to when it is time to leave. If the interviewer stands up, gathers his or her papers or extends a hand – it is time to go. Thank your interviewer for their time.

# Interview Checklist

## Preparation

Phone to confirm interview and address. Take a folder that contains:

- ✓ A copy of your resume
- ✓ Letter(s) of recommendation and reference sheet
- ✓ Paper and pen for notes
- ✓ Copies of certificates and diplomas
- ✓ Portfolio of sample work (if applicable)
- ✓ Company information you have gathered and a list of questions you have prepared



## Arrival

- ✓ Go alone to the interview
- ✓ Allow time to figure out bus routes, or if you are driving, to get out of traffic
- ✓ Check out your appearance in the restroom, if possible. It is best not to arrive more than ten minutes ahead of time
- ✓ Take a few minutes to relax, be friendly and business-like with everyone
- ✓ Introduce yourself to the receptionist, mention your appointment, thank the person and wait quietly

## During the Interview

- ✓ Greet the interviewer and introduce yourself, be ready to shake an offered hand
- ✓ Follow the lead of the interviewer, stay on topic, ask for clarification where necessary
- ✓ Provide copies of your resume and reference sheet when asked or if needed
- ✓ Be attentive to body language - maintain eye contact; do not cross your arms
- ✓ When asked if you have any questions, briefly ask any suitable questions
- ✓ State your interest in the position and with the organization with enthusiasm
- ✓ State your appreciation for the interview
- ✓ Repeat the time they have said they will notify you of their decision or ask when you will hear from them
- ✓ Shake hands if appropriate and say goodbye

# Interview Do's and Don'ts

- ✓ Do research the company
- ✓ Do prepare questions to ask
- ✓ Do practice your answers
- ✓ Do bring paper and pen
- ✓ Do bring extra resume, and list of references
- ✓ Do be on time
- ✓ Do dress appropriately
- ✓ Do maintain eye contact
- ✓ Do be positive
- ✓ Do be honest
- ✓ Do send a thank-you letter
- ✓ Do follow up by telephone
- ✗ Don't neglect appearance
- ✗ Don't give limp handshake
- ✗ Don't lack energy
- ✗ Don't be unprepared
- ✗ Don't be indecisive
- ✗ Don't criticize anyone
- ✗ Don't talk too much
- ✗ Don't take a friend with you
- ✗ Don't be rude
- ✗ Don't emphasize money
- ✗ Don't be too laid back
- ✗ Don't make excuses

## Take a Deep Breath – The Interview is Over

***But there are a few more things you could do in order to stand out to the employer***

Send a thank you letter. Thank them for the time they spent with you. You can use this as an opportunity to highlight skills you have that match what they are looking for. Make sure to also let them know that you are still very interested in the position. Less than 10% of interviewees do this. It can make a difference. It also gives you the chance to put your name before the employers one more time. This can set you apart from the other applicants.



If you haven't heard by the deadline that was set during the interview (usually a week) follow up with a phone call to express your interest, and find out where they are in their selection process.

Always try to learn something from each interview about yourself and about your answers. Were there any questions which you could have answered better? Any questions which you totally did not expect? Remember to prepare for the next interview.

# Common Interview Questions

## “Tell me about yourself?”

The question behind the question may be:

- *Are you prepared?*
- *Can you organize relevant information?*
- *How does your background relate to this job?*

### Suggestions:

Keep it brief, avoid going into details. Focus on the skills you have developed that are relevant to the job. The employer wants to know about your “professional self.” Talk about your past work experience, training, education, and interests and how they are related to the position you are applying for.

## “Why should I hire you?”

The question behind the question may be:

- *Can you convince me you are the right person?*
- *Help me decide on the best candidate.*

### Suggestions:

Show how you could solve a problem for the company by using a relevant example from your past. This will help the interviewer “see” you in action. If you have little experience, sell your education and give examples of situations that demonstrate your key strengths (motivation, energy, positive attitude, etc.).

## “What are your major strengths?”

The question behind the question may be:

- *What important qualities and traits would you bring to this job?*
- *What is your level of maturity and self-knowledge?*

### Suggestions:

Choose from your top five self-management skills (qualities, traits) those that you believe are most important for the job and the organization. Be sure to **give proof and provide examples** of times you demonstrated that strength.

## **“What are your major weaknesses?”**

The question behind the question may be:

- *Are you aware of your weaknesses?*
- *What is your level of maturity and self-knowledge?*
- *Can you handle difficult questions?*

### Suggestions:

**Never say you have none!** Never admit a weakness that could affect your ability to do the job well. Never disclose personal issues. Avoid the cliché answer of “perfectionism”. Employers have heard that one a million times. Choose your weakness before the interview. Limit your answer to one weakness and say what you did in order to overcome it. Overcoming a weakness is actually developing strength!

## **“What salary do you expect to receive?”**

The question behind the question might be:

- *Are you too expensive for our budget, or would you still feel motivated with a lower pay?*
- *Are your expectations too low for what we wish to invest in this position?*
- *Are you prepared, well informed about your market value?*

### Suggestions:

Never discuss salary before you receive a job offer. Mention that you trust that if an offer comes, it will be reasonable. When the interviewer insists, answer the questions using a range. Find out what salary range is typically offered for that type of position (check [www.workingincanada.gc.ca](http://www.workingincanada.gc.ca)).

## **“Why did you apply for this position?”**

The question behind this question may be:

- *Do you know what motivates you?*
- *How much do you really want this job?*
- *Do you really understand what it takes to be successful in this job?*
- *Why us? How do you know you would be happy in our organization?*

### Suggestions:

If you apply for positions that match your true needs, this should be an easy question. Link your interest and enthusiasm to the skills and knowledge that are most relevant to the position. Mention what you like about the organization and the people who work there.



## **“Could you please give me an example from your past that describes when you took initiative?”**

The question behind the question may be:

- *Show me evidence that you have initiative*
- *Can you prove with facts that you really do have initiative?*

### Suggestions:

Prepare for behavioural questions by compiling **key moments** from your past that **describe well how you handle different situations**. For example, other possible behavioural questions might be:

- *Tell me about a great decision you made.*
- *What about a decision that proved to be a mistake?*
- *Give an example of a time when you handled a difficult customer.*
- *What was one of the most difficult goals you had to reach? How did you go about meeting that goal?*

## **“Where do you see yourself five years from now?”**

The question behind this question may be:

- *Can we depend on you?*
- *Are you focused?*
- *Can we offer you what you really want?*
- *How long do you intend to stay with this company?*

### Suggestions:

Focus on tackling the challenges within the job to which you are applying. For the longer term, you can underline how you wish to develop your career by developing new skills and knowledge that are meaningful both to you and the organization.

## **“How did you like your last job? Why did you leave? What would your last boss say about you?”**

### Suggestions:

The employer wants to know how you get along with others at work. Be positive! Even if you didn't have the best of experiences, talk about what was good on the job, like that you got along with your fellow employees, or that you always got the job done on time. Try to mention specific accomplishments that you are proud of. Do not put down your previous colleagues, supervisor, or boss.

# **A few more questions you might be asked . . .**

## **About yourself**

1. What are your long term goals?
2. Describe your ideal job.
3. What causes you stress and how do you deal with it?
4. How would a friend/professor/etc. describe you?
5. What is the most important thing to you in a job?
6. Name five things that motivate you.
7. What is your definition of success?

## **About your work history**

8. What did you think of your old boss/supervisor?
9. Why did you choose this career?
10. Describe a situation in which you had to use your creativity to the fullest to complete a project.
11. How do you work under pressure?
12. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

## **About your education**

13. How has your college/university experience prepared you for your career?
14. Describe your most rewarding college/university experience.
15. What led you to choose your field or major?
16. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?

## **About this position**

17. What do you know about our company?
18. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
19. If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for?
20. Do you prefer working as a team member or would you rather work alone?
21. How important is job security to you?
22. What would you do in this . . . situation?
23. Would you be in a position to work overtime, if required?
  
24. Do you have any questions?

*(See p. 10 for questions you can ask an employer!)*

# Questions You Can Ask an Employer



1. What are some of the responsibilities of this position?
2. What is a typical day like?
3. Approximately what percentage of time will be devoted to each of these responsibilities?
4. What are some challenges that I might face as a new employee?
5. What kind of orientation and training is available to new employees?
6. How would you describe the environment of your company/organization?
7. Could you tell me about the strengths of the organization or department?
8. What are the career opportunities for someone entering this position?
9. How large is the department? What are some of the other offices with which I would work?
10. To whom would I be reporting and what kind of communication channels are there?
11. What are the long range plans for this organization?
12. In what areas of the organization do you expect to grow?
13. What kind of support staff is available?
14. How and when will I be evaluated in this position?
15. What is the management philosophy of this company?
16. Do you work with daily, monthly, or annual deadline?
17. Does the organization have a process for sharing creative ideas?
18. When do you hope to make a decision about this position? **or** What are the next steps in the hiring process?