

# The Job Interview

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While there is no single correct way to conduct an interview, these are some basic rules and situations common to most interviews which may help you prepare ahead of time.

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

### *How to Prepare:*

- Do your homework. Research the employer with whom you are interviewing. Know the salary range and commit your interest. Match your goals and needs with those of the employer. It is important to know the background of the organization as you may wish to ask questions. Also, learn the interviewer's name.
- Develop your agenda. List what skills you have to offer. Know your strengths and weaknesses.
- Practice answering commonly asked interview questions. This will help you rehearse to calm nerves on the day of the interview.

### *Things to Bring:*

- Bring along a couple of copies of your resume and cover letter for those on your search committee that may not have been supplied with one.
- Bring a portfolio/notebook and pen.
- Some candidates prepare an action plan or bring along business cards or letters of recommendation, etc. – these are not required but may give you a competitive edge.

### *Helpful Tips:*

- Dress in good taste. While many employers encourage individuality, let basic good taste determine how you dress for an interview. Head to foot cleanliness and neatness also will help to create a good first impression.
- Nervousness: It is normal for many people to be nervous. It helps to dry a damp brow or a clammy hand just before meeting your interviewer. Experienced interviewers discount a certain amount of nervousness.
- Be yourself. Remember that the interviewer wants to get to know you, not hear a memorized speech.
- Be on time. Try to be ten to fifteen minutes early. Call if you will be delayed.
- Be prepared. Be rested and think positive thoughts.



# DURING THE INTERVIEW

## *Starting the Interview:*

- Realize the importance of the first 3 min. This is where you will make your first impression.
- Smile and greet the interviewer as you enter their office.
- Take your cues from them at the start. If they move to shake hands, do so but not unless they make the first gesture. If they shake hands with you, use a firm grip.
- You may want to write down names as your interviewers introduce themselves. In some situations, you may be interviewed by 5+ people. Writing down names can help you to more confidently address those asking the questions and allows you to have an accurate record of who to send a thank you to after the interview.
- Be ready for at least one surprise question right at the start. These are a few of the favorites:
  - What can I do for you?
  - Tell me about yourself.
  - Why are you interested in this organization?

## *Answering Questions:*

- Most interviews will follow a rather simple question and answer format. If this is the case, your ability to answer quickly and intelligently is of great importance. Above all, answer honestly. Do not give confused or contradictory answers. The greatest preventive against a contradictory answer is the plain truth. A frank answer, even if it seems a little unfavorable to you, is better than an exaggeration which may tangle you up in the next question.
- If you are asked if you have ever been fired – and you have been, frankness is the answer. Tell them you have learned from your mistakes. Also, there is the possibility you got into a wrong job through a misunderstanding.
- You may be asked why you left your last two or three jobs. Return to school, better pay and more responsibility are acceptable reasons. Be careful not to give the impression that you are a job “jumper.”
- Follow the interviewer’s lead. Do not answer just “yes” and “no.” On the other hand, do not talk too much. If you find yourself talking in a monologue, give the lead back to the recruiter by saying: “Perhaps you have some other questions to ask me?”
- Use frequent, direct eye contact with the interviewer, especially when responding to questions. Look pleasant and smile frequently at appropriate occasions.
- Emphasize your strengths. Make sure that your good points get across – they will not know unless you tell them. Mention your best qualities in relation to something concrete.
- Never make a slighting reference about a former employer or professor. If something went wrong, suggest that at least some of the blame must have been your own.
- Show your interest by asking some questions about the company. Ask about opportunity, not security. Have in mind two or three good reasons why you’re interested in this particular employer. The chances are excellent that you will be asked for your reasons.
- Salary??? Some interviewers may ask you how much you want. The best answer in that case is to indicate that you are more interested in a job where you can prove yourself than you are in a specific salary. It is the job and what goes into it that determines an employee’s salary. It is easier to raise a salary than it is to justify a salary that proves too high for the experience and ability. In most cases, reputable corporations will offer the standard salary for the type of job in question. It is in your interest to have found out what the rate is ahead of time.

### ***Ending the Interview:***

- If you get the impression that the interview is not going well and that you have already been rejected, do not let your discouragement show. You have nothing to lose by continuing the appearance of confidence and you may gain much. Sometimes an interviewer who is genuinely interested in your possibilities may seem to discourage you to test your reaction.
- Most interviews last between 30 minutes to an hour. A glance at your watch will tell you if your time is almost up. Do not go on talking and talking. Be alert to signs from the interviewer that the session is up. If time is up and you still want the job or internship, tell them you are interested and stop.
- Summarize and have a positive close. Be certain to thank the recruiter for their time and their consideration of you. Smile, and show as much confidence in leaving as you did in arriving.

### ***Job Offers:***

- What if they offer you the job on the spot? If you are absolutely sure it is the one you want, accept with a definite yes. If you have the slightest doubt, ask for time to think it over. Trying to set a date when you can provide an answer will reassure them that you are giving their offer serious consideration.
- Do not make appointments in which you are really not interested, and avoid accepting more than one offer. You will find yourself in an extremely awkward position and you stand to lose the confidence of everyone involved.
- Do not be too discouraged if no definite offer is made or no specific salary is discussed. The recruiter will probably wish to communicate with the office first or interview more applicants before making any offers.

### ***Helpful Tips:***

- Do not chew gum or smoke.
- Be aware of body language. Sit up in your chair and look alert and interested at all times. Lean forward to show interest. Do not look tense, but do not relax so much that you slouch. Show that you can be a wide-awake, intelligent listener as well as a talker.
- Take minimal notes, as this is annoying and distracting to some interviewers. The best policy is to make notes immediately after the interview everything you want to remember.
- A few interviewers like to do most of the talking and judge you by your reactions, the interest, comprehension, and intelligence you show. Even if the recruiter does much of the talking, remember that you can lead them by asking questions which call in turn for a question you want to answer. For example, you are strong in extracurricular organizations. They have mentioned that point and you want to go into a little detail you could not cover fully in your resume. You simply watch for an opening and ask, "Are you interested in my extracurricular activities?" They are not likely to say "no."
- Some interviewers hardly speak at all and expect you to sell yourself. For an amateur, these are the hardest to deal with. This is where you will have to call on knowledge of yourself and your interests in the work their company does.
- Conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job or internship you are discussing. The recruiter is aware that you may have other irons in the fire, but they want to think that you would like a job or internship with their company.

- If the courses you took have not led you into preparation for a specific field of work, don't, on that account, pass up chances for interviews. Researching the organization will better help you present your broad qualities in light of the company's needs. If the employer has a training program, express interest in it!
- Try to avoid giving the impression that you have come in to look over possibilities, and that you are not sure what you want. When possible, apply for a specific job or field of work. If there is no opening in the area you suggest, the way you present yourself may lead the interviewer to suggest another job or department, perhaps, better than the one you were seeking. For this reason, it is not advisable to get too far out on a limb by saying you will not consider anything but one certain job.
- Show the interviewer that you are interested; realize the demands on their time and that you appreciate the opportunity they are giving you to present your case.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### *Follow-up:*

- After the interview, follow-up on any further contact your interviewer suggested. Follow their instructions exactly. Sending a thank you is highly recommended.
- If the interviewer seemed really interested in you or indicated that you would hear from them – and you do not hear from them - wait about a week after the date of contact indicated and then write a brief note to remind them of your talk. Express appreciation for the time they gave you and explain in as few words as possible your continuing interest in their company. You have little to lose at this point by refreshing their memory, and you might get a favorable response.
- Keep in contact. If you do not get a flat rejection or the polite “no” expressed in the type of letter that says, “We will keep your letter in our files and let you know if anything...” and there is still some suggestion that you should keep in touch, by all means keep in touch. Unless you make a nuisance of yourself, you will be able to stay in the foreground if a vacancy appears.
- Send a Thank You!
  - Thank you letters are *prompt*, personal replies to express your appreciation for an interview and to reiterate your interest in and qualifications for the position.
  - Sending a thank you letter leaves a positive impression and can sometimes be the deciding factor as to who gets offered the position.
  - It is important **to send a thank you to each of the individuals you interviewed with within 1-2 days following the interview.** (If you decide you are no longer interested in the position, it is still common courtesy to send a thank you note as it reflects your professionalism. It also keeps the door open if you should become interested in the organization sometime in the future or if the person you met with knows of another opportunity that might interest you.)

### *Helpful Tips:*

- Accept only one job offer.
- Keep active. If you do not “connect” immediately, remember that interviewers, companies and jobs differ greatly. You will learn much from your first interview and you will almost certainly do better in succeeding ones. The important thing is to keep trying.