



Interviewing Guide

There is no secret to a successful job interview. You simply need to prepare and practice. Unfortunately, few people take the necessary time to do either.

First, you need to know yourself – your interests, knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivations, and how they relate to the job for which you are applying.

Second, you need to know the employer – its mission, goals, values, interests and needs.

Third, you need to confidently and concisely convey why you are the best candidate for the position.

Use the resources in this section to help you better prepare for a successful interviewing experience.

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How to STAR in your job interviews

Job interviews can be intimidating experiences for anyone – from the entry-level worker to the high-level executive. To be a top contender for a position you must interview well. Here is one method to help you prepare to present yourself in the best possible way to an employer.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES

- ☑ Focus on 3 to 4 areas where your skills are the strongest. Knowing these will help you tell your interviewer why they should hire you.
- ☑ Examine your work and education background. Look for skills and experiences that match the job description.

CREATE A LIST OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCES TO RELATE

Employers want real examples of how you behave and perform professionally. Tell them a short story.

- ☑ Identify examples that illustrate where and how you have performed well using your skills and background, and relate them to the job for which you are applying.
- ☑ Include what you learned or what you might do differently in the future.

The **STAR** method is a helpful way to organize your thoughts and communicate clearly.

S: Explain the *Situation*

T: Describe your role or *Task*

A: The *Action* you took

R: The *Results* of your action

Be able to describe your useful skills in common terms in case your interviewer is not an expert in the field. For example:

Situation: When I worked at the state library, many of the books were not filed correctly.

Task: I was in charge of shelving books on three floors.

Action: I designed and proposed a new employee training method to my boss. I then presented the new method to the library assistants at the next staff meeting and everyone contributed ideas for the new training on shelving.

Result: After that meeting, there were fewer misplaced books, and customers asked fewer questions about finding missing books.

For additional advice on enhancing your communication skills, overcoming nervousness and anxiety, and gaining experience in the art of interviewing, **contact Academic & Career Advising at 360-867-6312 to schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor.**

Ten Rules for Interview Success

Ten tips for a successful job interview. These rules will help job-seekers to maximize potential employment opportunities.

1. **Speak clearly and enthusiastically about your experiences and skills.** Be professional, but don't be afraid to let your personality shine through. Be yourself. Don't be afraid of short pauses. You may need a few seconds to formulate an answer.
2. **Be positive.** Employers do not want to hear a litany of excuses or bad feelings about a negative experience. If you are asked about a low grade, a sudden job change or a weakness in your background, don't be defensive. Focus instead on the facts (briefly) and what you learned from the experience.
3. **Be prepared to market your skills and experiences as they relate to the job described.** Work at positioning yourself in the mind of the employer as a person with a particular set of skills and attributes. Employers have problems that need to be solved by employees with particular skills. Concentrate on describing your qualifications appropriately.
4. **Research information about the company before the interview.** Some important information to look for includes what activities are carried out by the employer, how financially stable the employer is, what types of jobs exist with the employer and the employer's mission and values. Researching an employer during the job search can help determine more about that organization and your potential place in it. Know how you can help the company and prepare questions to ask the interviewer about the company.
5. **Arrive early for the interview.** Plan to arrive for your interview 10-15 minutes before the appointed time. Arriving too early can create an awkward situation for you and the employer. It's not a bad idea to do a trial run a day or two beforehand to make sure you know where you're going, and to assess traffic and parking during the weekday.
6. **Carry a portfolio, notepad** or at the very least, a manila file folder labeled with the employer's name.
7. **Bring extra resumes and a list of questions you need answered.** It's okay to refer to your list of questions to be sure you've gathered the information you need to make a decision. Do not be preoccupied with taking notes during the interview.
8. **Brush up on your etiquette.** In many career fields, the lunch or dinner included during the interview day encompasses not only employer hospitality, but also a significant part of the interview process. Be prepared to carry your share of the conversation during the meal. Often social skills are part of the hiring decision.
9. **After the interview, take time to collect business cards** or write down the names and titles (check spelling) of all your interviewers, your impressions, remaining questions and information learned. If you are interviewing regularly, this process will help you keep employers and circumstances clearly defined.
10. **Follow up the interview with a thank-you letter or notecard.** Employers regard this gesture as evidence of your attention to detail, as well as an indication of your interest in the position.

Tips for Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews can be challenging because you receive no visual cues from the interviewer. There are some advantages, however. You can use notes, move around, talk with your hands, or wear whatever you want. If you anticipate hearing from an employer about an interview, or if you expect a call from a prospective employer for any reason, consider the following in preparation for that call:

- Make sure the message on your voice messaging is courteous and professional. It may be the employer's first impression of you.
- ☐ Inform everyone who may answer the telephone that employment calls may come at any time. If you feel your roommates or members of household are unreliable, consider listing a message or private cell phone number. Be sure to manage your cell phone calls appropriately.
- ☐ If you leave a message after returning a missed call, always leave your first and last name, your phone number and a good time to call you back.
- ☐ If an employer schedules a specific time to call you, make sure you are available and that you have a quiet place to talk.
- ☐ Keep a copy of your resume and cover letters close at hand or in an easily accessible location.
- ☐ Keep paper and a pen handy, or on you at all times for taking notes.
- ☐ Create a file on each organization that you have contacted in any way. You can refer to the file while talking on the phone and bring up pertinent information.

There are also some important things to remember when an employer does call:

- ☐ If a call surprises you, ask the employer to hold for a moment and compose yourself. Do not put the employer on hold for more than 30 seconds. If the timing is extremely bad for you, ask if you can return the call. Let the employer know the exact time that you will call, or arrange an appropriate time convenient to both of you and stick to that time.
- Never put the employer on hold while you answer "call waiting" or another "incoming call."
- ☐ Be aware that the interviewer may actually include a group of people. If they do not introduce themselves, ask if they would mind doing so. Write down their names and titles, and feel free to ask who is asking a specific question if you are not sure.
- Voice is important. Be sure to convey energy and enthusiasm. Although the employer can't see you, smile. It will help you feel more energized.
- ☐ Listen carefully to each question asked. Envision the recruiter sitting across from you and answer as if they are present.
- ☐ Speak directly into the phone. Keep the mouthpiece about one inch from your mouth. Do not eat, chew gum or smoke while on the phone, sound is amplified! Do not use a speakerphone, even if the interviewer does.

Dressing for Interview Success

Even though many companies have relaxed their internal company dress codes, interviews still follow the conservative standard. Dress for the world outside college is quite different from the campus scene. Conservative is in for interviewing. Why? You should be doing the talking, not your clothes.

This is not to say that you need to go out and buy a whole new wardrobe. Go for quality over quantity. One or two well-chosen business suits will serve you all the way to the first day on the job and beyond. No one will fault you for wearing the same sharp outfit each time you interview.

If you desire some variety within a limited budget, you might consider varying your shirt/blouse/tie/ accessories as a simple way to change your look without breaking your wallet.

For those who need a quick review of the basics, follow these guidelines for successful interview dress:

Men and Women

- ☑ Conservative two-piece business suit, with slacks or skirt (solid dark blue or grey is best)
- ☑ Conservative long-sleeved shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- ☑ Clean, polished conservative shoes; conventional heels for women
- ☑ Dark socks (black is best)
- ☑ Well-groomed hairstyle
- ☑ Clean, trimmed fingernails
- ☑ Minimal cologne or perfume
- ☑ Empty pockets, no bulges or tinkling coins
- ☑ No gum, candy, or cigarettes
- ☑ Light briefcase or portfolio case; no purses, small or large
- ☑ No visible body piercing (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.) or tattoos
- ☑ Necktie should be clean with a conservative pattern
- ☑ Get a haircut; short or tightly controlled hair always fares best in interviews
- ☑ Fresh shave; mustaches are a possible negative, but if you must, make sure it is neat and trimmed
- ☑ Beards are highly discouraged (unless you are interviewing for a job as a lumberjack!)
- ☑ No rings other than wedding ring or college ring; no more than one on each hand
- ☑ No earrings for men (if you normally wear one, take it out); one set only for women
- ☑ Conservative hosiery at or near skin color (no runs!)
- ☑ If you use nail polish, use a clear or conservative color
- ☑ Keep your makeup simple and natural

If you are still not sure how to dress for the interview, call and ask! That's right, call the employer. But this is one time when you do not want to call the Hiring Manager. Instead, ask to be put through to Human Resources and say:

I have an interview with _____ in the _____ department for a position as an _____. Could you please tell me what would be appropriate dress for this interview?

How to Address Illegal Interview Questions

Employers should be aware of employment law as it relates to interviewing potential employees. But that doesn't stop them from asking illegal questions. Some do it intentionally hoping you won't know any better, and to illicit answers that can bias their hiring decision against you. Others are simply ignorant of the law.

So, what are your options if asked an illegal question?

- Examine the intent behind the question.
- Respond with an answer as it may apply to the job. For instance, the interviewer may ask, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" You could say, "I am authorized to work in the United States."
- Ask the interviewer how the question relates to the position.
- Answer the question, knowing that you are giving information that is not job-related.
- Refuse to answer the question. You'll be within your rights but may be perceived as uncooperative or confrontational.

The following table shows some common areas of inquiry and the related illegal questions asked by employers. It also provides the legal questions they can ask related to each area of inquiry.

Area of Inquiry	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
National origin	Are you a US citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your "native tongue?" Photos cannot be required as part of the hiring process.	Are you authorized to work in the US? What languages do you read, speak or write fluently?
Age	How old are you? When did you graduate from college? What is your birth date/year?	Do you meet the minimum age requirement for this position?
Personal/Family	What is your marital status? Who do you live with? Do you plan to have a family? Have you ever been arrested?	Would you be willing to relocate, if necessary? Travel is an important part of this job. Would you be willing to travel, if necessary?
Affiliations	What clubs or social organizations do you belong to? Do you go to church? Do you have a disability? Have you ever collected disability or workers' compensation?	List any professional trade groups or other organizations that you belong to, especially if they are relevant to your skills and qualifications.