

How to Ace an Interview

Before the Interview

Do your homework:

- Research the company's website.
- Become familiar with the company's products/ services and history.
- Be able to state why you would like to work specifically for this company.

Plan questions in advance:

- Prepare questions on the organization, the job itself and overall company structure. Be ready with paper to take notes on the answer.
- Try to draw parallels between the job description and your work experience and expertise. Be prepared to discuss this during the interview.

Dress professionally:

- No jeans or casual wear even if the company has a "business casual" policy.
- Men should wear a suit and tie and be well groomed.
- Women should wear a suit with minimal make-up and perfume.

Be early:

- Leave plenty of extra time to get to the interview; better still take a test drive prior to the interview.
- Arrive 5 minutes early and announce yourself.
- If you arrive with extra time, relax in your car or outside the building and collect your thoughts. Don't present yourself more than 15 minutes early as many managers have tight schedules and will feel pressured by your early arrival.

Bring Your Resume:

- Bring 3-5 copies of your resume.
- Resumes should be well organized and neat.

During the Interview

No cell phone:

- Turn it off or leave it in the car.

Make a strong opening:

- Use good eye contact, smile, shake hands and sit up straight.
- Be enthusiastic, confident and energetic.

Be professional:

- Treat everyone you encounter with professionalism.
- Don't let an employer's casual approach cause you to drop your manners.
- Don't complain or make negative comments about previous employers.

Keep the dialogue going:

- Listen closely to questions and give thoughtful, direct answers. Give details but do not talk too much. Be sure to let the interviewer lead the interview.
- Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no to elicit discussion.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question. Take a few moments to gather your thoughts before answering.
- Be prepared to discuss what you believe the job entails. Interviewers may want to see that you understand the position.

Sell yourself:

- Sell the interviewer on your skills and what you will bring to the job.
- Be prepared to explain how or why you moved from one position to another, clarify any gaps on your resume and give details of any skills you've listed.
- Be specific, such as explaining how you used a particular technology or the purpose of an individual project.
- Maintain a positive attitude and give it your best effort.

Avoid discussing salary and hours:

- These are "what's in it for me" questions that do not typically help you receive an offer.

Make a strong close:

- Thank the interviewer for their time.
- Express interest in the position.
- Ask what the next step is in the hiring process. Know what action you are expected to take if any.
- Offer a firm handshake at the conclusion of the interview.

Common Interview Questions

What are your weaknesses? Emphasize your strengths and minimize weaknesses. Focus on your professional skills and avoid discussing personal qualities.

Why should we hire you? Give a summary of your experience and strengths. Relate them directly to the position for which you are interviewing.

Why do you want to work here? The interviewer is listening for an indication that you've given this some thought and are not sending out resumes simply because there is an opening. Discuss the company and your relevant experience.

What are your goals? Focus on short-term and intermediate goals rather than the distant future. Example, "My immediate goal is to get a job in a growth-oriented company such as yours."

Why did you leave (or are you leaving) your current job? Be honest but concise. State your reason for leaving in a positive context and focus on what you want in a new position. Don't be negative about your current position, employer, or get into personal details.

What can you do for us that other candidates can't? Discuss what makes you unique. Be ready with an assessment of your experiences, skills and traits as they relate to this particular position.

Interviewee Questions

Always prepare questions to ask. Having no questions prepared sends the message that you have not been thinking about the job. Avoid asking questions that are clearly answered on the employer's website or literature. This would simply reveal that you did not prepare for the interview. Never ask about salary and benefits issues until those subjects are raised by the employer.

Remember the interview is a two-way conversation. The interview has three purposes in the following order of importance:

- 1) To sell yourself
- 2) To evaluate the position
- 3) To get their commitment for the next step of the process

After asking questions, the interviewer usually invites you to ask questions. Ask questions that will help you to evaluate both the position and the company. The following are good examples of informed questions:

- Can you explain your organizational structure?
- What are the company's values?
- How will my responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom? How often?
- What will be the greatest challenge in this position?
- Can you describe a typical day of someone in this position?

Tackling Tough Interview Questions

The key to handling interview questions is to be prepared to discuss anything on your resume, especially the questions you really don't want to answer. Be honest, but try to turn any negatives into something positive.

To answer questions with poise, try to remember these tips:

- Listen carefully. If you feel the question is unclear, ask politely for clarification.
- Pause before answering to consider all facts that may complete your response.
- Always offer positive information; avoid negativity at all times.
- Get directly to the point. Ask if the listener would like you to go into more detail before you do.
- Discuss only the facts needed to respond to the question.
- Focus and re-focus attention on your successes. Remember, the goal is not to have the right answers so much as it is to convince the interviewer that you are the right person.
- Be truthful, but try not to offer unsolicited information.
- Try not to open yourself to areas of questioning that could pose difficulties for you.

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