



Effective Interviewing

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An interview is a conversation between you and a prospective employer about your skills and how they meet the organization's needs. It is an invitation extended to you because you made a positive impression via your resume and cover letter. The employer's goals during the interview are to confirm this positive impression, to develop a better understanding of your ability to contribute to the organization, and to determine "fit." Your goals during the interview are to help the employer achieve their goals, to generate a job offer and collect information that allows you to make an informed decision about whether to accept or decline the job offer.

Generating a job offer

The amount of time you'll have face-to-face with an interested employer in which to generate an offer (or an invitation to the next round of interviews) is limited. Use that time strategically - be well prepared. There's much you can't control about the interview (e.g., the mood and/or skill of the interviewer, the qualifications and interviewing skills of the other candidate). There's much you can control. Much of what you can control falls into the category of advance preparation. To be a more relaxed, articulate, knowledgeable, persuasive, and ultimately effective interviewee, you can:

Increase your knowledge base — expand on the research you conducted for your resume and cover letter (e.g., become familiar with the web site, check professional publications and local newspapers for articles about the organization, speak with people you know who work there), read newspapers and industry-specific publications

Know the plan — confirm with whom you'll be meeting, their role within the organization and how long the interview is expected to take; you can then better anticipate questions, target your answers to different audiences (e.g., your future boss will be interested in different things than your future coworkers) and determine what questions you need to ask

Anticipate questions — based on what you know about the field/position and your skills and experience, what are you likely to be asked?

Prepare answers and practice aloud — know what points you want to make about how you can meet the employer's needs and then get used to hearing yourself saying that; practice saying the same thing in different ways — be sure to provide concrete examples

Generate questions — determine what you will ask the employer that demonstrates your interest and qualifications and helps you determine if this job is right for you

Select your "uniform" — be aware of the appropriate professional attire for the field — generally, suits for men and suits or dresses for women; be sure your attire is clean and pressed the day before

Be geographically savvy — make a trial run to determine how long it takes you to get there, where you can park and how much parking costs — add extra time to account for surprises. It's **NOT** okay to be late.



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It ain't over 'til it's over

You know the interview is ending when the interviewer says "well..." You still have some critical tasks that need to be accomplished before you leave:

- Ask your questions if you haven't already done so
- Summarize your key qualifications for the job
- Express your enthusiasm for the position
- Confirm what happens next and when
- Confirm correct spelling and titles of your interviewers after you've left the interview
- Write thank you notes to each person with whom you interviewed
 - Underscore your continued interest
 - Take advantage of the opportunity to remind them of your skills and/or mention something you didn't discuss during the interview
- Follow-up to learn the status of your candidacy if you've not heard back within the time frame established during your interview
- Reflect on your interview, practicing things you'd like to do differently

Hot tips

Create a 60 second "commercial" to use as an introduction to you and your interest in the job/career field — the commercial can then be used as your response when the interviewer invites you to tell them about yourself.

Interviewing is an oral skill — anticipate questions and practice your answers out loud. Practice different levels of formality depending upon with whom you will interview.

Great interviewers transform an employer's image of them from an outsider to an inside contributor by:

- Owning it - clearly state your critical skill or competency
- Proving it - provide a concrete example of when/where you've used it effectively
- Connecting it - discuss how it directly benefits the employer by meeting their needs
- Your non-verbal cues speak more loudly than your verbal cues— be sure they are consistent.
- Remember, you can't accept or decline a job offer you don't get!

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS

Your Questions — and you must ask some

Don't ask questions that focus on what the organization can do for you (e.g., questions about salary and other benefits).

Rather, ask questions that demonstrate your interest in and understanding of the position and/or those that will help you decide if the position is right for you. Examples:

- How might the results of the upcoming election impact funding for this project?
- How does this position/division fit in the organization's strategic plan?
- I understand that the person previously in this position was promoted; what role did you play in facilitating their promotion?
- What training do you provide for new hires?
- How often is an employee's performance evaluated and what criteria are used?

Their Questions —

- Tell me about yourself
- Why are you interested in this position?
Working for our firm?
- How does your education/prior experience qualify you for this position?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your long-range career goals?
- Tell us about a time when you
 - made a mistake on the job (focus on what you've learned)
 - worked as part of a team (focus on both your individual and collective contributions)
- Why did you leave your previous position?
- Describe the work environment in which you are most effective
- Why should I hire you?