

INTERVIEWS

- **Interview Basics**
- **Interviews: Before, During, After**
- **Interview Thank You Letter Format**
- **How to Answer Interview Questions**
- **Traditional Interview Questions**
- **Behavioural Interview Questions**
- **Information Interviews**

INTERVIEW BASICS

The interview is usually the final decision-making tool in the hiring process. If you have been called in for an interview, you can assume that the employer is interested in you and feels that you may be able to meet their needs. The employer wants to verify what they read in your resume and talk about your qualifications. The employer also wants to learn how you 'fit' into the company culture.

If you are well prepared, you can approach the interview with confidence. This is the time to sell your skills and identify clearly what you can do for the company and why you should be hired. The best person for the job is not always the person who lands the job - it may go to the person who interviewed the best and was most convincing.

Remember interviews are a two-way process. The employer is evaluating you and you will also be evaluating the employer and the job opening against your own requirements and goals.

There are different interview styles - question-and-answer, behaviour-based, conversational and stress interviews, different interview formats - individual, group, panel, follow-up interviews, and different interview settings - on-site, job fairs, telephone and online.

Interview Preparation:

- When called for an interview (or when calling back to confirm time and place) find out as much as possible about the interview location, format, expected time frame and who will be conducting the interview.
- Know the position you are applying for and if possible, get a job description.
- Research the employer and industry; print this material and take it with you to the interview with your notes.
- Gather documents (extra copies of your resume, the cover letter you sent) and any additional information requested by the employer to take to the interview. Keep material organized in a professional-looking portfolio or folder.
- Bring a pen and paper to take notes.
- Re-read your resume. The interviewer may base questions on it.
- Practice answering common interview questions.
- Write out your qualifications/skills and how they match to the job requirements, with examples.
- Prepare a number of questions to ask the interviewer. You probably will not ask them all, but a lack of questions may be interpreted as a lack of interest.

INTERVIEWS: BEFORE, DURING, AFTER

Before:

- Plan your travel route in advance so that you are not late.
- Get a good night's sleep. Aim to arrive at the interview alert, well rested and fed.
- Check for good hygiene: Clean hair and fingernails, clean, neat clothing, no scent.
- Dress one step above what you would wear in that job.
- Arrive 10 -15 minutes early.
- Be courteous and friendly to any staff members you encounter.

During:

- Be aware of your body language. Stand and sit straight. Make eye contact with all people conducting the interview.
- Offer a firm handshake. Smile. Speak clearly.
- Listen carefully to each question. If you do not understand a question, don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
- Use specific examples when answering questions. Highlight your accomplishments.
- Avoid getting too personal. Keep your focus on what you can do for the employer.
- Keep your answers brief, but avoid yes/no responses to questions.
- Express a good attitude and your eagerness to work.
- Always keep answers positive; never end an answer on a "negative" note. Do not speak critically of former employers.
- Do not ask about salary; if you are asked, offer a range rather than a specific amount.

After:

- Thank the interviewer(s); state your interest in the job, then leave. Don't overstay.
- Make sure you know what the next step in the interview process is before you leave.
- Write a thank you note or letter to each person who participated in the interview, within 1 day. If you are writing more than one, they should be personalized and different from each other. A thank you e-mail is also acceptable.
- Think about the interview and learn from the experience.
- Follow-up within a week or within the time frame suggested by the interviewer.

These are suggestions only. It is always important to use your own judgment.

INTERVIEW THANK YOU LETTER FORMAT

Your Contact Information

Date:

Employer's Full Name & Title
Company Name
Full Postal Address

Dear *Employer's Name*:

1st Paragraph: Tell the interviewer why you are writing, thanking him / her for the opportunity and emphasizing your continued interest. (Name the position that you interviewed for and the date that you were interviewed on).

2nd Paragraph: Remind the interviewer of any important information that you want to stress including any related qualifications that may have been overlooked during the interview.

3rd Paragraph: Close with confirmation of your availability for further interviews (if necessary) and advise the employer that you will be in contact to inquire about the status of your application.

Yours Sincerely,

Signature

HOW TO ANSWER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SITUATION - ACTION – RESULT: SAR TECHNIQUE

Many interviewers ask behavioural questions requiring you to recall an event from the past that illustrates the skills you have that relate to the job. You should prepare for the interview by reviewing your experience for stories that provide good evidence of your skills. Then answer the question using the SAR technique. Keep your answer brief and focused on the SITUATION - ACTION – RESULT.

Situation: Briefly describe the situation in which you found yourself. Identify the problem that you needed to solve and what you had to consider in solving it.

Action(s): Identify the actions that you took to solve the problem. If other people were involved in the solution, make that clear. Remember the interviewer may ask your reference about this. At the same time don't downplay your role in a successful resolution.

Result: Describe the result of your actions and the ways in which they brought about a good result for a previous employer.

Example:

I worked with a woman who was responsible for data entry and who reported to me. She started to come in late frequently. (SITUATION)

I talked to her privately in my office, but the lateness persisted. I spoke with her a second time, but this time, I pressed for more information. I asked her if she was happy in the job, if she felt challenged and so on. At first, she felt uncomfortable talking about it. Eventually she admitted that she was bored in the job. We worked out an action plan whereby she would commit to getting to work on time and I would provide some assistance with upgrading her skills for further advancement. (ACTION)

The lateness stopped immediately and she was promoted within 6 months (RESULT).

TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are as many interview styles as there are interviewers. Not all interviewers are trained or skilled. In general the larger the organization the more likely it is that the interview process is carefully planned and standardized. In smaller organizations the conversation may be much more casual. Your best strategy is to be very well prepared. Here are some traditional interview questions.

1. What are your strengths as an employee?
2. If you could change one thing about your personality what would it be? Why?
3. What do you know about our company and why do you want to work for us?
4. What interests you most about this position/company?
5. Why should you be considered a strong applicant for this position?
6. What are the skills you most need to develop to advance your career?
7. Tell me about the best/worst boss you've ever had.
8. Do you think there is anything you could have done to improve your relationship with that one bad boss?
9. How do you handle change?
10. How do you go about making important decisions?
11. Do you work well under pressure?
12. If you could start your career all over again what would you do differently?
13. Do you prefer to work with others or by yourself?
14. How do you get along with your co-workers?
15. What are your most memorable accomplishments in your last job?
16. What are you looking for in your next job?
17. What aspect of the job I've described appeals to you least?
18. What types of people do you find most difficult to get along with?
19. Have you ever hired anyone? Why did you choose him or her?
20. What does the word success mean to you?
21. What do you want to be doing 5 years from now?
22. What are your most important long-term goals?
23. How would your co-workers describe you?
24. How do you generally handle conflict?
25. You've had little experience in _____. How do you intend to learn what you need in order to perform well in this job?

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Current interview practice involves the use of behavioural interview questions. This type of question allows employers to gather valuable information about how you may behave in certain work situations. It is based on the assumption that past behaviour is often the best predictor of future behaviour. Employers want you to give real life examples and experiences to best illustrate your competency for the position.

1. Give me an example of the most difficult person you have had to deal with. How did you handle the situation?
2. What was the biggest conflict you resolved on your last job? What steps did you take to resolve the problem?
3. What was the most memorable accomplishment at your last job? In your career? a) How did you achieve this peak in your job/career?
4. All jobs have unpleasant tasks. What was the most unpleasant task you were asked to do and how did you handle it?
5. Most procedures or processes are not perfect when first developed. Tell me when you had to modify an existing procedure. What problems did you encounter and how did you solve them?
6. Tell me about how you get along with your co-workers. Briefly sum up your skills in dealing with fellow employees.
7. I would like you to think back to a project that you were very proud of. How was this project outstanding?
8. Give me an example of when you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or subordinates.
9. Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you did not agree with it.
10. Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
11. Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
12. Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you've completed.
13. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
14. Describe a situation in which you were able to read another person effectively and guide your actions by your understanding of his/her individual needs or values.
15. What did you do in your last job to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.

INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

An information interview is an interview that you set up and in which you ask the questions. The purpose is to learn, not to get a job. It is one of the best sources for gathering information about what's happening in an occupation/industry directly from people working in the field. You can conduct information interviews to:

- Discover unadvertised employment opportunities
- Expand your network and obtain names of new contacts in your field
- Build confidence for job interviews and further cold calling
- Determine current and future trends in your industry
- Identify your strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the field

If you have asked someone for an information interview, don't ask for a job, although you can certainly ask for their opinion about employment prospects in general. Information Interview Steps:

1. Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry and prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered.
2. If you can contact someone through a referral, that is helpful. If you are cold calling, write a brief telephone script describing your background and reason for the call.
3. Contact professional organizations. Use the yellow pages, and business directories to compile a list of companies or organizations; contact them if necessary to obtain the name and title of the best person with whom to speak. Try to contact someone doing the kind of work you would like to be doing.
4. Contact the person to set up an interview. Ask for 15 minutes of their time for a meeting to help you gather information. Tell them you are looking for career information - not for a job.
5. Research the organization so you can make some questions very specific. Keep in mind, the person you see will be evaluating your professionalism (communication skills, knowledge, etc.) as well.
6. Dress as if you were going to a real job interview. Arrive on time, be polite and professional (even if you are conducting the interview by phone).
7. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion.
8. Before leaving/ending, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these individuals.
9. Don't go over your time.
10. Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a thank-you note to your contact within a day or two after the interview.
11. If the contact person offers to keep in touch, then make sure you do!