

INTERVIEWING RESOURCE GUIDE



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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW?

The purpose of an interview is to persuade an employer that you have the needed qualifications, background, and ability to be a successful employee. The interviewer also wants to ensure that your personality will be an appropriate fit for the organization. While you must be qualified for the position, the interviewer is also measuring your interpersonal skills, communicative ability, personality, and the confidence you exude.

During the interview process, you should be attentively listening and gathering information about the company or organization. You, therefore, can ask appropriate questions and truly see if the position matches your personality, qualifications, and career direction.

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT INTERVIEW TYPES?

Phone Interview: Common for jobs that are out-of-state. These positions attract many applicants and require superior verbal communicative skills and a strong telephone demeanor.

Screening Interview: Narrows down a relatively large number of likely candidates to a smaller list of possibilities. Companies use screening tools to ensure that candidates meet minimum qualifications. The interviewer's primary goal is not to determine whether you are the best candidate for the position. The interviewer is instead seeking to eliminate candidates who do not meet the qualifications.

Directive Style: The interviewer has a clear agenda that he or she follows. Interviewers ask each candidate the same series of questions. This technique allows them to more easily compare results.

Meandering Style: Relies on the candidate to lead the conversation during the interview. The interviewer asks open-ended questions like "tell me about yourself;" the candidate controls the interview.

Stress Interview: Designed to see whether you have the ability to withstand the company culture, the clients, or potential stress. You might face long silences by the interviewer; the interviewer might openly challenge your answers.

Behavioral Interview: A technique that focuses on demonstrated behaviors as the best evidence of future performance. Open-ended questions are asked to see how you acted in previous situations.

The Audition: Tests how you'd perform on the job by having you perform as part of your interview. The interviewer devises a simulation to gain a clearer picture of your likely job performance.

Group Interview: An interview with other candidates, which shows a glimpse of how you interact with peers. The interviewer might call on you to discuss an issue with the other candidates or discuss your qualifications in front of them.

Tag-Team Interview: You are interviewed by a group of individuals from the company. They usually alternate in asking questions. This interviewing method is often attractive for companies that rely on team cooperation.

Mealtime Interview: An interview over a meal. Particularly when the company desires an individual with superior interpersonal skills, the interviewer will conduct a mealtime interview to see how you act in a social setting.

Informational Interview: An interview you initiate. It is an opportunity to learn firsthand about a particular career by speaking with someone who works in the profession.

HOW TO PREPARE BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- **Do advance research on the company:** You should be familiar with the employer before the interview. This preparation will allow you to be educated about the position and ask questions when prompted by the interviewer. Employer research can be conducted with the following resources: company websites, The

Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Fortune, and the Chamber of Commerce. Additional helpful websites include: www.salary.com and www.hoovers.com. Current news about employers is often found in the Business Section of any local newspaper. Company information is also available on www.louisvilleworks.com

- **Questions to consider when doing research on a company:**
 - What does this company do?
 - How long has it been in the area?
 - Does it have other offices, stores, or locations?
 - How has the company been doing recently?
 - What kind of positions does it have available?
- **Bring extra copies of your resume:** The interviewer might want to give copies of your resume to other hiring personnel. You also might be in an interview with more than one interviewer.
- **On the day of the interview, know where you're going and arrive 10-15 minutes early:** If you're unfamiliar with the area, you should practice the driving route prior to the interview. Be sure to always give yourself additional time! You can never be sure about parking and traffic.
- **Be sure to take a professional looking padfolio containing a pen and paper.**
- **Have reference names and contact information.** Refer to resume packet for information on how to compose a reference sheet.

HOW SHOULD YOU DRESS DURING THE INTERVIEW?

First impressions are critical in an interview. Your appearance is the first observable factor an employer will see. To be successful, do the following:

General Guidelines

- Avoid trendy fashions
- Hide body art and tattoos
- No perfume/cologne
- Conservative makeup
- Neat hair
- No jeans/sweats
- Pressed clothing
- Minimal jewelry

Women

Acceptable dress includes:

- A skirted suit, pantsuit or conservative dress.
(Go to Louisville.dressforsuccess.org or call 502-584-8050 for Dress for Success Louisville.)
- Skirts should be knee-length or longer. Avoid pants that are too tight. No Capri pants.
- No spaghetti strap or sleeveless shirts.
- Avoid shirts that are too tight fitting, have low necklines, or revealing waistlines.
- Always wear plain-style, non-patterned hose to interviews.
- Wear flat shoes or low pumps in colors that avoid making your feet a focal point.
- Avoid open-toed shoes; they are inappropriate for interviews.

Men

Acceptable dress includes:

- Conservative dark navy or gray two-piece business suit. (Go to www.calky.org or call 502-589-6620 for the First Impressions Men's Suit Program.)
- If you do not own a suit, then you should wear a conservative dress shirt (always collared) and nicely pressed slacks.
- Wear conservative, clean, and polished shoes.
- A short hair cut and no facial hair is expected.

Much of this information was gathered from Washington State University's website. Remember that each industry or career field has different standards of professional dress for the interview. What is appropriate in one career field may possibly be inappropriate in another industry. If in doubt of how to dress appropriately, then ask an individual in that career field, a Career Counselor, or contact the company.

HOW SHOULD YOU ACT DURING THE INTERVIEW?

- Turn off your cell phone before the interview.
- Have a positive attitude and be optimistic.
- Provide a firm handshake and make eye contact when greeting the employer.
- Sit still and upright in your chair.
- When asked a question, be thoughtful about your answer.
- Give specific examples to support your answers.
- Don't get personal in the interview.
- Never bring up salary.
- Thank the interviewer for his/her time and find out when you may get back to the interviewer.
- Ask for the employer's Business Card. You can use this to write your thank-you letter at the conclusion of the interview.

TWO-MINUTE PRESENTATION

What is a two-minute presentation and why is it important?

A two-minute presentation is what you will respond with when the interviewer asks you "Tell me a little bit about yourself." It is long enough to keep the attention of the interviewer while also giving just enough information about you. The interviewer can take notes and ask follow-up questions for additional information. This is the time to make your "sales call!"

As you create your Two-Minute Presentation, review your skills and consider what employers want. Studying job descriptions will provide you with specific skills and strengths to include in your presentation! You will include:

- Your career objective
- Related past work experiences
- Strengths/abilities/skills
- What you can offer the company
- Include specific accomplishments
- How the position fits with your career goals
- Why you are interested with the specific company

Samples—TWO-MINUTE PRESENTATION

Example 1: Steve is looking for a marketing position. He is a recent college graduate with limited experience. The company is looking for someone who is energetic, organized, and has experience in the marketing field, specifically someone who can think creatively to reach new markets. They also need someone with excellent communication, problem-solving and negotiating skills.

“I recently completed a Bachelor’s degree in Marketing. As part of my program, I conducted an internship where I worked as a public relations/marketing representative (**related past work experiences**). This position allowed me to gain experience with planning and marketing, problem-solving, and working with people at all levels (**skills**). Some of my strengths include excellent organizational skills, communicating with customers and vendors, and targeting new customers or markets to achieve sales goals (**strengths**). I believe I could benefit your company by using a customer-oriented approach to negotiate new accounts and exceed profit goals (**how to improve company**). I am looking for an opportunity to use the skills I have acquired to continue to serve customers while using my high-energy and creativity to reach new markets and increase sales (**objective**). I am eager to work for this company because of the vast clientele you serve and your reputation for excellence (**why you are interested in the company**).”

Example 2: Julie is looking for a clerical position. She has 5 years experience as a secretary. The company is looking for someone who is professional, computer savvy and customer-service oriented. They must be able to multi-task in a fast-paced environment and enjoy interacting with the public.

“I am looking for a position that allows me to use my clerical experience and customer service skills (**objective**). I have worked as a secretary for over 5 years and enjoy the fast-paced work schedule the field offers (**related past work experiences**). I am highly skilled in MS office and can type 70 WPM (**skills**). An accomplishment I am proud of is completing an Office System Technology certificate, which has allowed me to be more productive and efficient (**accomplishment**). My strengths include a friendly customer-service oriented approach with clients and the ability to multi-task and consistently complete tasks ahead of schedule (**strengths**). I can offer this company a professional presence

at all times and the knowledge to streamline and simplify office procedures (**how to improve a company**). My goal is to obtain a position that will allow me to continue to expand my knowledge of office systems and further my education in the office management field (**career goals**).”

POPULAR QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE INTERVIEW

1. **What can you tell me about yourself?** Don't give the interviewer your life history. Instead, specify how your related past work experiences/skills relate to the position. Refer to the two-minute presentation section.
2. **Why should we hire you?** This question is critical. You should emphasize in what ways you will be a value to the organization.
3. **What are your major strengths?** The interviewer is looking for you to emphasize your skills, especially your adaptive skills. Adaptive skills are defined as personality traits such as honesty, dependability, and enthusiasm.
4. **What are your major weaknesses?** This is a hard question for many job seekers to answer. The interviewer wants to know that you are aware of your weak points and in what ways you are working to overcome them. A helpful hint would be to articulate a weakness that is also a strength.

For Example: “I'm a perfectionist which is sometimes problematic with my co-workers, but I always want our finished product to be of high quality.”

You can also use the following tips from an article on CNN.Money.com entitled “What's your greatest weakness? 3 smart replies” by Anne Fisher:

- **Focus the discussion on how you have improved over time.** Instead of hashing over a current weakness (assuming you can think of one), talk about a past shortcoming and how you resolved it. Maybe you used to have trouble meeting deadlines, for instance, until you took a time-management course that helped you get your schedule under control. "The idea is to show that you are interested in getting better and better at what you do," says Dattner.
- **Talk about how the job you're applying for will help you stretch and build your skills.** Again, no matter how good you already are, you can always improve - and you may see specific ways in which this particular job will help you do that. If so, the interview is a good time to mention it.
- **Describe a valuable piece of advice someone gave you, and how it has helped your career.** “This could be, for example, a boss who once told you not to give people the answers but to let them figure things out on their own,” says Dattner. “Or maybe a mentor once pointed out to you that not everyone is motivated by the same things you are, and that insight helped you become a better manager.” “Whatever the pearl of wisdom you received, a willingness to talk about its effect on you "shows that you want to learn and grow,” Dattner notes. “And that's really what hiring managers are trying to find out.”

5. **What are your short/long-term goals?** The interviewer wants to see that you have considered plans for your future. Outline your career objectives before the interview!

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AN INTERVIEWER MAY ASK

- How did your education prepare you for this position?
- What is your greatest accomplishment?
- What do you know about this field?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a position?
- What do you know about our company?
- How well do you accept criticism?
- What is the most difficult decision you have ever had to make?
- How do you handle stressful situations?
- Where do you see yourself in three years? Five years?
- What did you like best/least about your last position?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

1. Give an example of an instance when you had to deal with frequent changes or unexpected events on the job (or at school).
2. Describe a situation in which you had to draw a conclusion quickly and take speedy action.
3. Tell about a time when your ability to listen helped you communicate better.
4. Give an example of when one of your ideas was well received by others.
5. Tell about a time when you were particularly driven and highly motivated. (school or work)
6. Tell about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person at work.
7. Describe a time when you had to say something difficult or unpleasant to your employer or professor.

When answering behavioral based questions, use the **S.T.A.R.** method (**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction taken, and **R**esult). For example, if the interviewer asks you, “Tell me about a time when you had to handle an angry customer,” your response could be:

“When I was working at a department store, a customer was mad about our return policy. I listened to the customer express her frustration, and calmly explained to her why the company has this policy. I then offered her the opportunity to exchange the item. She was still angry because she wanted to return the item. I called my manager for assistance and he was able to make a special consideration for the customer, allowing her to return the item. The customer was happy and my manager was proud of the way I professionally handled the situation.”

EXAMPLES OF INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

Examples of inappropriate and/or illegal questions:

- Age (“What year did you graduate from high school?”)
- Disability/Medical History
- Race
- Marital Status (“Do you have a spouse?”)
- Religious preferences (“Where do you go to church?”)
- Country of origin (“What country are you from?”)

You can ask the interviewer (if the question is inappropriate) “Does this have job relevancy?” or “is your question relevant to the job?” You want to steer the interviewer away from inappropriate questions. A great way to do that is to bring attention to your skills/qualifications.

QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

You should always prepare questions to ask employers. Do not ask questions that are clearly stated on the employer’s website or in company literature. This would only show that you have not done previous research on the company. Instead, ask strong, probing questions. These will demonstrate that you have studied the company and are sincerely interested in working for them. It is appropriate to type or write these questions down ahead of time and use them as a reference tool during the interview. The following are some sample questions to consider:

- Could you explain your organizational structure?
- Can you describe the work environment at this company?
- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- What skills are especially important for someone in this position?
- Could you describe your company’s management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom?
- What particular computer equipment and software do you use?
- What is the company’s policy on providing seminars, workshops, and training so employees can keep up their skills or acquire new ones?
- How would you characterize the organization? What are its principal values? What are its greatest challenges?
- How much guidance or assistance is made available to individuals developing career goals?
- How do you like your employees to communicate with you?
- May I have a business card? (This ensures that you will use the correct address and spelling of the interviewer’s name in your thank you note).
- When do you expect to make a decision concerning this position?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- **Send a thank-you note immediately after the interview.**
- In your thank-you note, refer to specific details about the interview.
- Remind the potential employer of your qualifications.

- Include any key information you forgot to bring to the employer’s attention during the interview.
- A thank-you note serves to confirm your interest in the company and shows appreciation for the interview.
- The thank-you note can either be typed or handwritten. If you know the company is going to make a quick decision about the candidate or if you have poor handwriting, then go ahead and email the letter. Under any other circumstance, handwrite the letter because it is more personal.

SALARY

www.Salaryexpert.com

- **Never initiate salary discussions.** This can give the employer the impression that your main interest is money, instead of the position and the company. Allow the employer to initiate this topic.
- When you state your salary expectations, first tell the employer that you are interested in the position, the company and the opportunities they are offering you. Reiterate your skills and experience. Provide the employer your salary range and state that it is based on your knowledge of the field. You may want to bring up cost of living expenses and if you have above average credentials.
- **Research how much your position earns** and give the employer a range. Example: \$23,000-\$25,000. You may want to reply by asking them to give you the salary range for the position first.
- If you are asked to supply your salary expectations or current salary prior to the interview, state that your salary is negotiable and that you will disclose this information during the interview.
- Salary is negotiable and based on education, experience, type of benefits package offered and job responsibilities. Assume the first offer is negotiable and state that you will get back to them with a decision. Talk to someone who is knowledgeable about salary and benefits packages for a second opinion.

EXAMPLE THANK-YOU NOTE AFTER INTERVIEW

Your Name
 Address
 City, State Zip Code
 Phone Number

Today’s Date

Name of Person who interviewed you
 Their title
 Name of company
 Address
 City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. (last name of person who interviewed you):

Thank you for discussing the Customer Service/Sales Representative position with me today. I believe this position matches my personality, abilities, and interests and I want to express my continued interest in the job.

In the interview you mentioned that the person in this position must be energetic, outgoing, and a problem solver. I hope that you were able to witness these qualities in me during our meeting, as well as my positive attitude and desire to learn all that I can from your company.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (your phone number) should you need further information from me. I am very excited at the opportunity to join your team.

Sincerely,

Sign your name here

Type your name here