

How to Prepare

Interviewing is a skill – as with all skills, preparation and practice improve the quality of that skill. Therefore, the correct preparation can make the difference between getting an offer and getting rejected.

Know Yourself

In order to have a successful interview, you must first take the time to review yourself – this includes your traits, skills, experience, accomplishments and goals. The interviewer only knows you by your resume, so this is the time to sell what you have accomplished in the past and what you are going to achieve in the future.

Employers are looking to hire successful people. They are specifically wanting to know what accomplishments you made in your role. That is, they already know what your previous positions entailed or what classes you took – so, touch briefly on this. They are wanting to know things like how you made your last organization better or if you received any awards on your way to your degree.

Helpful Tip

The minute you start something new (class, internship, job, campus organization, etc.), start keeping track of your accomplishments. Log them in a notebook, computer, tape recorder, or smart phone. By doing this, you will be able to relate back to this list when you are preparing for an interview.

Another aspect of knowing yourself is having an accurate assessment of your personal qualities and skills. Every position requires specific qualities and skills in order to be successful (you can always find these on the job posting). So, it is a great idea to understand your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to these two areas. Take a look at these qualities and skills:

Qualities

- Effecting Team Member
- Resourceful
- Proven Work Ethic
- Responsible/Reliable
- Goal Oriented
- Competitive
- Quality Oriented
- Persevering
- Enthusiastic/Energetic
- Demonstrative Initiative

Skills

- Implement
- Motivate
- Sell/Promote
- Create/Develop
- Communicate Effectively
- Teach/Train
- Analyze
- Administer/Manage

Are you strong in any of these areas? Research more qualities and skills to narrow your list down to your top 4 or 5 from each category. Next, think of examples of how you have exhibited these in your past experience and use these examples to prepare and use during your interview.

Research the Company

Perhaps the most important task that you will need to complete prior to your interview is the research the company. During your interview, you can really stand out (positively and negatively) by showing how much or how little you have researched the company. This simply does not mean to log onto their webpage for a few minutes and call it a day. This means dedicated, thorough research. So, what are some of the main areas to focus on?

- Primary product/service and its history
- Specific details of the job you are interviewing for
- Headquarter location
- Typical clients and/or customers
- Organizational culture
- Competitors and standing in the marketplace

You can locate this information many different ways (besides searching the internet): company website, newspaper articles, business magazines, LinkedIn, Chambers of Commerce, or [Career Shift](#).

Prepare Your Questions

At some point during your interview, you will be asked this question, *“Do you have any questions for me?”* This is not the time to ask how much money you will make or how much vacation time you will have. This is the time to show off your research and assess whether the position and organization is the right fit for you.

In order to ask the right questions, you must first know **why** you are asking questions in the first place. By asking questions, it allows you to learn more about the position and organization. They show that you have legitimate interest, preparedness, and aspiration to succeed. Finally,

solid questions reveal your knowledge of the position and allow you to create a connection with the interviewer.

Another step to asking successful questions is determining **how** to ask your questions. Your questions should be tailored to you and not from a list of generic list. Also, do not ask questions that could easily be answered on the organization's website or job description – this will prove that you did not spend that much time on your research. Remember who is interviewing you – managers and supervisors will know different aspects of the position compared to a human resource representative, and vice-versa.

So, you now know why you ask questions and how you ask those questions. Next, you must determine **what** questions to ask. Always prepare at least 4-6 questions to ask during your interview. Often, a few of these questions will be answered during the process of the interview, so it is best to have more than a one or two. Also, if a discussion triggers a question that you have or have not thought of, ask it then – you may not remember to ask the question at the end of the interview. Try not to focus on position specific questions – make sure to have broad organization questions, too.

Below are examples of questions that you could ask during your interview. Use these questions outright and/or adapt these questions to your own interests and concerns.

The Company

1. What challenges do you see your company facing in the next few years?
2. Can you describe the company culture for me?
3. What are the organization's strengths?
4. What opportunities do you foresee in the next few years?
5. How are you planning on increasing market share? When you do so, how will you maintain your high level of customer service?

Example: I recently read in the Wall Street Journal that a major competitor was moving into one of your main markets – how do you think your organization is going to react?

Example: With the way millennials are influencing the market today, how do you see your company staying in front of your closest competitor?

The Position

1. What are the three most common traits of successful people in this position?
2. What are some of the barriers that I may face in this position – how do you think I could best address them?
3. What are the main objectives and responsibilities of this position?
4. Can you describe a typical day in this position?
5. Is this a new position? If not, was the previous person promoted?
6. How many people would I supervise? To whom would I report?

7. What improvements do you think people in this position need to make in order to better the position?

Example: After reading over your company website, I noticed that interns play a big role in your operations – what are some of the projects that interns have completed in the past?

Education, Training, and Performance

1. Describe the training process for this position.
2. Are there additional training programs/workshops available to employees?
3. Does the organization support further education for its employees?
4. How will my performance be evaluated?

Example: Do you have a mentor program for new employees? That is, is there someone for new hires to lean on during their transition period?

Example: I read that your company initiates a three month training program – how do you evaluate the employee's performance during this period?

The Interviewer

1. What do you enjoy most about working for this company?
2. Can you tell me how your career has advanced with this organization?
3. How would you describe your management style?

Example: You mentioned that you started in this position when you first joined this company – what were some of the things that you did to stand out positively?

The Process

1. What is the next step in the process?
2. Are there any other questions that you may have for me?
3. When do you expect for this person to begin this role?

Example: Thank you so for your time today. I think we had a great meeting and I look forward to making an impact on your team. What would you anticipate as the start date?

How to Dress

To demonstrate that you take the interview process seriously, appropriate attire is needed. Unless you are told otherwise, always dress up for the interview. Your clothing should be conservative and well-fitting and appropriate for the position you are seeking. Also, after your interview is completed, you should not be remembered for your attire – typically that is not a good thing!

Business Professional: Men

- Suit: Dark, solid color (black, gray, or blue) – can include faint pinstripes.
- Shirt: White or blue long-sleeved dress shirt.
- Tie: Conservative pattern and color.
- Footwear: Professional leather lace-up shoes and dark socks that match your suit.
- Grooming: Neat, professional hairstyle and fresh shave. Avoid cologne or aftershave.
- Jewelry: Keep to minimum. Watch and wedding/class ring. Piercings may not be viewed positively.

Business Professional: Women

- Suit: Dark, solid color (black, gray, or blue) – can include faint pinstripes. If wearing a skirt, it should be knee-length – avoid high slits.
- Shirt/Blouse: Coordinated with suit, but remain conservative.
- Footwear: Avoid open-toed shoes. Neutral hosiery with basic pumps or low heels.
- Jewelry: Less is better – avoid dangling earrings.
- Grooming: Conservative make-up (minimal eye make-up). Professional hairstyle and light perfume (if any). Clear or light nail polish.

It is best to prepare and try on your outfit a few days in advance of your interview. By doing this, it will ensure that you will have enough time to make any needed adjustments. If no adjustments are needed, it will then be one less thing to stress over the day of your interview. Make sure your clothes are neatly ironed or dry-cleaned for your interview.

Helpful Tips

If you are unsure of how to dress for your interview, call and speak with the secretary or an HR representative – they will be glad to tell you. Also, after your interview, take your outfit to the dry-cleaner. That way, it will be ready for your next go-around.

Interview Day

On the day of your interview, plan on arriving 10-15 minutes early. Be sure to know exactly where you are going and take into consideration these factors: traffic, parking, time zone differences. Arriving early also provides you with a few moments to review your research material and questions (do this in your car – not in the lobby).

Interview Items – These things should be brought with you to your interview. They should be stored in an organized, professional portfolio.

- Academic Transcripts
- Copies of Resume (5-10)

- List of References
- Pen and Paper

When meeting the person you are interviewing with for the first time, be sure to smile and show enthusiasm. Always give a firm handshake and introduce yourself with confidence. Be sure to keep eye contact and watch out for harmful body language – folded arms, looking at your watch or the door, shaking your leg, fiddling with a pen, etc.