

HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW

Interviews can feel intimidating. In an interview, you are being asked to tell a collection of stories about times when you have demonstrated the skills required to do the job you are applying for.

If you have been selected for an interview, the chances are, the employer wants to hear more about the experiences you have outlined on your resume. Remember:

- focus on the needs of the company instead of your own when answering any job interview question.
- Every one of your answers should be “tailored” to the company you are interviewing with.
- NEVER say anything negative about your past employers or experiences. We grow from every experience we have. No one wants to hire a person that speaks negatively about former employers in an interview setting. Focus on what you learned from your previous experiences, even if what you learned is that you would like to try something better suited to your expanded skill set.

Here are six pointers to be successful:

1. Start preparing for any interview by carefully reviewing the job description.

The job duties responsibilities and required skills section will tell you the skills the employer is looking for you to demonstrate. You can anticipate the questions you will be asked, by reviewing the job description.

(This is why it is important to save copies of: job descriptions of the jobs you apply for, the resume you used to apply, and your cover letter. [Trello.com](https://trello.com) is a great, free, digital dashboard that can help you track your job search progress and refer back to when contacted for an interview.)

2. Do your research and learn as much as possible about the company you are applying to.

Go to the company’s website, learn about what they do. Also try to look at industry trends and what competing companies are doing.

3. Practice speaking out loud your responses to the most common interview questions (attached).

It is best to plan and practice your answers ahead of time. Practicing will greatly reduce your stress level once you are in the interview and allow you to perform your best.

Reach out to a career counselor, alum, and/or mentor to practice these questions with. Practicing in front of others can be helpful. The “just wing it” approach usually backfires. The more you practice the better you will do!

4. Research industry specific questions.

Each company will ask additional questions that are specific to the industry they work in and that show a mastery of the skills they list as requirements on the job description and a general knowledge of the industry. As an example:

Business industries: tend to ask “skill based behavioral questions” to identify skills in the following categories: Interpersonal Skills, Communication Skills, Initiative, Creativity/Innovation, Leadership, Planning & Organization, Flexibility, Decision-making.

Computer Science Majors: will often be given technical interviews, at which they will be given a problem and asked to solve it.

IxD Majors: will often be asked to present a case study.

Childcare: will ask about your experience with children and behavior management.

Where to find additional interview questions:

- Google Search additional questions for the job title or company you are applying for to be properly prepared.
- www.glassdoor.com tends to be a good resource when looking into what to expect at interviews for specific companies.
- Ask someone such as: a faculty member, career counselor, or anyone you know currently working in the industry.

5. Prepare for the interview the night before.

- a. **Have your interview clothing selected:** Black pants and a dress shirt are always a safe choice. Suits are generally not required unless you are interviewing for a finance position.



- **Bring a folder with the following items:**

- The address and directions to get to the interview location. If it is an unfamiliar location, you should try to make the commute before the day of the interview. A test run will ensure you will be able to arrive early to your interview on the actual interview day.
- The names you have been given of the people you are meeting with.
- At least two extra copies of your resume, cover letter, and references.
- A blank sheet of paper and a pen to make notes after the interview.
- You may also include a cheat sheet of the questions you want to ask the employer. Only glance at the sheet at the end of the interview if necessary. You are there to interact, and reading off of a paper can feel contrived and impersonal.

6. Interview day

It is ok to be a little nervous in an interview, everyone is! Try to forget about your nerves and stay focused on your goal.

- **Stay calm:** Try listening to your favorite songs or calling your best friends for a pep talk the morning of the interview to calm your nerves.
- **Arrive Early:** It is highly recommended to arrive 15 minutes early to the interview. The last thing you want is the stress of racing against the clock. You want to be as relaxed as possible.
- **Be courteous and professional to everyone:** While you are waiting to be interviewed, it is best to review resume, rather than be on your cell phone. The staff assisting you at check in will notice your actions and professionalism and report them to the interviewer. You want to appear professional and focused to all members of the prospective employers company.

7. During the interview

- Make sure your cell phone is turned off.
- Make sure you are not chewing gum or playing with your hair.
- Think of yourself as a problem solving partner with your interviewer and have a relaxed conversation.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification on a question.
- Be confident, engaged and enthusiastic.
- At the end ask for business cards or write down the names and titles of anyone that interviews you, so you can follow up with a thank you note for each interviewer.*
- Ask what the next steps are and when you should follow up.
- Thank the interviewers for their time at the end of the interview, and then you can go home and celebrate. You will have just survived your interview!

*For tips on writing thank you notes: https://www.job-hunt.org/job_interviews/sample-interview-thank-you-email.shtml

TOP 7 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS*

1. "TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF..."

What they want to know: What education and experience do you have that will help you be successful at this job

DO:

- Have a 60 second pitch prepared that tells the interviewer where you are now professionally, what you have learned from your past work experiences and talk about what makes you excited about this specific opportunity.
- Do your company research and find out exactly what strengths and qualities this specific company is looking for and in your answer try and show the hiring manager you possess them (You can discover these strengths or qualities in the job description or on their website.)

DON'T:

- Don't dive into your life story.
- Don't go on about experience that is unrelated to the job you're interviewing for.

2. "WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?"

What they want to know: What education and experience do you have that will help you be successful at this job

DO:

- Research what problems you will have to solve in this position. Tell a "success story" that highlights how you have the 'qualities' needed to fill their specific needs.
- Show you know some significant details about the company because you have researched them and are prepared.

DON'T:

- Don't be too modest or too arrogant.
- Don't answer with "why" you want the job. Answer with "why you are the perfect fit" for the job.

3. "WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH?"

DO:

- Find out from the job description what strengths the company would like you to have.
- Highlight a strength that is crucial to the position by telling a related success story.

DON'T:

- Don't make claims that you can't illustrate with a brief example or fact.
- Don't name a strength that is irrelevant to the job at hand.

4. "WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESS?"

DO:

- Truly take the time to explore your weakness. Show that you are "self-aware" and that you have the ability to take steps to improve yourself. Be able to provide specific examples to lend credibility to your statement.
- Give an example of a minor weakness, that is not related to the core requirements of the job and tell a story of what you have done to overcome it.
- Some questions you may explore to identify weakness: Are you assertive, aggressive, direct, shy, afraid to speak up? Do you beat around the bush or get right to the point? Do you delegate tasks? Do you give direction, do you take direction? Do you work best alone or with others? Are you experienced with public speaking?

DON'T:

- Don't answer with the cliché "I'm a perfectionist" answer or any other such answer that the hiring manager can see right through.
- Don't highlight a weakness that is a core competency of the job. (Know the job description "inside and out".)

5. "WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK FOR US?"

What they want to know: What you know about the company, their values, the projects they are working on and the industry they are in.

DO:

- Talk about specific things you like about the company. Do your homework before and find out the needs of the company and talk about how you're passionate about "fulfilling those needs".
- Show how your strengths and interests perfectly align with the job position and company culture.
- You may also bring up something specific that you've found during your company research phase and tie it in with your answer.

For example: if you discovered that they recently held an inaugural live event bringing together people from around the country in their niche, bring it up! The event (or anything else interesting you discover) can be an example of why you admire the company and want to work for them. This tactic will help you stand out from your competitors and get the hiring manager seeing you in the job already.

DON'T:

- Don't come off as a "hired gun" who may be gone in a few months.
- Don't say "because I need the money." (You'd be surprised how many job seekers think this is "cute" and actually answer this way. Don't.)

6. "DESCRIBE A DIFFICULT WORK SITUATION AND WHAT YOU DID TO OVERCOME IT..."

What they want to know: Are you a solution oriented, team player. How do you work on a team, how do you solve problems?

DO:

- Tell a success story that shows you handling a problem that could arise in the position you're interviewing for.
For example: you could tell a problem solving story about you handling a productivity problem at your last job by exhibiting leadership and your ability to handle conflict between coworkers. (This answer combines multiple desired qualities into one answer.)

DON'T:

- Don't bash anyone in your success story. (Coworker, boss or customer!)
- Don't ramble.

7. "DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR ME?"**DO:**

- ALWAYS have a few questions prepared and focus your questions on the company and what you can do for them.
- Ask about something you've discovered in your company research. This will show your passion and knowledge of the company.
- Some good general questions you may consider asking:
 - What accomplishments would make an employee successful in the first year of this position?
 - What are the best/most difficult aspects of working in this group/organization?
 - What's the biggest challenge facing this group/organization right now?
 - What are your plans for expansion in terms of product lines, services, new branches, etc.?
 - How would you describe this organization's management style?
 - Ask if they have any further questions about your qualifications for this position. (This allows you to address something they may be thinking in their head but haven't brought up.)
 - What is the person who was last in this position doing now?
 - Always ask what the next steps are and when you should follow up.

DON'T:

- Never say "No, I think I'm good." Always have questions ready!
- Don't ask questions about salary, benefits or time off until an offer has been extended.
- Don't focus your questions on yourself and what you can get from them.
- Don't ask questions that you could easily find the answer to.
- Don't ask how soon you can start applying for other positions in the company.
- Don't ask if they have a reason they won't hire you. Keep them focused on what you do have not what you don't have.

* the bulk of the content is from: <http://theinterviewguys.com/top-10-job-interview-questions/> by Jeff Gillis and <https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-answer-the-31-most-common-interview-questions> by The Daily Muse Editor.