

Preparing for the Interview

So you're a little nervous. Okay, you're very nervous. That's to be expected. Fortunately, there's plenty of preparation you can do before the interview to boost your self-confidence and ensure you make the best first impression possible.

Keep in mind that a good interview is a win-win. Your goals are to learn more about the company, job and culture to see if they are a good fit for you, and to persuade the interviewer that you are the best candidate for the job. The interviewer's goals are to promote the company and gather information about you. Everyone has something to gain from a good interview. The following tips will help make your interviews a success.

Nail Down the Details

Double-check the interview time, location and the interviewer's name and title. Scout out the address and parking options in advance.

Dress for Success

Plan to dress formally, in clean, properly-fitting business clothes. If you can, investigate acceptable business attire at the company and dress accordingly. Style your hair neatly. Make sure your shoes are clean and polished. Wear a watch and be conservative with your jewelry.

Do Your Homework

Conduct research about the company and the position you are interested in. Check the company's website and annual report. Prepare questions you'd like to ask the interviewer about the company's philosophy, aspects of the job you are applying for and what the company requires of its employees.

Prepare Your Answers

Give yourself a competitive edge by being able to provide well-organized, confident answers in the interview. You can prepare for many of the interview questions in advance by:

- Reviewing your own experience and employers.
- Reviewing your technical skills, so you can answer specific technical questions about your expertise. Assessing your strengths. Make a list of your strengths by category: Knowledge-based skills from education and experience; communication skills and other transferable skills you take to each job; and your unique personal attributes. Memorize several from each category based on the strengths your employer will need.
- Examining your weaknesses. Make a list of your areas for improvement. Practice answers that minimize the area and focus on ways you handle that weakness.
- Preparing your "elevator speech." Have a short, concise response ready about reasons you want the job, and ways you can make a difference at the company.
- Demonstrating your "fit" with short stories about your accomplishments.

Anticipate Positive/Negative and Neutral Questions

Practice listening carefully to whether a question prompts an automatic positive or negative response. Turn the negative and neutral questions into positive examples.

Positive Questions

- What are your strengths?
- What can you contribute to our company?

(Please see the back for more details.)



- What are your most significant accomplishments?
- Why do you think you are qualified for this position?
- Why have you been successful?
- Describe the ideal position for you.
- Tell me about a situation in which you felt very effective on the job.
- In what type of business environment do you function best?

Negative Questions

- What are your weaknesses?
- Tell me about a work situation where you felt ineffective.
- What didn't you like about your last position (manager) (company)?
- What is the biggest mistake you have made in your career?
- Tell me how you have handled a difficult peer (manager) (subordinate).
- What criticisms have supervisors had about your work style?
- What type of business environment makes it most difficult for you to function?
- Why did you leave your last position? (Be brief, consistent, and stick to a pre-determined, positive reason for leaving).

Neutral Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- How do you communicate with managers/peers/subordinates?
- How do you handle pressure?
- What are your salary requirements and expectations? (Give a range, not a specific figure. Leave room to negotiate after the position is offered. Make it clear that salary is not the main reason you are interested.)
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What is important for me to know about you?
- What is the key thing you have learned in your management career?
- How do you set priorities?

What NOT to Ask

Demonstrate your professionalism during the interview by avoiding:

- Personal questions about your interviewers, such as how they got their job, or what they think of the company.
- The interviewer's opinion of a former employee.
- Politics or religion, unless the position is of a political or religious nature.

Wait to ask about company retirement plans, vacations, bonuses and holidays until you have received an offer or are in the process of negotiating an offer.

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