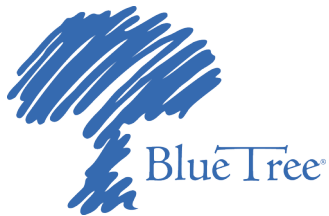


Comprehensive Interview Preparation Tips

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Preparing for the Interview

Dress For Success

- Dark, conservative two-piece suit; white shirt or blouse
- Freshly polished, scuff-free shoes, dark socks
- Modest earrings, rings on one finger only and a simple watch
- No perfume or cologne
- “Quiet” tie

Practice

- A sincere smile
- A firm but gentle handshake
- Good eye contact
- “Hi, I’m _____. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”
- Good posture

Arrival Time

- Do a final check in the mirror in the restroom
- Don’t be late
- Don’t be too early; 5-10 minutes is good

Research The Company (The Internet is a great source)

Your research should answer the following questions:

- What products and services does the employer provide?
- What is the company's reputation in the industry for its products and services?
- Who are its competitors?
- What are the common industry problems?
- What are the major events/activities for this company in the last year?
- What is a realistic and desired salary target? Be clear about a minimum offer.
- A list of your skills and knowledge that match the position.
- A list of three to five specific questions you want to know about the employer.
- A list of three ways you can make a contribution to the employer.
- Anticipate the negative aspects of your background and prepare positive answers.

Interview Do's

- Control the interview by answering questions with well-prepared answers and ask the interviewer a prepared question of your own to demonstrate that you have done your homework on the company.
- Maintain sincere eye contact, good posture and body language. Remember to smile sincerely.
- Make sure you have a firm but gentle handshake.
- Dress conservatively.
- Let the employer know you would be a valued employee because of your good work habits.
- Be attentive and alert.
- Go into the interview remembering you are also interviewing the company.
- Relax and keep your cool, even if the interviewer doesn't.
- Avoid controversy.
- Arrive on time. Under no circumstances be late. Don't arrive too early—ten minutes is exactly the right amount.
- Be polite and respectful to the receptionist.
- If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- Talk in positive terms. Keep your doubts to yourself.
- Eat a balanced snack about one hour before the meeting.
- Prepare good news for questions about your private life.
- Compliment the interviewer about his/her office, pleasant receptionist, etc.
- Conduct a final check in the restroom mirror before you walk into the office—hair, smile, teeth, hemline, buttons, etc.
- Use the interviewer's name.

Interview Don'ts - Never Ever

- Never complain about anything—not the weather, the parking, your industry, your former employer or your personal problems.
- Avoid discussions of money until you receive a tentative job offer.
- Don't act “buddy-buddy” or personal with anyone at the company.
- Don't drop names.
- Don't be late.
- Don't chew gum, eat or smoke—even if the interviewer does.
- Don't wear perfume.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't jump in quickly to give an obvious answer.
- Don't tell any jokes.
- Don't be flip.
- Don't get hostile or uppity if you are asked an illegal question. Answer as pleasantly as possible.
- Don't trash their competition.
- Don't wear sunglasses, an overcoat or outdoor clothing.
- Don't address the interviewer by his first name unless you have been instructed to do so.
- Don't look at your watch during the interview.
- Don't pick up anything in the interviewer's office.
- Don't take notes.
- Don't read any documents on the interviewer's desk.
- Don't worry.

Questions You Can and Should Ask During the Interview

(Excerpted from *The Outplacement Solution*, Wolfer & Wong)

- Describe the job to me, and what do you want the ideal candidate to accomplish in the next 6 months to a year? - This is the first question. It is a great icebreaker. It will give you more information than what is on the job description.
- At the end of the interview ask - What do you feel will be my biggest challenge in this role? When you ask this question, this gives you the opportunity to eliminate any concern that they might have in regards to your ability to do the job.
- Why is the position open?
- What are the best/worst parts of the job and the company?
- What is the typical career path?
- How do you feel about promotions from within?
- How do you rate your competition?
- What do you consider to be your firm's most important asset?
- Could you tell me a little about your role with the company?
- What are your plans for expansion?
- What kind of people do you usually look for?
- What do you see ahead for your company in the next five years?
- Do you see a recession or a boom ahead for your industry as a whole?
- What kind of staff turnover do you have?
- Are there any major problems now or brewing in the future?
- How is performance measured?
- What is the manager like?
- Who are the key people you interface with?
- What are the unique opportunities of the job?

- What type of training or orientation is provided?
- Do you think what I've told you about myself fits with what you are looking for?
- What are the requirements for this position?
- Is there anything else you would like to know about my background?

Typical Questions Interviewers Ask and the Answers They are Looking For

(Excerpted from *The Outplacement Solution*, Wolfer and Wong)

Q. Why are you leaving your current position?

“Forced resignation” is not as negative as “Fired.” Always remain positive. Never bad-mouth a previous employer.

Q. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Have a list of three of each. Do your homework and make your weaknesses as positive as possible. It is important to have weaknesses so the employer knows you're human.

Q. What's unique about yourself?

Different way of asking about strengths. Use strong value statements, something you know the employer is looking for.

Q. How would you describe yourself?

Tell me a little about yourself. Very broad question. Ask for clarification or focus—professional or personal. Often employers use this question to assess your communication abilities. Do not ramble. Be clear and concise.

Q. What are your salary requirements?

Try not to give a specific amount; give a range.

Q. Are you willing to relocate?

Does relocation bother you? Do not narrow it down to a specific city or state unless it is a personal requirement. Let them know you would certainly consider it if it was a positive move for the company and your growth within the company.

Q. Are you willing to travel?

Provide a range (e.g. up to 25%). Do not give an exact number unless it is a personal requirement. Also, this question is sometimes used by the employer to see if you have child care issues that would prevent overnight travel.

Q. What interests you most/least about this position?

Relate “most” into your strongest skills. Relate “least” to a positive by associating it with a skill you are interested learning.

Q. What did you think of your last boss?

No negatives. Think real hard about a positive and say it with conviction.

Q. Why should I hire you over a person with more/less experience?

The issue is how you can contribute better than someone else. Don't let your own bias on age, salary, etc. cloud your answer. Answer this question by reviewing your strengths that can contribute to the job.

Q. Why have you been unemployed for so long?

The underlying meaning is, is there something wrong with you? Your answer should include references to: just now starting to look for a job, took a vacation, etc. The employer wants to know if you're OK. If you took a long time between jobs, stress the positive things you did for self-improvement.

Q. What do you have to offer this company?

Why should I hire you? Have a list of three or four skills or knowledge.

Q. What are your expectations about this job?

They are either checking to see how closely you are listening or what type of research you did prior to the interview.

Q. What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?

A variation of "How can you contribute?" They are looking at your standards and meaningful expectations.

Q. Why are you interested in this company?

Checking if you did any research on the company.

Q. What do you do in your spare time?

Looking for an active, well-rounded person. This is the time to talk about hobbies and professional/civic associations and your position in them.

Q. Describe a situation in which your work was criticized.

What is your attitude toward change? Talk about how you felt and what you did differently. Accept blame or criticism; do not point a finger at someone else.

Q. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

Provide realistic expectations.

Q. What do you really want to do in life?

Issue is how happy are you.

Q. Why did you choose the career that you are in?

Planned or just happened?

Q. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

Issue is how well do you know yourself. You can also talk about what type of environment or boss you like to work for.

Q. Why did you select your college or university?

Do you plan or just let things happen?

Q. How would you describe the ideal job for you?

How can you contribute to this job? This is the time to emphasize your strengths.

Q. What type of boss do you prefer?

No negatives, positives only.

Q. Do you have any plans for further education?

How flexible are you? Are you still interested in growing? Are you willing to do things differently? The focus of this question is not just formal education; but do let them know of your continuing classes you have taken recently.

Q. What are your long- and short-range goals?

When and why did you establish these goals? How are you working to achieve them? How do your personal goals fit into this organization? How long will you stay?

Q. How do you determine or evaluate success?

What is important to you? What are your standards? Are you self-motivated or do you have to be told you're doing a good job?

Q. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinate.

What working environment and values are important to you? This is an opportunity to describe the ideal working relationship.

Q. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction and why?

Tie accomplishments to issues important to employer. Employers want happy, confident and positive employees.

Q. How do you work under pressure?

How stable are you? How much stress, overtime and weekend work can you handle?

Q. What have you learned from your mistakes?

It's all right to admit to mistakes as long as you accept blame and learn from them. Never blame others.

Polishing Your Interview Skills

Prepare to answer these basic questions:

- What are your strongest skills and areas of knowledge?
- How can you contribute to this company?
- What are you looking for in a job?
- What would you like to know about the company?
- How do your skills relate to the company's needs?
- PRACTICE POSITIVE THINKING!
- Learn to weave these words into your vocabulary:

Ability, Accelerate, Accurate, Active, Affect, Aggressive, Analyze, Attitude, Capable, Careful, Common Sense, Conceive, Conduct, Conscientious, Control, Develop, Diplomatic, Direct, Discipline, Drive, Dynamic, Effective, Efficiency, eliminate, Energetic, Enthusiastic, Evaluate, Excel, Excellence, Expand, Expedite, Focus, Generate, Guide, Implement, Improve, Incisive, Initiate, Innovate, Lead, Listen, Monitor, Motivate, Participate, Perform, Persuade, Potential, Precise, Pride, Produce, Professional, Proficiency, Provide, Recommend, Reliable, Responsible, Results, Simplify, Skill, Solve, Streamline, Strengthen, Success, Systematic, Tactful, Thorough, Train, Trim, Urgency, Vital, Win

(From *How to Turn an Interview into a Job*, Jeffrey G. Allen, JD, CPC)

Skills Analysis

- Strengths:
- Weaknesses:
- Biggest Accomplishments - Personal And Professional:
- What I Liked Best About My Last Job:
- What I Didn't Like:
- My Ideal Job:
- Two - Year Goals - Personal And Professional:
- Five - Year Goals - Personal And Professional:
- Skills Relating To This Position:

Thank You Letters

Thank you letters are essential. They need to be written and mailed or emailed within 24 hours of the end of the interview and should contain:

1. A thank you for the time and courtesy YESTERDAY.
2. A quick pitch for the position you interviewed for.
3. If pertinent, a little personal wish.

Sample Letters

Dear _____:

Thank you for the time and courtesy you extended me during our meeting yesterday. After learning more about the Accounting Manager position, I am convinced I can make an immediate contribution to your firm due to my substantial (accounting, SEC, tax, etc.) experience.

It's an exciting opportunity and I look forward to hearing your decision soon.

Sincerely,

Dear _____:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for me to learn more about (name of company) and the position of Senior Accountant.

I was interested in the position prior to our meeting, and since then have become excited about the opportunity. I look forward with anticipation to the next step in the selection process.

Best regards,