

The Interview

- **Interview Process**
- **Tips on Interview Questions**
- **Dress for Success**

The Interview Process

The primary idea of the interview is to share information. It is your goal to sell the employer on the concept that you are the best person for the job. To be prepared, here are some tips to remember before, during, and after the interview.

Before the Interview

- Research the company, the job, the salary range, and the interview process.
- Do your homework, practice answers to questions that might be asked. (Practice, Practice, Practice)
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer.
- Have a copy of your résumé ready.
- Develop and prepare your career portfolio to take with you.
- Take time for good grooming and hygiene.
- Go alone and plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the site prior to the interview to determine location, parking, and travel time.

During the Interview

- Do not chew gum or smoke.
- Relax, be yourself, and demonstrate self-confidence.
- Don't tell hard luck stories or appear desperate.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer.
- Demonstrate good posture and mannerisms.
- Be enthusiastic. Don't be negative, impatient or hostile.
- Stress your qualities and skills.
- Don't speak unkindly of former employers or teachers.
- Keep a businesslike attitude.
- Ask questions about the job or company.
- Do not ask about salary, unless the interviewer brings it up or you are offered the job.
- Once you have been offered the job, you can negotiate salary.

After the Interview

Thank the interviewer(s) for their time; smile and shake hands.

- Thank the receptionist for his/her courtesy, and ask for the interviewer's business card for the thank-you card or letter.
- Send a thank-you card or letter within 24 hours of the interview.

Tips On Answering Interview Questions

Tell me something about yourself.

The interviewer does not want to know your life story. He or she wants to know how your skills and background are good for the job. For example, you might say:

“I always knew I wanted to work in a business environment. Over the past ten years I’ve worked in a variety of businesses and have learned how various businesses run. For example, I was given complete responsibility for daily operations of a clothing retail outlet. There I learned to supervise other people and to solve problems under pressure. I really enjoyed working with the public so I went to work for ABC Airlines. After working as a Reservation Agent for two years I was promoted to Customer Service Manager....”

Remember, a different job would require you to stress different skills.

Why do you think you would like to work for our company?

The usual answer to the questions is “I am looking for a job,” which is saying that your only interest in the company is that the company has something that **YOU** want - a job opportunity. **One of the most important things you should do before you go to an interview is to find out all you can about the company.** This information is available in the business section of any library. People who have a good reason to seek work in a particular organization will be seen as more organized and more committed. Here is an example:

“This particular organization seems to be the type that would let me develop my problem-solving skills. It is well run, rapidly growing, and open to new ideas. If I work hard and prove my value here, I feel I would have the opportunity to stay with the business as it grows, and grow with it.”

What would your former employer say about you?

The interviewer really wants to know if you will be easy to get along with and if you can be depended on. Be sure to emphasize your good worker traits and work habits. Then give an example to prove it! For example, you might say:

“He would tell you I can always be counted on to get the job done. I even took work home a few times to help him meet an important deadline. He would also tell you that I’ve only missed two days of work over the last five years.”

If you have a personal letter of recommendation from your last supervisor this would be a good time to share it. You could also let the interviewer know you’re quite comfortable with having your former supervisor contacted.

Almost everyone has had some type of problem with an employer. If the interviewer is likely to find out about your problem by checking with previous employers, honesty could be the best policy. Tell it like it was and accept responsibility for being part of the problem. If you learned something from the experience, say so. Here is an example:

“My three former employers will all tell you I worked very hard and always got the job done. The reason I left my previous job, however, is the result of what I can only call a personality conflict. I was deeply upset but we both agreed it was time I moved on. They would give me a positive reference, but they may also tell you there were conflicts. I had no idea the problem was so serious because I was so involved in my work. That was my error and I have since learned to pay more attention to interpersonal matters.”

Note: Often previous employers will only disclose information about your start and end date of employment and possibly whether you are eligible for rehire.

Why should we hire you instead of someone else?

When answering this question, quickly inform the interviewer of your skills and positive characteristics as they relate to the job for which you are seeking. Be specific with your response. For instance, if the job requires meeting deadlines, tell the interviewer how often in the past you have worked evenings and weekends to make sure an assignment or project was completed on time. Remember, know what the job calls for, then take time to prepare a response.

Here is an example from a person who has recent training but little work experience:

“I have recently completed vocational training in this field and know about all the latest equipment and methods. That means I can get to work and be productive almost right away. And, as you know, I have five years experience in a variety of jobs. While this job is in a different industry, it requires similar skills such as managing people and meeting the public. I am also willing to work hard to learn new things. I am willing to invest extra time after regular hours to learn anything this job requires.”

Where do you want to be one (three/five/ten) years from now?

This is not the time to talk about your dream of opening your own business. An employer wants to know how much “staying power” you have when they ask this question. If they believe you will simply move on to another position at your first opportunity, you probably will not be hired. On the other hand, if the interviewer feels threatened by you (that you may take his/her job), you may not be hired. The best response is one where you indicate your sincere desire to get into a company willing to utilize your skills and talents, and where you can make a contribution to assisting the company in meeting its goals.

What are your biggest strengths?

The employer is concerned with both skills and personal qualities. Mention two or three strengths that will make you successful in the position you are interviewing for. Be sure to tell the interviewer that you are a good worker who can be counted on. Emphasize qualities such as determination, cooperation, reliability, etc. Then follow it up by giving a specific example to demonstrate you are what you say you are.

What is your biggest weakness?

This is a question most job seekers don't handle well. If you tell what you do poorly, you may not get the job. If you say you have no weakness, the interviewer won't believe you. Ask yourself what the interviewer really wants to know. She wants to know that you are aware of your weaknesses, and that you have learned to overcome them so they don't affect your work. Whatever weakness

you choose, your answer should emphasize “the fix” not the weakness. One approach to use is to constructively criticize yourself. A secretary might say, “Although I've had excellent training in word processing, I need to become familiar with your computer system. Another approach would be to state a “weakness” that could actually be construed as a strength. For example, you could say, “I tend to be impatient. I'm accustomed to working quickly and efficiently, so I become frustrated with myself when a project is not done on time.”

What did you like most about your last job?

Be very positive and enthusiastic when answering this question. This would be a good time to compliment your former supervisor and/or company. The compliment is a nice touch, especially if you were laid off from your last job. It'll show the interviewer you handle adverse situations in a mature and professional manner. In addition, the interviewer will regard you as appreciative and pleasant if you speak in a positive way about the job you just left.

What did you like least about your last job?

Don't criticize the company or the supervisor when answering this question. State something relating to the job itself or to your abilities. If you make negative comments about the company or supervisor, the interviewer will believe you'd do the same to him/her if you were hired. Whatever situation you focus on, make certain the same negative situation isn't part of the job for which you are interviewing.

What problems did you have on your last job?

This question can be difficult. You don't want to complain or make it seem as if all the problems you had with your last job were caused by those with whom you worked. At the same time, you don't want to respond with statements making you look inefficient. The best response is demonstrating disappointment in yourself as a result of desperately wanting to do well for the department/company. For instance, you could state you were disappointed at being unable to expand your department due to budget cuts. Or, you could state that you believed you could have done a better job on a specific project had you had more time to work on it.

Why did you leave your last job?

The interviewer wants to know if you had difficulties with your last company that may be problematic with his/her company. Many employers will check references. So if you are not honest you could get caught. Employees usually quit a job for numerous reasons. You should mention only those reasons that are favorable for you. If you were laid off, you might mention other factors that contributed to your readiness to move on. For example, you might explain how the job didn't sufficiently use your skills, training, or abilities. Many people have been terminated at sometime in their careers: It's no sin and often has little to do with being a good worker. If you learned something from the experience, say so. The right answer to this question could get you the job, even if you reveal some negative information.

What salary would you expect if you were offered this job?

The real point of this question is to help the employer either eliminate you from consideration or save money at your expense. If you've done your homework, you should know what similar positions pay. However, never mention a salary figure unless you're absolutely certain there is a set figure, with no room for negotiation, already established for the position. Your objective in an initial interview is to create a positive impression. It is unlikely you would get a firm job offer in a first interview, so if salary comes up, avoid getting nailed down. Here are some things you could say:

- "Are you offering me the position?"
- "Can you discuss your salary range with me?"
- "What would you pay someone with my skills?"
- "I'm very interested in the position and my salary is negotiable."

(Contributed by Riverside County Economic Development Agency)