

Preparing for a job interview

The job interview is a crucial part of your job search because it's an opportunity for the employer to figure out if you're right for the job.

Before the interview

Be sure to do some background research to become familiar with the organization. This might include researching any current events that might relate to the organization or industry, the organization's goals and objectives, and the history of the company. Here are some questions to help you with your research:

- What does the organization do?
- What's involved in the position you're applying for?
- What qualifications do you need for the position?
- What kind of skills is the employer looking for?
- Who are the customers or clients?
- What kind of reputation does the employer have?

You'll be more comfortable in the interview if you know a bit about the company and the position you're applying for.

Print off an extra copy of your résumé so the employer can refer to it during the interview. You should also bring a copy of your reference list.

Preparing for interview questions

One of the best ways to prepare for an interview is to anticipate questions the interviewer may ask. This will allow you to give thoughtful and organized answers during your interview.

Here are some questions you should be comfortable answering:

- Why do you want this job?
- How did you become interested in this field of work?
- What do you have to offer this organization?
- What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?

Here are some tips to help you strengthen your answers to potential interview questions:

- Review your experiences at work, at school, and in volunteer activities.
- Think of examples and situations that demonstrate your abilities or strengths (for example, a time you demonstrated good judgment, initiative, responsibility, or communication skills).
- Make a list of your accomplishments or achievements to reference during the interview.
- Think about challenges you've faced in the past, and be prepared to describe how you dealt with them and what you learned.
- Preparing questions for the employer

At the end of an interview, you are typically asked if you have any questions about the organization or job you're applying for.

Your job interview is not only an opportunity for the employer to interview you—it's also an opportunity for you to interview your employer. By asking thoughtful and appropriate questions, you are showing the employer that you're interested in being part of their organization.

Things you could ask the employer include:

- How is the organization structured, and how would my role contribute to the work of the organization?
- What is a typical day in the life of a person who works in this position?
- How would this position allow me to learn and grow?
- When do you anticipate making the decision about hiring for this position?

Top-10 tips for a successful job interview

1. **Dress for success.** Professional business clothes are always appropriate, regardless of the type of job you are interviewing for. Proper hygiene and a tidy appearance are important. Iron your clothes if you can, and avoid strong perfumes or colognes.
2. **Be there on time.** Try to arrive 5 or 10 minutes early to be safe. Find out ahead of time where you're going and how long it will take to get there. Drive or travel the route a day or two ahead, at the same time of day as you will on the day of the interview. Confirm how often the buses run. Have a back-up plan.
3. **Let your personality shine.** If you're excited about the job, don't be afraid to show it. Employers want passionate employees, so be yourself. Just remember to always keep it professional.
4. **Be confident.** Feeling nervous in an interview is perfectly normal; just don't let your nerves overpower your interview. Eye contact and a calm, clear speaking voice are excellent ways to show your confidence.
5. **Watch your body language.** During your interview, relax and sit naturally, but don't slouch in your chair or lean on the interviewer's desk. Avoid chewing gum, or fidgeting with jewelry or your hair.
6. **Be professional.** This begins with a smile and a firm handshake. Remember, this is your first introduction to the organization, so be polite to everyone you meet and turn off your cell phone.
7. **Listen and ask for clarification, if you need it.** Remember to listen carefully to the interview questions so that you actually answer the question, and never interrupt. If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
8. **Let them know what you have to offer.** When answering the questions, let the employer see what you have to offer their organization. Talk about your past experiences and accomplishments without bragging, and tie those experiences to how they can help you contribute to their organization.
9. **Think before you speak.** Although you want to be open and honest in your interview, avoid talking about your personal or financial problems.
10. **Don't linger.** Leave as soon as the interview is over, making sure you don't linger. Shake the interviewer's hand again, restate your interest in working for the organization, and thank them for the interview.

After the interview

Although the actual interview is over, the process isn't totally over.

1. Shake hands with the interviewer and exchange pleasantries. Try to invest some feeling into the handshake and pleasantries, even if you think you bombed the interview. The interviewer should give you a time frame for when to expect to get a callback, if applicable.
2. Send a thank-you letter to your interviewer and/or liaison. Now is a good time to thank the person you interviewed with, even if it's just a formality.
3. Follow up with the interviewer at the appropriate time. You should have received some information about when you could expect to hear back from the employer. The standard time is about two weeks, but it can depend. If you've waited past the designated callback date — or the callback date wasn't set and it's been two weeks — follows up with the interviewer in a short email. You can say something like:
"Dear [interviewer's name], I interviewed at your company [at such and such date], and am still interested in the position if it hasn't yet been filled. I'd greatly appreciate any information you might have about my candidacy. I look forward to hearing from you."

Even if you didn't get the job, try not to get discouraged. Like any new skill, you need to practice to get better. Interviewing is the same. The more you do it, the easier it will become.