



The Interview

How well you interview will determine if you get the job. It is essential to know yourself and how your personality, characteristics, qualities, and experiences relate to the position you are applying for. Prepare diligently for the interview and know what kinds of questions will be asked of you - in addition to what questions you intend to ask of the employer.

You need to do a certain amount of soul-searching in order to prepare for the interview. Think about and write out answers to the following questions, making sure to look at them from your unique perspective.

1. Which achievements did you enjoy most? Which are you proudest of? Be ready to tell the interviewer how these accomplishments relate to the position at hand.
2. What mistakes have you made? Why did they occur? How have you learned from them, and what have you done to keep similar things from occurring again?
3. How well do you interact with authority figures - bosses, teachers, parents? How do you prefer to interact with peers and authority figures?
4. What are your favorite games and sports? Think about the way you play these games and what that says about you. Are you overly competitive? Do you give up too easily? Are you a good loser - or a bad winner? Do you rise to a challenge or back away from it?
5. What kinds of people are your friends? Do you associate only with people who are very similar to you? Do you enjoy differences in others - or merely tolerate them? What are some things that have caused you to end friendships? What does this say about you?
6. If you were to ask a group of friends and acquaintances to describe you, what adjectives would they use? List all of them, the good and the bad. Why would people describe you this way? Are there specific behaviors, skills, achievements, or failures that seem to identify you in the eyes of others? What are they?


Now look at your answers and determine what will set you apart from other candidates. Relate those qualities and characteristics to the kinds of questions that will be asked in the interview. You can also use mistakes made in the past as examples of self-improvement if you have taken the initiative to improve in those areas.

The most important and useful thing you can do to prepare for an interview is practice. Take the time to do some soul-searching. Research common interview questions and practice answering them. It may even be useful to write out the answers and read them several times - including right before the interview. Practice in mock-interview situations. Practice with your friends and family. Practice, practice, and then practice some more.

Finally, don't forget to ask questions at your interview. Keep them relevant to the position and don't ask about pay or benefits during a first interview. Books are available that can give you ideas about what is expected and how to handle the "Do you have any questions?" question.

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Interview Etiquette

Be responsive.

- Maintain normal eye contact.
 - Establish a give-and-take conversation.
 - Don't interrupt or monopolize the conversation.
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Be polite.

- Shake hands.
- Say thank you.
- Don't sit down until the interviewer does.

Be on time.

- You should arrive ten minutes before your scheduled appointment.

Be prepared.


- Have copies of your resume and references ready.
- Have your portfolio ready with examples of your work and accomplishments.
- Make sure you have done your research on the position and the company.

Be honest.

- Never exaggerate or lie about your qualifications.
- Confess to areas where your knowledge is limited and then tell the employer how you plan to take corrective action.
- Help the interviewer by keeping your information relevant to the task at hand.

Ask questions.

- Be prepared with several questions you can ask about the position and the company.
- Asking questions indicates you are interested, eager, and willing to do the job.



Dress to Impress

So, you think it's okay to drop off your resume or application in a pair of baggy jeans and a t-shirt? Think again!

How you dress says more about you than you may realize. It demonstrates your attention to detail and your judgment of what is appropriate. These are two very important pieces of information for a potential employer.

Dressing the part is important.

Whether we like it or not, people judge us by how we look. First impressions matter. Not only that, but how we dress also affects our mood and productivity. You may want to believe that you are more productive in jeans and tennis shoes, but that's probably not true when you're in a business environment.

So, how should you dress?

Conservative! That's probably not what you wanted to hear, but it is the safest thing to do. Every organization has a culture, but until you are quite certain about what it is, it is best to err on the conservative side. Conservative is also the rule on a job hunt. Even in companies where the culture is more casual, they still look for job seekers who stick with the classics.

What are the classics?

Dark colors and conservative suits. Colors should be black, charcoal, or navy. Men should be in slacks, ties, suit/sport coat, and dress shoes. Women should wear slacks or knee-length skirts, tailored suit coat, and one-inch heels. All of your clothing should be ironed and shoes should be buffed. That may seem like a small detail, but there have been situations where shoes made the difference. Again, those who pay attention to every detail of their clothing probably pay attention to every detail on the job.


Appearance isn't just the clothing you wear.

It's also imperative that you have a good haircut that is styled neatly, that your hands and fingernails are clean, and your breath doesn't stink. Also pay attention to your jewelry. Men should only wear a watch, a college ring, and/or a wedding band. Women should limit their jewelry to stud earrings (preferably pearls), two or three rings, and a watch. All accessories should be simple and kept to a minimum. Now for the big one—do NOT wear cologne or perfume. Some people and books will recommend that you keep it to a minimum; my recommendation is none at all. You have no way of knowing whether or not your interviewer is allergic to perfumes. Play it safe.

There is no one perfect outfit. The general rule of thumb when interviewing is to dress one step above what you would wear on the job. Ultimately, you must decide what you are comfortable wearing and what is most appropriate for your situation. When in doubt, ask for help. There are many people who can offer a sound word of advice. And don't forget—a smile is always the best accessory.

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Behavioral Interviewing

Employee turnover costs companies billions of dollars every year. Because of this, employers are constantly looking for a better way to hire individuals. The challenge for the employer during the hiring process is to find a person who not only has the requisite skills but that also has the personality and the desire to fit into the company culture.

~~The most common form of interview is now behavioral or behavior-based interviewing.~~ This form of the interview allows the employer to ask situational questions designed to find out how the prospective employee has handled similar situations in the past. It is somewhat based on the theory that past behavior predicts future behavior. They may also ask hypothetical situations, such as how you would act in a specific situation. These types of questions tend to evoke more critical information from an applicant than many of the old standard questions did. A sampling of behavioral interview questions is included in this packet.

So how do you answer behavioral interview questions? Specifically. You will be asked to give specific examples of when you demonstrated particular behaviors or skills and that's exactly what you should provide in your answer. The employer wants specific, detailed examples that demonstrate results. Vague or general answers are not acceptable. You should prepare examples that demonstrate successes and those that were more of a learning experience (sometimes called a failure). The SOAR model, outlined below, is a way to structure answers to behavioral questions.

SOAR Model


1. Situation - Determine the situation and events
2. Obstacle - Describe any obstacles/challenges that you faced
3. Action - Specify what action(s) you took to overcome obstacles and achieve results.
4. Results - Highlight positive outcomes.
5. In addition:
 - * What you learned from the situation.
 - * What you would do the same and/or different.

There are several things you should know and keep in mind when answering any type of interview question. Take your time - don't be afraid of a few moments of silence. Gather your thoughts and have a plan before you start talking. Keep in mind, however, that nobody wants dead air for several minutes. Be sure to answer the question that is being asked. Listen carefully to what the interviewer is saying so you will know what they are wanting. Your answers should be concise and to the point. Be sure to cover all the bases and then stop. It is possible to say too much and talk yourself right out of a job. Answers to interview questions don't have to be based solely on work experience. School work, volunteer work, and lessons learned through hobbies are also appropriate. Just be sure to think about things in advance so that you have time to evaluate each possible situation for its appropriateness.

Preparing for and being able to answer behavioral questions will enable you to answer almost any type of interview question. Behavioral questions force you to consider your skills, talents, and weaknesses and how those contribute to or detract from your work. Preparing for these types of questions is essential to your interviewing success.

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Sample Behavioral Questions

1. Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
2. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
3. Give an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
4. Describe the most creative work-related project you have completed.
5. Give an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell how you solved it.
6. Tell about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
7. Give an example of when you had to show good leadership.
8. Give an example of a time when you had to keep from speaking or making a decision because you did not have enough information.
9. Give an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
10. What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?
11. Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?
12. Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
13. Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.
14. Tell about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.
15. Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?
16. What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
17. Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.
18. How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
19. What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.
20. Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree.
21. Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
22. Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
23. Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head". Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.
24. Give an example of how you applied knowledge from previous coursework to a project in another class.
25. Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
26. Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your professor's or supervisor's expectations. What happened? What action did you take?
27. Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing their share of the work.
28. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague? Did you agree or disagree with the manager's actions?
29. Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
30. What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?



Sample Behavioral Questions

52. Tell of the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle-perhaps an angry or irate customer. Be specific and tell what you did and the outcome.
53. Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?
- ~~54. Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?~~
55. Tell me about a time when you displayed excellent customer service?
56. What has given you the greatest sense of achievement at work? Why?
57. All jobs have frustrations, can you describe some examples of your job which frustrate you?
58. What standards have you set for yourself in your current position? How well have you done about meeting these standards?
59. Tell about 3 situations in which you did not succeed and explain why.
60. Have you ever introduced a new idea? Can you describe what it covered, the steps you took to implement it and why you saw the need to introduce it?
61. Tell about a time when you were confronted with an unexpected problem? How did you deal with it? What happened?
62. Tell about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in getting a job done.
63. Give an example when you were able to successfully communicate to another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or visa-versa).
64. Tell about a time when you dealt with a difficult person? How did you handle it and what happened?
65. Give an example of a deadline you have had to meet?
66. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
67. Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
68. Give a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
69. By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
70. Tell about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.
71. Give a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
72. Give an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell me your success in reaching it.
73. Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to compose.
74. Has there been a time when you improved a process? What was it? How did you go about making the changes (step by step)? Answer in depth or detail such as "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about meeting with that person", or "Lead me through your decision process."
75. How have you demonstrated initiative?
76. How have you motivated yourself to complete an assignment or task that you did not want to do?



The Follow-Up Letter

Well, you built a solid resume, researched the company, and breezed through the interview. You're sitting back thinking about how wonderful you have done. But guess what - you can't stop now! What occurs, or does not occur, after the interview often determines who gets the job.

That's right, even if you've done everything incredibly well up until now, not following-up with a thank you letter can kill your chances of getting the job. Employers often interview several people for each position and you can get lost in the pile if you don't follow-up and make yourself stand out from the crowd.

This is not an impossible task. It's really a simple thing compared to the hours you spent preparing the perfect resume and researching answers to interview questions. You simply need to write a letter to the interviewer(s) to thank him/her for their time and restating why you are the perfect candidate. Here's a basic follow-up letter outline.

1. *Address line:* Use the full name of the interviewer, his or her title, and the company name and address.
2. *Subject line:* "Re: Interview for the position of XXX on XX X, 2005"
3. *Salutation:* Dear Mr./Ms (Don't use Miss or Mrs.)
4. *Opening:* "It was a pleasure..." "I appreciated meeting with you..."
5. *Body:* Develop something you discussed in the interview that emphasizes how your qualifications will help the employer or add a point or two that did not occur to you during the interview.
6. *Closing:* "I look forward to hearing from you." "I look forward to the opportunity to work for your company."
7. *Complimentary closing:* "Sincerely," or "Best regards,"

And don't forget these other basic tips concerning the follow-up letter.

1. Each letter should be an original. Never send photocopied or mass-produced letters.
2. It should be signed in black ink.
3. Print the letter on the same paper used for your resume and cover letter.
4. A follow-up letter should not be more than one page long.
5. Send the follow-up letter the same day or the day after the interview.

This may seem like a trivial, even menial, task - but it is important. A follow-up letter is a step in the job-search process that many people overlook or take for granted. Show your follow through abilities, initiative, and respect by taking the time to craft a strong letter. It could be what wins you a job.

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Chapter 17: Communicating Through Letters, Applications, and Interviews

that company. Also, you never know when you may need to call on someone in the company for a favor. Thus, you want to remain in good standing. However, don't say you are still interested in the company if you are not.

After you have the appropriate information, write a thank you letter within a day after the interview. Writing a thank you letter offers several advantages. First, it's polite to do so. Second, you make an excellent impression when you are sincere and interested. Most important, writing the letter places your name once again in the mind of the decision maker. This action comes when he or she is making a decision. If you spoke to a series of people, write a personal letter to each. Writing these letters takes time, but you'll find the time well spent. Surprisingly few candidates write thank you letters, but they can make a lasting impression. When you do write these letters, you set yourself apart from the competition.

What are the parts of the thank you letter? View it as a routine business letter. You'll begin with the main message, which is "Thank you for taking the time to interview me." Follow with detail and explanation. The middle paragraphs give you an opportunity to show what you learned from the interview or indicate something that particularly impressed you. Perhaps you'll want to summarize your impressions of the organization. Or you may want to emphasize again why you would be the right person for the job. Perhaps you'll want to express your appreciation for the kind and professional manner in which the company treated you.

Close your thank you letter with a confident look to the future, and tell the reader that you hope to hear soon about the company's decision. Note each of these parts in the example in Figure 17.11.

222 West Maple Drive
Grand Rapids, MI 44444
June 16, 19—

Mr. David Waterman
Information Processing Department
Reliable Industries, Inc.
555 South Grand Avenue
Grand Rapids, MI 44466

Dear Mr. Waterman:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the position of programmer. You were very gracious.

As we toured the department and the firm, I noticed the commitment Reliable Industries has made to obtain state-of-the-art equipment. In addition, your plans for expansion in the department to increase automated manufacturing efficiency sound exciting.

If you need additional information about my background, or if I can answer other questions for you, please let me know. I am looking forward to hearing your decision soon.

Sincerely,

Carmen Richardson

Carmen Richardson

Figure 17.11
A Thank You Letter