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Interviewing Quick Guide

The Interviewing Process

The interview process allows employers to better understand your professional experience, skills and accomplishments, while providing you with an opportunity to learn more about the organization. Types of **interview formats** include **telephone**, **in-person** and **video/Skype**. Interview formats could include you and one person representing the company or multiple people representing the company, also known as a **panel** interview. You might also encounter a **group** interview in which you and other candidates are interviewed at once. There are pros and cons to all interview formats. Being prepared to sell yourself is the best way for you to be confident and conquer the interview. The two most popular **interview styles** include **traditional** and **behavioral-based**.



Interviewing Basics:

- Dress business professional for interviews. It is better to be overdressed than underdressed.
- Arrive on time, preferably about ten minutes before your interview.
- Bring copies of your resume and any supporting documents such as cover letters, transcripts, letters of recommendation and a list of references.
- Prepare to answer interview questions and have questions prepared to ask the interviewer(s).



A typical Interview structure may include:

- Introductions.
- Traditional interview questioning.
- Behavioral interview questioning.
- Opportunity for the candidate to ask questions.
- A tour of the worksite or introduction to key employees.
- Follow-up: it is proper etiquette to send a follow-up note of thanks (either hand-written or via e-mail) usually within 24 hours of the interview or the next business day. The note should recap what you have to offer, your continued interest, and what you learned during the interview.

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

Most human resources recruiters and hiring managers ask behavioral-based questions during the interview process on the premise that past behavior is a good indicator of future behavior. Not only are they evaluating your behavior by the examples provided, but also the content and completion of the questions that are asked.

Begin by preparing and practicing effective behavioral stories relevant to the positions listed, key qualities and competencies by using the S.T.A.R method, Situation/Task, Action, Result.

Situation or Task	<i>Describe a situation you were in and the task that you needed to complete from a current position, previous job, volunteer experience, or any relevant event. Be specific to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand.</i>
Action YOU Took	<i>Articulate the action YOU took, even if you are discussing a group situation or task. An interviewer is interested in your actions, not the efforts of the group.</i>
Results YOU Achieved	<i>How did the situation or task end? What did YOU achieve as a result? What did YOU learn?</i>

Practice answering these questions using the **S.T.A.R. method**.

1. Tell me about a time you encountered an irate customer. How did you respond? What did you do to try to resolve the issue? What was the outcome?
2. Describe a time when you were unsure of how to handle a billing issue while dealing with an upset customer and noticing that your direct supervisor was unavailable to help. What did you do? How did the situation resolve?

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Describe a situation when you were able to strengthen a relationship by communicating effectively. What made your communication effective?
- Give a specific example of a time when you had to address an angry customer. What was the problem, your role, and what was the outcome?
- Tell me about a situation where attention to detail was important in accomplishing an assigned task.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Everyone makes mistakes. Provide an example of a time when you made a mistake and how you recovered from it.
- Describe a time when you were asked to keep information confidential.
- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your work tasks/projects? What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.
- Give an example of a situation where you had difficulties with a team member. What, if anything, did you do to resolve the difficulties?
- Give an example of a problem you faced on any job that you have had and tell how you went about solving it.
- Please give your best example of working cooperatively as a team member to accomplish an important goal. What was the goal of the team, your role, and the result?
- Since the goal of an interview is to find the best candidate, expect the unexpected. For example,
 - You're in a job interview. Everything is going better than you imagined it could. You look professional and fabulous. You are totally prepared. You are on a roll! You feel that you are nailing every question. You feel that you have established a good rapport with your interviewer. Suddenly, out of the blue, they ask:

Who is Your Favorite Super Hero and Why?

This is called a “*wild card*” or “*off the wall*” question. You may think that this question may be asked to try to throw you for a loop, but it may be asked to see how creative you are, or to see how you react under pressure. So, try to avoid getting rattled, instead take a moment to think and then respond to the best of your ability.

Sample Traditional Interview Questions



- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position/company?
- What are your top 3 strengths?
- What is a weakness that you have?
- What has been your biggest accomplishment in the past year?
- In what ways can you add value to our company?
- Do you prefer to work independently or on a team?
- What are your short-term career goals?
- Where do you see your career in the next 5 years?
- Describe your ideal supervisor and his/her managerial characteristics that would work well with your preferred management style.
- Why are you the best candidate for this position?

Questions Not to Ask an Employer During A Job Interview

- Can I do this job from home?
- What does your company do?
- When can I take time off for vacation?
- Did I get the job?
- What is the salary for this position?
- How many hours will I be expected to work each week? Will I need to work on weekends?
- How long will I have to wait to get promoted?
- What type of health insurance does the company offer?

*RESOURCE: Allison Doyle, October 09, 2017

Sample Questions to Ask in an Interview

Prepare to ask about 2-4 thoughtful questions when prompted at the end of the interview. If you are interviewing with multiple individuals, ask different questions in each interview as the interviewing team is likely to meet after your interview to compare notes.

- How would you describe the company culture?
- Can you tell me more about how this role fits into the department and organization?
- If I were hired, can you tell me about the training that would be provided?
- How is this position evaluated? And how often?
- What would I expect to be doing in the 30, 60 and 90 days?
- What is your timeline for the hiring process for this role? Would it be appropriate to follow-up with you in a couple of weeks or should I wait to be contacted?
- If I think of questions to ask after this interview, would it be okay for me to contact you? If yes, then ask, "could I please have your business card?" [Use this information to send a thank-you note as well!].

Phone interview

Employers are increasingly using phone interviews as a cost-saving screening method, especially to cut down on travel expenses to bring in candidates from distant locations. However, the primary goal of phone interviews is usually to screen out candidates or clarify content on the resume.



Guidelines for successful phone interviews:

- If the interviewer calls and wants to do the interview on the spot, and it is not a good time for you, do not hesitate to ask them if they could reschedule the interview for a better time.
- Using a landline or cell phone should be suitable for this type of interview. Most people no longer have landline phones, plus cell phone carriers have improved service so it is unlikely you may encounter a disruption like a dropped call.
- Be sure you are in a quiet, secluded place, free of distractions.
- While it is tempting to do the interview in your PJs – simply because you can – dress nicely just as you would for an in-person interview, because it will help you project yourself in a more confident and professional manner.
- Speak clearly and ensure that you can be heard. Avoid any behaviors that will cause distracting sounds during the interview, such as gum-chewing, coughing, sniffing, sneezing, and throat-clearing. Keeping a glass of water handy would be helpful.
- A great thing about a phone interview is that you do have the luxury of having your resume, the job description, and other supporting notes such as a short list of your accomplishments available to review in front of you during a phone interview.
- You can also have a writing utensil and paper handy to take notes.
- Since a primary goal of phone interviews is to screen out candidates, expect the unexpected.
- When it's your turn to ask questions, ask ones that employ techniques to “close the sale” if you will, and move you to the next step in the process (usually a face-to-face interview).
- In the end, phone interviews require thank-you notes just as face-to-face interviews do.

RESOURCE: The Quintessential Guide to Job Interview Preparation

In-Person Interview



BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. Before you go.

Your first step should be to do some thorough research. This includes learning general information about the company, its competitors and relevant news about the industry.

Employers also do their own research. Besides verifying employment and talking to references, in this era of social media, candidates should be mindful to remove any questionable photos, or remarks, from their profiles, as it could be used to make hiring decisions.

2. Brainstorm solutions.

The employer is hiring to fill a need—you must show that you are the best fit. “Every position is centered on a problem,” therefore, it is your job is to figure out what that problem is for the employer and how it can best be solved. Come prepared to the interview to show what you can do for the organization.

3. Prepare S.T.A.R stories to answer interview questions.

Using the **S.T.A.R format**—situation/task, action and result—to demonstrate your experience and to clearly detail your role and accomplishments at your previous organizations.

EXAMPLE: “**S/T**—What was the situation or task you were responsible for and when/how did it become challenging? **A**—Describe the specific action or contributions you took to resolve the matter. **R**—State the positive result.”

4. Attire matters.

Before you start job searching, dig in your closet, purchase, or go to your nearest Dress for Success program for free interview attire. Prepare your outfit the night before so that you’re not rushing the day of the interview. Make an effort to ensure that your outfit and hair are professionally groomed. Some believe that dressing up a notch from the job you are applying for is best. However, in certain industries attire can be flexible. It will take some research on your part to figure that out. Make-up for women, and accessories for men and women are just as important to be mindful of. For example, it is best to wear little to no perfume/cologne, leave cell phone in the car or turned off, do not chew gum, avoid wearing noisy jewelry, vibrant make-up or accessories.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. Engage with your interviewer(s).

Remember the interview is a conversation and should not feel like an interrogation. Essentially, the employer wants to get a sense of not only your capabilities but also your personality. In fact, choosing candidates may often come down to personality fit. The truth is you can always teach a person a task or a program, but you can't teach personality – it either fits or it doesn't! Another thing that works is observing things about the interviewer or their office to see if you can find any commonalities, if so capitalize on it without being too informal.

2. Be more interested than interesting.

A great deal of interviews involve 50% talking and 50% listening. Therefore, it is just as important to listen as it is to talk during an interview. Ultimately, there should be a fair amount of talking initiated by the interviewer and interviewee. It's about finding a balance in being genuinely inquisitive and engaged in the interview.

3. Don't be afraid of silence.

It's normal for there to be moments of pause during an interview on the interviewer and interviewee's part. From the interviewer's standpoint, they could be thinking of how to reframe their next question or taking notes to record your response. From the interviewee's standpoint, they could be taking their time to make a thoughtful response. This is again normal as many interviews are behavioral-based and have multiple part questions that may require more thought and reflection. In the rare case that the silence goes on for too long, it is appropriate to break the silence and ask the interviewer if they need you to clarify anything at that point. Otherwise, remain calm knowing this is a normal part of the process.

4. Be conscious of nonverbal cues.

Nonverbal is the largest part of the interview process. So much so that it can add to or subtract from what you say. So be conscious of how you physically respond and interact with the interviewer. Being mindful of things like your body language – is it considered "opened (positive) or closed (negative)". Both can be displayed in many ways, but the important thing is that your body language should convey confidence and professionalism.

5. Show your enthusiasm.

Don't let nervousness consume you. Make sure that you calm your nerves and allow your enthusiasm for the job and selling what you have to offer, be the focal points. You can display your enthusiasm by smiling, maintaining a positive attitude, expressing what you like about the company or the job, and emphasizing how much you want the job. Passion can go a long way!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. Do an Interview Assessment

After your interview, recall as much of the Q&A as possible. Then write a summary of them. This could help you if you secure a follow-up interview. Also, include anything you wish you had said or elaborated on more during the interview. This too could come in handy for a second interview.

Overall, take a thorough interview assessment of how you handled the interview and note areas of strength and areas of improvement for future interviews.

2. Document Contact Information and Next Steps

At the end of your interview, always ask about the process moving forward. For example:

- Will the interviewer be contacting candidates for a second interview? If so, when?
- When do they plan to make a decision?
- Once a decision is made, do they notify everyone who interviewed or just the successful candidate?

Knowing what to expect and when to expect it, will put you at ease and help you determine when you should follow-up about your interview/the hiring process.

Try to keep track of everyone you talked to during the process, especially if you were interviewed by multiple people. In particular, make note of their names and contact information or later ask the person who coordinated the interview for those details so that you can properly follow-up with a formal thank-you note for the chance to be interviewed. A well-written thank you note should be sent within 24-hours or the next business day and should help you make a great impression with your prospective employer.

3. Follow-Up with the Hiring Manager

Decisions about candidates can be made quickly, so it is important to send your follow-up/thank-you immediately. You want your interviewers to remember you and a follow-up/thank you note is a great way to do so.

The follow-up/thank-you note does not have to be long, it should simply thank the interviewer(s) for taking the time speak with you, and it should give you an opportunity to highlight a few things from the interview:

- Confirmation that you believe the position and organization is an excellent fit for you.
- Briefly, remind them why the position is an excellent match with your experience, qualifications, and perhaps career goals.
- Take the opportunity to supply additional information that will address areas of concern that you did not fully address during the interview.
- Express your appreciation for the opportunity and if possible, compose slightly different personalized follow-up/thank-you notes to each person rather than just using the same one.
- Lastly, mention something noteworthy that you learned or remembered about the interview.

Follow-up/thank-you notes could go to interviewers' as well as helpful support staff you interacted with along the way. Those staffers may have more influence than you know when it comes to hiring decisions.

4. Connect with Your Interviewer Online

In this day and age of social media and connecting to people online for personal as well as professional purposes, it may be a good idea to connect with your interviewer(s) through LinkedIn. This connection could be important because if you do not get the current position, something might come up later and the interviewer might notify you.

5. Notify Your References

Having suitable references is essential for your job search. So, if you haven't already, alert your references that they might receive a call or email and summarize your case for the job and add in any points you want them to stress in their recommendation. Also, make sure they have your current resume to remind them of what you did when you worked with them and what you've done thereafter.

If you know anyone from a company that you are applying to, do not be afraid to ask them to be a reference or to go further and give you an endorsement. People usually like to be helpful, but don't forget to show appreciation for their endorsement with a follow-up/thank-you note as well. This goes for your references too.

*RESOURCE: 5 Things You Should Do After a Job Interview, Alison Doyle

VIDEO INTERVIEWING



A video interview could occur via Webcam, Skype, Google Hangout, or Facetime Job Interview or through some other online program/service. The interview could be live or simulated by an avatar.

More employers embrace video and web-based technologies to conduct interviews with job candidates because it is cost-effective, and time effective, among other reasons. Therefore, it has become increasingly important for you to be prepared as you begin your job search.

If you know that you're uncomfortable with the technology or how you look/sound on camera, the best you can do is practice, practice, practice! The more you practice, you should get more comfortable with the technology, and better at interviewing. Consider using the recording/audio studios at select Cuyahoga County Public Library branches so that you can hear and see yourself.

BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

1. **Check your hardware.** Choose the device--a computer/laptop, tablet, smart phone that is the most reliable. Test all the technology; your connection, your camera, your lighting, your sound, and if possible, the video program. Plan for glitches. Have a backup plan if something goes wrong the day of the interview.
2. **Select the proper location** for the interview. Choose a location that is secluded where you can shut out distractions, control the lighting, and display a plain wall as your backdrop. Also, choose a pose in which you can be seen on camera from about the waist up.
3. **Schedule a mock interview.** Schedule an interview with a friend, colleague, family member, or if possible a Career Counselor or Career Coach. Practice both your interviewing skills, as well as the technology if possible, such as recording the interview so that you can play it back for yourself to observe how you look and sound.
4. **Complete full interview preparations.** Conduct research on the employer, prepare responses to interview questions, formulate a few questions you want to ask, and determine the best professional attire to wear to the interview.

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

1. Again, test all equipment prior to the interview.
2. Dress professionally.
3. Turn off all apps and programs that might interrupt before interview starts.
4. Remember your nonverbals such as solid eye contact, smiling at appropriate times, good posture, and using hand gestures to make your point.
5. Focus on making direct eye contact into the camera as opposed to the monitor.
6. Have a conversation just as you would in an actual interview situation.
7. If you need them, you can have some notes in front of you to remind you of points that you want to highlight.
8. Take a second before responding to questions from the interviewer in case the connection is weak or delayed.



AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. **Write a thank-you note.** Follow-up on the hiring process as there may be more rounds of interviews. Following up occasionally also emphasizes your interest in the job.

RESOURCE: Dr. Randall S. Hansen, founder of Quintessential Careers

Panel / Team Interviewing



PANEL

A panel interview, also known as a board interview is a formal and organized interview where a job candidate is asked questions by more than one member of the company. You sit in front of the room, waiting for the interviewers to ask you a standard set of questions. Typically, this type of interview is used in academia and government or for high-level executive jobs.

You may be asked to speak about instances when you demonstrated behaviors or skills that are key to performing a desired job. You know this form of interviewing as behavioral-based, which again relies on the premise that past performance is the best indicator of future performance.

Here are a few more additional tips:

- Always be prepared to provide an elevator pitch—a brief summary of who you are and your job/career goals. This message should be detailed, yet concise.
- The saying “practice makes perfect” does have truth in it. Especially when it comes to interviewing. Be sure to practice for the interview with a video or audio recorder if possible, so that you can see/hear yourself. Remember to look at each interviewer who asks you a question in the eye, and then shift your eye contact to other members of the interviewing team. Remember, recording and video studios are available at some branches in the Cuyahoga County Library system.
- Make sure you get each person's business card, at the beginning or end of the interview, so that you can address each person by name, when you send follow-up thank-you notes.

TEAM INTERVIEWS

Another multiple-type interview is the team or "good cop/bad cop" interview. The team is usually made up of two interviewers, one who asks the questions and one who takes notes. The two typically trade roles, which can be confusing if they have different styles. Keep in mind that these individuals are working together toward the same end goal, so treat them equally.

Although these interviews can be stressful, interview practice and preparation again can be helpful. When you rehearse your answers and your physical presentation beforehand, you will likely feel more confident no matter how many people you have to interview with.

GROUP INTERVIEWS



Group interviews can include both multiple interviewers and multiple candidates. As a group, you may be asked to answer typical interview questions, but you may also be put to the test and asked to answer a different question from everyone else. One purpose of this style of interview is to see how you interact with others, demonstrate your skills in a crowd, solve problems on the spot, and how you can make yourself stand out in a crowd – in a good way.

A few helpful tips:

- **Put on a Poker Face:** Do not show any disappointment or shock when you see multiple candidates. Enter the room with confidence. Your reaction could give the employer an idea of how you might interact with the company's team and to surprises on the job.
- **Make Friends:** Resist the urge to be silent and ignore the other candidates, or to pull out your phone or review your notes while waiting. Instead introduce yourself and try to get to know them. When the interviewers get there, they might take notice of who is facilitating conversation. Your interaction will show the interviewers that you don't shy away from networking and will make you seem confident.
- **Involve Everyone:** While the other candidates may be your competition, they can also assist you. Throughout the group interview, having the ability to address others by name will make you stand out and appear like a leader or at the least as a person with a good memory. You can also build off other candidates' ideas. For example, if someone answers a question, follow it up by addressing his or her response and adding your own thoughts. Remember, the interview is supposed to involve everyone in the room.
- **Be Yourself:** Yes, you should speak up and make sure you're being noticed but remember that interviewers aren't looking for the loudest voice in the room. That said, don't go overboard by getting overly aggressive, or speaking over others or discounting their opinions to prove that you are a leader.

- **Speak with Purpose:** Whether it is comfortable or not for you to speak up front of a crowd, be sure that when you do answer questions or give your opinion, you do so with purpose. Remember, you don't have to talk constantly to be noticed, being memorable is more important and you can do this by making sure that what you are saying is unique to the conversation.
- **Listen:** it's important to listen to the interviewers and interviewees and stay engaged in where the conversation is going. Try to pay attention and use body language to show that you are engaged with the group, even when you are not talking.
- **Follow-Up:** Make sure you stand out at this stage of the process by not only writing a thank-you note, but by referencing parts of the conversation in which you contributed an interesting answer or learned something important. The purpose is to make the interviewer recall you in a positive way. In the same token do not forget about the importance of appearance, promptness, poise, and research.

*RESOURCE: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/standing-out-from-the-crowd-how-to-nail-a-group-interview>



PRACTICE!

Career Counselors and Career Coaches are available to conduct mock interviews to help you practice traditional and behavioral-based interview questions in a safe environment. You can also join us for one of our popular interview workshops, “*Behavioral-Based Interviewing*” or “Steps to an Effective Interview”.

To schedule an appointment or to learn more about other services that we provide, please contact us:

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