

HOW TO SURVIVE AN INTERVIEW

After weeks of waiting, you finally landed that much sought-after interview. You're elated and can almost hear the actual words of someone offering the job to you. Nothing can go wrong now!

Or can it?

"Wait a minute," you think to yourself. "What if they don't like me for some reason? What if I blow the interview questions? What if I seem dull, uninformed and awkward? What if...I don't get the job?"

This is a familiar scenario among many interview candidates: pre-interview jitters. Fortunately there are steps you can take to help you to prepare for that all-important interview and thereby eliminate much of the fear and anxiety. Here are a few suggestions to assist you.

- ◆ Research! Knowing the details about an organization makes you stand out from the pack. Find out what the company does, how large or small it is, its growth rate over the past several years, what products and services it sells, who are its primary competitors, what is the company's mission, etc. Utilize company web sites, current newspaper articles, business directories, trade journals, company literature or ask a friend who works there. The Student Employment Services & Co-op Center maintains information on many area employers.
- ◆ Know the current "Buzz Words" in your field, and be prepared to use them.
- ◆ Prepare a list of possible responses to interview questions ahead of time. Know your strengths and weaknesses, and be able to discuss your accomplishments in detail.
- ◆ Know the name and title of the person(s) with whom you are to meet.
- ◆ Be on time! Even better, arrive 10 minutes early. Know the exact location and distance of your destination. If an emergency situation arises and you are going to be late for your interview, call and inform the employer. Warning: arriving late for an interview almost guarantees rejection.
- ◆ Bring additional resumes and your reference list to the interview. If applicable, bring related materials (your professional portfolio) which demonstrate your abilities.
- ◆ Select your clothing carefully. The following section on appropriate dress will assist you.

APPROPRIATE DRESS



The last few years have seen some significant changes in the style of dress in the workplace. The term "Business Casual" has come to reflect a more relaxed attire. Some organizations even recognize a "Dress Down" day, usually a Friday or another scheduled day of the week.

But, make no mistake: It is essential that a job candidate dress professionally for the interview. The first impression you make on a prospective employer occurs upon his/her very first glance at you. In fact, in one recent business survey, 95% of the employers interviewed said that a job seeker's personal appearance affected the employer's opinion of that applicant's suitability for a job.

The following guidelines will give you a general idea of professional attire:

WOMEN:

- ✓ Suits or coordinating jacket and skirt or dress outfits are the most impressive look.
- ✓ Choose subdued colors rather than loud tones.
- ✓ Skirts or dresses should be a conservative length.
- ✓ Heels should be no higher than 2 inches.
- ✓ Stockings/pantyhose should be neutral and have no runs or snags.
- ✓ Keep make-up to a minimum, and avoid flashy, excessive jewelry.
- ✓ Remember that professional attire is not the same thing as social/evening wear.
- ✓ Non-professional Interviews: A conservative pantsuit or coordinating jacket and blouse with slacks or a skirt.

MEN:

- ✓ A dark navy or gray suit is preferable to other colors; pinstripe is fine.
- ✓ If you do not own a suit, dress slacks and a coordinating jacket will suffice.
- ✓ A tie with your outfit is a must for a professional image.
- ✓ Hairstyles that are conservative are essential in a business environment.
- ✓ Shoes should be polished or shined.
- ✓ Wear no jewelry other than a wedding or a college ring, if applicable.
- ✓ If you have a beard, it should be neat and trimmed. Do not go to an interview with an "in-between" look.
- ✓ Non-professional Interviews: A sports jacket with or without tie and nice slacks. A suit is not needed.

GENERAL:

- ✓ Perfume/cologne should be avoided. Many people are allergic to scent.
- ✓ It is wise to choose your clothing several days in advance so that you have time to launder and press if need be.

REFERENCE SELECTION

A few key points to keep in mind regarding your reference sheet:

- ✓ Be certain that you ask the permission of your reference choices before listing them. Never assume that an individual will automatically grant you this courtesy.
- ✓ Choose three people who can attest to your skills and abilities, preferably those who have supervised your work
 - For the traditional student, three good choices would include a college professor, a current or former work supervisor and a volunteer coordinator for any community service you have performed. A combination of these is also acceptable.
 - For the experienced worker, certainly former/current supervisors or managers are preferable.
- ✓ The information contained on your reference list should include: reference name, title, company/organization name, work address and phone number. Below is a small-scale sample of a typical reference sheet.

REFERENCE SHEET – CARMINE C. LOPEZ

Ms. Marilyn S. Sanford, Project Manager
Dow Manufacturing Company
229 West Avenue
Allentown, PA 22009
(215) 777-8989

Mr. Daniel Hummel, Camp Director
Indian Days Summer Camp
1010 Chalfont Lane
Camp Springs, NJ 30888
(609) 508-2733

Dr. Angela Morris, Professor of Sociology
Delaware County Community College
501 South Media Line Road
Media, PA 19063
(610) 359-7799

Please Note: Your reference sheet should be word processed on good cotton bond paper and taken to the interview. It should *not* be attached to your resume.



NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Eyes, hands, feet and other body parts, along with body gestures, often communicate information (of which you are unaware) to others. This is non-verbal communication.

Your non-verbal communication in the interview will either add to or detract from your verbal message. The two levels work inseparably in making an impression on the interviewer. Be aware of how you look so that these nonverbal components of your communication can complement what you say. This does not mean becoming rigid, controlled and overly self-conscious, however. Review the following categories to become more aware of how body language speaks for itself.

Eye Contact:

Try to maintain eye contact with the interviewer, though not a glassy stare. Friendly, attentive eye contact conveys sincerity, interest and confidence. If you have more than one interviewer, include each one in your answer by moving your eyes from one to another. If you are being interviewed by a team, be certain to include the entire group in your scope of eye contact.

Facial Expression:

Do not hesitate to smile during the interview when appropriate. In general, be sure your facial expression matches what you are saying. For example, if you are discussing a serious issue, a smile would be inappropriate.

Voice Tone, Inflection and Volume:

Speak in a clear, well-modulated audible voice. Many people tend to show their nervousness by talking rapidly. Check your voice tone, inflection and volume during the interview. Remember, your voice is a primary instrument of communication.

Posture:

Carrying yourself well as you walk into the interview will create an initial positive impression with your interviewer and indicate confidence. During the interview, sitting in your chair and leaning forward indicates interest.

Handshake:

A firm handshake during the interview introduction can show confidence and assertiveness.

Non-Words:

Try to eliminate non-words such as "like", "you know", "uh", and "ok". These sentence fillers may buy you a few seconds to gather your thoughts, but they are barriers to clarity. Take several seconds to think prior to beginning your answer if you need to.

THE PHONE INTERVIEW

Recently many companies have discovered that the phone interview is a time-efficient method to pre-screen job candidates. Therefore, it is important to be prepared for this type of professional encounter.

The phone interview certainly can work in the job applicant's favor if he/she keeps some highly important strategies in mind.

- ◆ Be aware that a company representative can call the candidate's home at any time. It is not at all unusual for a dinnertime call at the end of the business day. Household members should be alerted to this in order to use a polite manner when answering the phone. Make sure that those answering the phone take complete and accurate messages for you. In case no one is home, be sure that the message on your answering machine is appropriate.
- ◆ If an employer wishes to set up a phone interview in advance, choose a time when things will be quiet and private for a significant amount of time. Alert household members that you are not to be disturbed during the interview.
- ◆ It is a good idea to have a brief overview of your experience and skills listed on index cards and placed near every phone in the house so that you will be able to discuss your background without hesitation. Remember that extended pauses and hesitations on the phone are much more noticeable than they are when speaking to someone in person. Confidence and focus are essential in an interview, so prompt responses should be emphasized.
- ◆ Phone manner, speech and voice tone are crucial elements for the success of your phone interview. Your manner should be friendly and upbeat. Avoid using an abrupt tone or one that is too soft or too loud. Try to pace your speech pattern so that its rhythm flows evenly. Speech that is too rapid is very difficult to understand while speech that is too slow can make the interviewer impatient. Keep in mind that the interviewer has an agenda to follow and does not want to be kept waiting. Lastly, try to give your voice enthusiasm and expression. Using a monotone will not make you seem like a good communicator.

Following these tips will enhance the possibilities of attracting an in-person interview. Try practicing with a friend or a relative after sending out your resume, and ask for feedback. Practice, confidence and poise will make the phone interview a rewarding experience for you and a pleasant one for the interviewer.



THE IN PERSON INTERVIEW

So, what actually takes place during an interview? The style and duration of the interview process varies widely among organizations; there are no “set” standards. While many large organizations may have a structured, multi-meeting interview process with two or more “call backs” or interview appointments, some of the smaller organizations may only interview candidates one time and make a decision shortly thereafter.

Also, it is not unusual for companies to utilize a team decision in their hiring policies. ***The multiple interview***, whereby a candidate is questioned by a panel of 3 or more, has become a popular screening method. A team approach enables a company or one of its departments to compare notes and perspectives on the merits of the job candidates. Treat each team member pleasantly and respectfully and try to maintain eye contact with each individual.

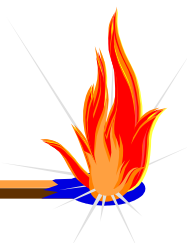
Although no two organizations interview identically, certain procedures are universal and worth thinking about well in advance.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE...

Normally you will be asked to wait in a reception area. Don't be surprised if you are asked to fill out an application at this point if you have not already done so. In any event, use your waiting time productively. Take a look around and try to get the “feel” of the working environment. Upon meeting the interviewer(s), extend your hand for a firm, brisk handshake, and be seated where the interviewer directs you.

DURING THE INTERVIEW...

It is typical for the interviewer to discuss certain aspects of the company or the position for which you are being interviewed. Listen carefully to the information. You may jot down a word or two to remember any information which is important to you, but do not take extensive notes as this will distract the interviewer. The information gathering segment of the interview serves as an excellent basis for questions to ask the interviewer later.



THE HOT SEAT:

The type of questions which are asked by the interviewer vary a great deal. They depend upon the type of position for which you are applying and upon who is doing the interviewing. For instance, a human resource director would ask much more generalized questions than a division supervisor would ask. Let's look at the types of questions which could be posed during ***your*** next interview.

THE BEHAVIOR DESCRIPTIVE INTERVIEW

(Q) - What's the latest thinking regarding the content of today's interviews?

(A) - **PROVE IT!**

Yes, the hiring climate in the current work force is committed to making sound, and if possible, predictable hiring decisions for every career level. Therefore, while interviews still contain questions which are open ended and objective, they now also target specific, qualitative information. The professional term used to define this type of questioning is *behavior descriptive*.

The behavior descriptive interview leaves little margin for variance among its candidates. In order to judge each interviewee equally, the interview is structured to elicit the same information from each candidate. Therefore, the questions are either identical or highly similar in nature.

Additionally, the interviewee needs to be prepared to give specific examples of past experiences which highlight needed skills. You must be able to articulate times, events and particular accomplishments within a given framework. In other words, *KNOW THYSELF* and be able to discuss your work experience in the greatest detail.

Let's look at the types of questions that might be part of a behavior descriptive interview. Pay particular attention to the behavior or competence that the interviewer seeks to measure:

- (Q) Tell me about the last time you recognized a problem in an organization in which you were involved.
- ✓ How did you identify the problem?
 - ✓ How did you determine the solution to the problem?
 - ✓ How did you communicate the problem to co-workers/supervisors who were directly involved?

Note: Here the interviewer is trying to determine a specific behavior (**BEH**) - *how the candidate is able to diagnose and solve organizational problems in a complex situation.*

Are **you** able to answer this question clearly and concisely regarding your past professional experience? If not, it is a good idea to jot down a response and then polish your answer in written format which you can then rehearse for the interview.

Additional Examples: Next page...

- (Q) Tell me about the most complex computer project you have been involved with in an organization.
- ✓What software was involved?
 - ✓What was your role?
 - ✓What did it help you to accomplish? OR What was the result?

(BEH) *Candidate's computer proficiency/knowledge*

- (Q) Tell me about how you managed your school work and a part-time job during your busiest semester?
- ✓What made the semester busy?
 - ✓Did you have any priorities and how did you set them?
 - ✓How did the semester turn out?

OR:

- (Q) Tell me about the last time you had to "juggle" several different responsibilities when you held a job?
- ✓What were the responsibilities?
 - ✓Did you have any priorities?
 - ✓Were there any strategies that helped you cope?

(BEH) *Candidate's ability to manage multiple tasks*

- (Q) What was the most successful solution that you and a group of other individuals developed to a particular problem?
- ✓What was the problem?
 - ✓What was your role?
 - ✓What was the result of your solution?

(BEH) *Candidate's ability to solve problems in a team/group setting*

- (Q) Describe a situation in which your work was criticized.
- ✓Who voiced the criticism?
 - ✓What was the specific work/project in question?
 - ✓How was the situation resolved?

(BEH) *Candidate's ability to be supervised and to take advice/suggestions*

Please note that with this type of highly structured interviewing, it is common for the interviewer to grade or rate your answers based upon preset criteria. Therefore, do not be anxious if you see the interviewer jotting down numbers or brief notes following your answers.

Behavior Descriptive Interview **WORKSHEET**

This will help you to begin to think in terms of very targeted information as a backdrop for interviews. After completing the particulars, it is suggested that you re-write it so that it can be delivered in a polished and concise verbal format. Keep in mind that the behavior which is being analyzed in this example is ***the ability to attend to large amounts of detail.***

(Q) Tell me about the last time when you had to gather large amounts of information to complete a project.

Describe the project –

How did you organize the details?

What was the end result?



TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS: The following are questions which are also popular among many industries and which might be asked during the first level or “first round” of interviewing.

Please Note: It is not unusual for companies to interview candidates several times even for entry-level jobs.

1. Tell me why you applied for this position.
 - Be able to have a firm answer regarding how your experience/training seemed like a good match for the job description.
2. What do you know about our company?
 - Let the employer know that you did your homework by responding with the research that you did on the organization.
3. Why did you leave your last position?
 - This is an appropriate answer for experienced job seekers. Stress your desire for professional growth.
4. Why did you remain in your current position for such an extended time?
 - Emphasize the positive points regarding your former industry/company, but stress that you are now looking forward to applying your skills to a new environment. Do NOT mention anything regarding job “burnout” in your former position.
5. What elements of your last job caused you the most pressure? How did you handle the pressure?
 - Always choose an incident in which you succeeded or excelled, never one in which you failed.
6. Discuss any team projects in which you participated either in school or at work.
 - Give a detailed description which highlights your participation in the event.
7. Describe your former supervisor’s management style. OR: What did you like most and least about your former supervisor’s management style?
 - Careful! Stick to general information and always begin on a positive note such as, “My supervisor continually kept the lines of communication open in our department, which I greatly appreciated. He did have a bit of a temper at times, but I quickly came to realize that his behavior was nothing more than a stress relief method.”
8. What are your main strengths?
 - Do not hesitate with this response. Choose the characteristics about yourself which have helped you to succeed; you might be asked to give examples.

9. What is your biggest weakness?
■ There are two ways to go with this answer: One is to choose a characteristic of your professional life which you have already improved. For instance: "I discovered that my time management skills needed improvement, so I decided to plan my agenda well in advance in order to avoid any scheduling conflicts." Another response would be to choose a characteristic which can also be viewed as a strength to an organization. Example: "Because I am a perfectionist, I sometimes expect too much from others."
10. What particular skills can you bring to our organization?
■ This is the perfect "sell-yourself" question. Choose three of your best professional characteristics.
11. What are your career goals?
■ Think in terms of a broad-based response. Here the employer wants to know that you have given careful thought to your chosen profession and that you also have a certain amount of ambition.
12. Why are there gaps in your employment history?
■ Gaps in your job history make an employer concerned about your reliability. If this situation applies to you, you'll need to demonstrate how you have used the gap time productively.
13. Why did you choose this particular career/field of study?
■ Here an employer is looking to discover your level of interest in your area of expertise. It is best to discuss your interest of the subject matter in terms of personal fulfillment rather than personal gain.
14. What was the most challenging part of your last position?
■ If you are a recent graduate, you may address this question from an academic level by telling the interviewer about the challenges of your study and research. If you held a part-time job throughout college which posed challenges, you may discuss those as well. If you are an experienced job seeker, the interviewer is primarily concerned with your most recent experiences with creative problem solving.
15. Why have you changed jobs so frequently?
■ Dependability is the issue here, and "I needed to find myself" is not a productive answer. Temporary jobs, layoffs/reorganizations and retraining are really the only acceptable answers for this question.
16. Why have you remained so long in your last position?
■ Here employers are concerned that you have become stagnant and unmotivated. It is best to highlight the most positive aspects of your last job/company and then to emphasize your desire for a new and challenging environment.

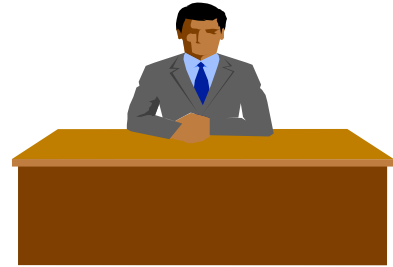


17. Why have you decided to change careers?
■ Sometimes employers can be suspicious of people who have spent a significant amount of time in one industry and then decide to change their career entirely. Never indicate that you are suffering from “burnout” from a former job or career. Rather, give an honest and brief assessment of your former industry and then stress your desire of bringing your skills into a new employment arena.
18. Are you willing to undergo further training and/or education for this position?
■ Yes! Respond without hesitation. Most organizations which are willing to further your skills also are willing to assist with the costs.
19. Are you willing to relocate for this position?
■ Personnel and hiring managers would prefer honesty regarding this question. Give this prospect a great deal of thought before deciding. Additionally, it would be helpful to consider those places to which you would move before interviewing with a national or international company. Remember: **RESEARCH**
20. What are your salary requirements?
■ It is highly important that you know the market value of both the job and the level for which you are applying. Be realistic. If you have some experience in a particular field, then your “going price” would be the mid-to-upper starting range. If you do not have related experience, then you should expect to start at the lower end of the range. One Internet site which gives salary information is Salary Wizard:
<http://www.salary.com>.
Also be aware of the classified listings in your local newspapers as the salaries listed there would be more accurate for your region.
21. If hired for this position, when would you be able to start?
■ If you are currently working, it is perfectly realistic to be able to give that employer 2 weeks notice. Beware the company that frowns upon this professional courtesy! Chances are that such an organization would not extend many courtesies to their own employees.
22. Why should we hire you?
■ This catch-all question provides the perfect opportunity for you to summarize your strengths and how you can meet the employer’s needs.
23. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your suitability for the position?
■ Again, this type of question will enable to tie up any loose ends that you might have forgotten.

Lastly, there is a **very** important question that could certainly turn the tide in your favor – **SEE THE NEXT PAGE** for a discussion of...



“Do You Have Any Questions?”



It is typical for the interviewer to ask this at the end of the question and answer period. Your response will indicate to the interviewer how interested you are in the position. It is best to ask questions which are appropriate to the job or to the company in general. **Do not ask questions**

regarding compensation and/or benefits. It is the employer’s responsibility to bring up this topic when you become a serious contender for the job. Here are some sample questions which demonstrate your enthusiasm for the position.

- ✓ Is the position vacant due to company expansion?
- ✓ On what basis do you judge success in this position?
- ✓ How are performance reviews given?
- ✓ What type of training does your company offer?
- ✓ What direction do you see your organization taking? OR: What are your company’s plans for future growth?
- ✓ What are the prospects for advancement within the organization?
- ✓ When will you be making a hiring decision?

NOTE: *It is perfectly acceptable to make a follow-up phone call to check your status if you have not heard from the organization within the given timeframe.*

- ✓ What is the next step in the hiring process?
- ✓ Is there anything more that I can tell you regarding my background and qualifications for the position?

ALSO: *This would be a good time to clarify any questions you had concerning the nature of the job or the duties of the position.*

INTERVIEW CLOSING

At the end of the interview, the interviewer should discuss the timeframe for the hiring decision and the next step in the hiring process. As stated in the last section, it is perfectly acceptable to inquire about this toward the end of the interview. In any case, it is important that you, as the job candidate, have a firm idea of what to expect next. **Do not be surprised if the hiring process requires one or even two call-backs, even for an**

entry-level position. Bear in mind that companies today are extremely cautious before extending a job offer. Lastly, before exiting the interview, be certain to shake hands with the interviewer, say that you enjoyed the opportunity, and thank the interviewer for his/her time.

The Thank-You Letter

The best method for imparting a professional image and for indicating your desire to work for the organization is to type a brief thank-you letter shortly after the interview (within 24 hours is preferable). Here is a sample thank-you letter.

227 Mulberry Lane
Media, PA 19063

Date

Mr. Joseph Burns
Director of Human Resources
ACE Newspaper
101 Turner Boulevard
Philadelphia, PA 19124

Dear Mr. Burns:

I want to thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the position of Editorial Assistant. I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about the opening and about Ace Newspaper Company.

I feel that my experience and educational training meet the needs of the position, and I welcome the opportunity to apply my skills to such a reputable company. Additionally, my background in desktop publishing and web development will make a progressive contribution to the paper's high standards of productivity.

I am very interested in the position and in working with you and your staff. If there is any additional information I can provide for you, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing your decision soon.

Sincerely,

Sarah M. Johnson

Now, there is nothing more to do than cross your fingers and hope for the best. Usually, a company will apprise you of their decision by phone or by mail. Sometimes, however, an organization which has passed you over for a position does not extend these courtesies.



Therefore, a phone inquiry to see if the position has been filled is certainly in order, particularly if the estimated time that was given to you is well past. Do not criticize an interviewer for the way in which he/she has handled the situation. If you discover (or are told) that you did not receive the job, be gracious and ask the interviewer to keep you in mind for future openings.

THE JOB OFFER

If you are offered the position, be certain of several elements before accepting:

Is the job for you?

- ✓ Have you and the interviewer communicated clearly regarding responsibilities and the entire scope of the position?
- ✓ Have you clarified any foggy or uncertain areas?
- ✓ Do you feel as though you will hit it off with your direct supervisor?

Is the company for you?

- ✓ Have you done your homework regarding the organization, including asking friends and/or acquaintances who work there?
- ✓ Does it provide the type of enriching environment that will help you grow in your profession?

Is the compensation package acceptable to you?

- ✓ Have you researched the going salary for the position? Visit www.salary.com
- ✓ Have you constructed a budget sheet to be certain that this is a salary you can live with?

OTHER KEY POINTS

It is advisable that you get a copy of the job offer and salary package in writing. Most organizations will produce a letter for you, outlining these details. If not, it is certainly acceptable to request one.

Always take at least 24 hours before accepting a position. No matter how tempting the offer, you still need to weigh all of the elements of the job in order to make a wise determination.

For interviewing practice go to <http://interview.monster.com>

Good luck on your new job!

