

Tips for a Successful Interview

Now, it's interview time. This is your time to shine. It is your opportunity to talk about your skills, your potential, and how you can help the company and the hiring manager succeed. It is also an opportunity to connect with people in the company, to learn more about the position and to ask them questions. The following are tips for any interview. We have also included specific tips for different types of interviews you might experience.

TIP: Anticipate likely questions. There are a number of common interview questions. Be prepared for them.

TIP: Practice. Say your answers out loud. Practice with our counselors or others. Get feedback and practice again.

1. Do your research ahead of time.

Hopefully, you have already done a bit of research on the company for your resume and cover letter. Do more in your preparation for the interview. Research the company, product and industry online. Talk to people in the industry if possible. Mention what you have learned from your research at strategic moments in the interview.

2. Dress professionally.

For blue collar jobs, clean and pressed casual clothing will do. Don't wear jeans, shorts or t-shirts with words. For professional positions, dress one cut above what you will expect to wear to work. Inspect yourself before you go into the interview to be sure your don't have buttons undone, lipstick on your teeth or anything that makes a negative first impression. Don't forget to pay attention to your fingernails and shoes. It all makes an impression.

3. Have your 30-second elevator speech ready.

Many interviews open with "tell me about yourself." In this situation, you want something already prepared. This is where your 30-second elevator speech comes in. Have it ready to go and start your interview off right.

4. Have prepared questions about the job and company in case you are invited to ask them.

Ask questions that show you have done your research. Read the job description and only ask questions that are NOT already answered there. Think about what you want to know about the position and the company. Some common questions include:

1. How has this position evolved since it was created?
2. What have past employees done to succeed in this position?
3. What have you enjoyed most about working here?
4. What is the top priority for the person in this position over the next three months?
5. What are the next steps? When might I hear from you? Can I call for an update?

5. Demonstrate good communication skills: listen, smile, lean in, use eye contact.

Employers are looking for people with good communications skills. These are not just verbal, but include body language or nonverbal communication as well. From the beginning, the interviewer(s) will be giving you information. Listen to it, nod or somehow let the person know you heard what they said. Lean into the conversation to show your interest and that you are engaged. Smile and use eye contact to show confidence.

6. Don't talk too much.

Telling an interviewer too much can be just as bad as not telling enough. Don't ramble on during your answers. By doing your homework and being prepared, you will know what they are looking for in the questions. It always helps to practice and to answer potential questions out loud in front of others.

7. Use appropriate language.

Use professional language in the interview. Stay away from slang or references to age, race, religion, politics or sexual orientation. These are taboo at any point in the job search.

8. Write a thank you note to each person you meet in person or interview on the phone.

Thank you notes are great way to make a last impression. This can be in form of an email, hard-copy business letter, or a printed thank you card. If you are hand-writing the thank you, be sure it is nicely legible. This could also be an opportunity to say something you forgot or didn't get a chance to say during the interview.

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Interviews come in all shapes and sizes. Interview methods can vary greatly by industry, company or even the position within company. Preparation will be your best friend when it comes to a successful interview. Below are a few types of interview styles and specific tips for each. Remember that you have already made it past the first hurdle. They know you have the skills and background to do the job. The interview is your chance to score high on the “likeability scale” and to prove that you are the best candidate for the job.

| Type of Interview | What to Expect | A Few Simple Tips to Remember |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Phone or Screening Interview | Phone interviews are used to narrow the applicant pool even further. It will likely be short and to the point. They are looking for confidence, clarity of voice and a cultural or personality fit. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't take this lightly. It's the first step to an full interview. 2. Make sure your phone connection is high quality. 3. Have your resume, questions and research handy for referral. 4. Smile. It can be heard in your voice. 5. Dress for interview and sit up straight in the chair. Both will build your confidence which can be heard in your voice. |
| Standard Screening Interview | 1-on-1 interviews are the standard style. In some cases, you may have multiple such interviews in a single day, or 2-on-1 team interviews. They are evaluating your qualifications for the position and your ability to fit in. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be prepared to give your elevator speech at some point. 2. Be honest in your answers, as follow-up questions are more prevalent. Questions such as: “tell me more about...” or “what did you do in that situation?” 3. Establish a connection with everyone you meet (before and after the actual interview). Sell yourself as a natural addition to the team. 4. All interviewers have an agenda. Know what their role in the company is to tailor your answers to their needs. |
| Panel Interview | A panel interview is a group of 4-7 people asking you questions. They will likely have prescribed questions and rotate who asks them. Questions could be standard or behavioral in nature. They will likely be taking notes while you are talking. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Try to write down their names and roles as they introduce themselves so you can address them by name. If possible get each person's business card for follow-up later. 2. Often these are more formal question and answer sessions that do not allow for follow up questions by the interviewer. Be sure to get everything in that you want to say for each question. 3. Smile and make eye contact with everyone even if they don't. |
| Behavioral Interview | Behavioral interviews focus on the past so the employer can predict the future. Interviewers are looking for how well you will work with in a team or with others. They will likely be taking notes while you are talking. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Questions may include talking about difficult situations. Always include information on how you overcame the difficulty and learned from it. 2. It's common to tell too much with these type of questions. Be succinct in your answers. 3. Be honest in your answers so that you don't get caught in a follow-up question. 4. Use the Problem, Action, Result (P.A.R.) approach to your answers similar to your resume accomplishment statements. |
| Assessment or Case Interview | Some interviews include a type of assessment or case study. It gives them additional information. Think of it as a chance to demonstrate your knowledge associated with the job. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The issues addressed can be real-world examples or imaginary but your thorough research on the company will be beneficial. 2. Take a few minutes to organize your thoughts before answering the questions or doing the task. 3. Google and highly-competitive tech companies can ask wildly tough questions intended to make you think on your feet. Relax and think it through. They are looking at how you solve problems. |