



The Job Interview

Congratulations! You've done your homework, presented a great résumé and cover letter and the employer has invited you for an interview. You look great on paper but now is the time to show you really are as great as you say you are . . . probably even better! A successful job interview is carried out in three phases:

- Preparation
- The interview
- Follow-up

Preparation

It bears repeating: résumés rarely will get you a job. Interviews do. This is your chance to make a real impression. Here are some preparation tips:

- **Know where to go for the interview**, what time you should be there and whom to ask for.
- **Arrive early** for an interview. This shows that you are a responsible person who is likely to show up to work on time. A few minutes of extra time will allow you to relax, get your thoughts together and do a final check of your appearance.
- **Dress appropriately**. Err on the side of conservative business attire. Look the part. If most employees in positions similar to the one you are applying for wear suits, so should you.
- **Bring key personal information with you**. Even though you have sent a résumé and cover letter you'll probably be asked to fill out an application. Be prepared to write down information about previous employers (names, addresses, phone numbers and dates of employment). You'll probably need to have names, dates and contact information about personal references.
- **Make a list of anticipated questions** and be prepared to answer them. Here are some suggestions:
 - **“Tell me about yourself.”**
Many prospective employees consider this one of the toughest questions. Just remember, the employer wants to know about YOU the person; not that you were in the band or that you play handball and ride your bike on weekends. Your response should be based on your personality and style and how you might apply those traits to the job. They are expressed by words such as analytical, amiable and good communicator. But you can't just say “I'm analytical.” You must express “how” you are analytical and show how that applies to your work. For example: “I'm very detail-oriented, which is why I decided to work in research. I enjoy working with a team that understands the importance developing systems and procedures aimed at functionality and efficiency.”
 - **“Why do you want this job?”**
The best way to respond is to connect the requested job qualifications with your skills and experience. This shows that you understand what they are looking for and that you have what it takes to do the job.
 - **“What were your responsibilities in your last job?”**

The key word here is “responsibilities,” which is quite different than what you “did.” Be positive and be sure to connect them to the job you’re applying for.

- **“What was the biggest accomplishment / failure in your previous position?”**
Although you may have listed several accomplishments on your résumé, it’s best to focus on the one(s) that best match what the employer wants for the position. And don’t let the word “failure” throw you off. Let the interviewer know that you are able to learn from your weaknesses as well as your strengths.
- **“Where do you see yourself in five years?”**
“I want your job” should not be the first thing that comes to mind; nor does “I want to marry a rich prince (or princess) and live a life of leisure.” That doesn’t mean the question won’t be asked. So be positive and remember that employers are looking for people who are willing to take on challenges and responsibilities and who will learn and grow with the job.

The interview starts when you walk in the door. First impressions count for a lot. Introduce yourself with a firm handshake. Project body language that says you are genuinely happy to be there and are looking forward to this.

Most interviews will cover the following topics:

- **Your qualifications.** What types of jobs have you held? What did you do? What did you accomplish?
- **Your skills and how they apply to this organization.** This is where the research you have done about this company will pay off. Be prepared to provide specific examples that are pertinent to the job. Paint a picture that helps the employer see you as the best candidate to fill the job.
- **Your goals.** Whether they are short-term or long-term, let the employer see that you have goals, that you want to take on new challenges and that this position fits into your personal career goals.
- **Your strengths.** The employers want to know that you are a team player, can think on your feet and can take responsibility. They also want to know how your skills and strengths will be an asset to the organization.

Your turn to ask some questions

An interview is a two-way conversation. Do your research and be prepared to ask questions of your own that show you know something about the company, have done your research and are interested in learning more. Remember in your conversation, that you are selling your abilities and capabilities and your ability to learn quickly!

- What will be your duties in this position?
- To whom will you report?
- What types of skills does the employer want for someone in this position?
- Ask a specific question based on research of the company’s Web site.
- Describe the three top challenges that I will face in this job.
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- When can I expect to hear back from you?
- What is your preferred method for contact? Phone or e-mail?

Follow-up

The follow-up process is very important and a potential key to your success!

Send an appropriate thank-you letter, within 24 hours, to each person you interview with, either via e-mail or regular mail. (Some employers actually prefer e-mail!) Most employers do not receive thank-you letters from job candidates, so it’s important that you make a good impression.

Use your notes to compose why you are a good fit for the job. If you need to follow up your interview to provide additional information, do so immediately and use the opportunity to thank the interviewer again.

Here are some sample “concepts” you can include in a follow-up letter (these are only concepts, not to be used verbatim. Put them in your own words):

- “Thank you for taking time to discuss the lab tech position and for giving me a tour of your new facilities. I am familiar with the lab equipment you have and will be able to step right in to this position.”
- My solid education from Midstate University and the fact that I am able to develop innovative solutions to difficult situations show a work ethic and sense of scientific curiosity, two qualities you said were important to success at Brand X.”
- “Thank you for your time last Wednesday. Although the chemist position is no longer open, I appreciate your advice and thank you for sharing your enthusiasm for this industry. As you suggested, I will follow up by contacting Mary Smith at Company Y. In addition, I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you again should other positions open up for which you think I am qualified.”

E-mail follow up

E-mail has become a perfectly acceptable follow-up method in today’s world of electronic communication. However, many people have become either lazy or too informal in composing e-mails. Tailor your language and content as you would in a mailed letter. Here are some dos and don’ts for composing an e-mail follow-up:

- **Do** send a follow-up e-mail within 24 hours of an interview; even sooner if possible. The biggest advantage of a follow-up e-mail is that you can send it right away and get the recipient’s immediate attention.
- **Do** use proper spelling, punctuation and format.
- **Do** use the e-mail to discuss any issues that were not addressed in the interview.
- **Do** use a specific person’s name in your salutation; and if you met with several key people, send a separate e-mail to each one.
- **Don’t** misspell a recipient’s name or name of the company. Be sure to get a business card so you’ll have the correct information.
- **Don’t** use a form letter to each recipient when sending to a group.

Phone call follow-up

Before you place a follow-up telephone call, script out or develop a list of bullet points you want to cover and be prepared to leave a voice mail or have a live conversation.

Place your follow-up calls in a timely manner based on the answer to your question about the next steps in the hiring process. Continue to follow up until a job offer is made or you learn you are no longer being considered.

Be patient!

Unless the interviewer says he or she will call you by a certain date, remember that interviewers have other things to do and often other people to interview. So be prepared to wait. Continue to follow up without being obnoxious and **don’t stop job hunting**.