

Interview FAQ's

Once you have created your resume and applied for a job opening, the next step is to get an interview. Interviews come in many forms, and may be multi-step processes, depending on the organization. An employer will use an approach tailored to helping them find the best qualified candidate for the job. For some positions, if your resume meets the basic requirements outlined in the job posting, an in-person interview will be the key element in deciding whether or not you are hired. However, for larger organizations with higher paying positions, the company may go through a multi-step interview process, and may combine different types of interviews for each. Each interview represents a decision point for the employer – whether to hire you, advance you to the next level of the selection process, or decline to pursue the process with you any further.

1. What types of interviews are there? Really, there is no defined number of interview techniques, and each can be structured/scripted, unstructured, or a combination.
 - a. Traditional – This is the most well-known, with the hiring decision maker meeting one on one with each candidate. On the plus side, you get to focus on responding to a single person, and focusing your attention entirely on what they are saying, and their body language. However, if this person is not fully professional, or there is an immediate disconnect between Interviewer and Interviewee, it can be a hard sell.
 - b. Phone – The phone interview reduces the entire interview to what you can verbally describe, and your speaking skills (grammar, inflection, diction, vocabulary) will be on full display. Small quirks in a person's speaking become amplified, since the interviewer has only your voice to focus on. Be aware, while one person may be asking the questions, there may be silent participants on the other end.
 - c. Video – There are two different ways that the video interview can be conducted – Live, and prompted/recorded. The live interview can be as simple as a connecting via any form of video calling or video conferencing, and happens in real time. Generally, they see you, and you see them. Unlike the phone interview, the background behind you, how you are dressed and groomed, your gestures and body language, and many other factors will all be on display. It is a good idea to do a dry run by recording yourself in the same environment and dress speaking into the camera, and then playing it back to see how the result will look. There is also the prompted/recorded video interview, where there is no other person on the other side of the camera. This type of interview is scripted, with the interviewer having been pre-recorded, or by simply having questions presented on the screen. When you are ready to answer, you push record, and provide your answer, and then end the recording to complete the answer and let the system take you to the next question. This kind of interview can be very disconcerting, as the Interviewee has zero feedback of any kind by which to gauge their performance. On the plus side, this is true for every applicant, so try to relax.
 - d. Lunch Interview – A lunch interview can be offered for many reasons. Often, this kind of interview is a supplemental interview. As a candidate, you have likely passed all of the other gates, and the interviewer wants to confirm their decision by getting to know you in a more personal way. For positions where business is conducted frequently over meals, it is also a way to determine that facet of your abilities. The candidate should be prepared to demonstrate a wide variety of skills, from small talk, to forming connections with another person. The structure will be more conversational, and the Interviewer may allow the interviewee to talk at length on their own. The key is to strike the right balance in all facets. Contribute to the conversation without dominating it.

Demonstrate good manners and table etiquette. Talk about things you are knowledgeable about without sounding condescending or conceited, and listen actively to the other person, asking questions which encourage the other person to elaborate.

- e. Group Interview – Early in the selection process, a large employer may interview people in groups in order to thin out the candidate pool, both by getting candidates to self-eliminate, as well as identifying anyone who is obviously not a fit. The key here it to make a positive impression without drawing any negative attention to yourself. A well thought out question to the Interviewer may do that, but it should be innocent enough not to cause the wrong impression, such as asking for additional information or detail on a point the interviewer makes. This is also a good opportunity to listen to make sure this is the position you want. In a group interview, this is where they will bring up aspects of the job most likely to be objectionable to certain candidates, such as the need to start on a non-traditional shift, mandatory overtime, weekend or holiday work, or significant expectations regarding travel. Don't exert effort trying to get to a second interview for a job you don't really want.
 - f. Working Interview (Audition) – For certain skilled positions, a working interview, or audition may be used as part of the selection process. For example, an applicant for a clerical position may have their keyboarding skills assessed with a hands on assessment. A chef applying for a position in a Hotel or fine dining establishment may be asked to go into the kitchen and prepare a meal of his choice from the ingredients in the kitchen.
 - g. Panel Interview – Generally a structured/formal interview, where the candidate is assessed and asked questions by a multi-person panel of interviewers. While the interviewers will take turns asking questions, all of them will assess every response. The positive of this type of interview is that it reduces the impact if a single interviewer takes an immediate dislike to you, as they will have to justify their score with that of their fellow panel members. For the applicant, if you are not prepared for it, it can be difficult to know where to focus. The key is to maintain eye contact with the person asking the question, and then direct your answer to everyone, observing each interviewer for body language cues to your answer.
 - h. Impromptu – This can happen when dropping off a resume in person, or at a career fair, but as it implies, it is not scheduled in advance. It is important to be aware of when these can occur, and make sure you are prepared both mentally and in your appearance. If you choose to drop off applications or resume's in person, always dress as you would if you were going to an interview there, because you just might be!
 - i. Survey/Test – Employers will administer written surveys and tests for a variety of reasons. From assessing basic knowledge and skills, to attempting to determine personality and character traits, these can be very intimidating for the applicant, particularly if you are unsure what they are trying to assess. The best approach is to answer as honestly as possible. If the test is more about trying to get a picture of you as a person, there may not be a right or wrong answer to any question, so long as it is an honest answer.
2. How should I prepare for my interview? Preparation starts when you decide to submit an application for a position. As stated above, you may have little time to prepare once you apply, so review the position description thoroughly, and also study up on the company itself. Develop a list of questions you would have about the company, the work environment, and other factors. Questions about pay, benefits, and the like are good to be thinking about, but should not be brought up until you have reached a point in the interview process where you feel an

offer of employment may be forthcoming. You want to make sure you have already sold yourself before asking any question that sounds like an employment negotiation.

3. How should I dress? – That depends on the job, but a clean, neat appearance is a must. The type of clothes you wear should be appropriate to the position. If you will be working in casual attire, a 3 piece suit is overkill, and could actually do you harm. If you are not sure, err on the side of caution. Clothing should be relatively modest and tasteful. If the job involves wearing a uniform, the minimum is a business casual appearance. Items like jeans,, shorts, flip-flops/sneakers, t-shirts, spaghetti straps, and the like are generally not considered business casual. For men, khaki's and a polo with loafers would be a good start. From there, a long sleeved shirt, would be the next level, then the addition of a sport coat, then a tie, and finally, the proper matched suit. For women, at a minimum, Capri's, slacks, or a knee length skirt with a modest tank style top or blouse and flat or low heeled shoe, followed by a knee length dress or pant suit.
4. How do I make a good first impression? – First, work on maintaining a calm attitude. An interview can be a stressful experience, and it is easy to let your nerves get the best of you. Keep in mind, your interviewer is not there to interrogate you or find ways to disqualify you. Rather, their purpose is to look for a candidate, or candidates, who meet the requirements of the job. They WANT to hire someone, why not you? Remember also that they are just people. They have personal lives, families, hobbies, and other interests beyond just the job they are doing. See your interviewer for the individual person they are, and it will help you to relax. Once you master that, remember your manners and professionalism. Smile, make eye contact, and introduce yourself. If a handshake is offered, a short quick, and firm handshake is the norm. Firm does not mean crushing. Try matching the pressure that the interviewer exerts. In most hand-shakes, the actual shake movement is subtle, a slight up and down, 2-3 times, and then release, unless your interviewer is a double hander. Grasping your hand with both of theirs, or using their opposite hand to grip your forearm or elbow can be a bit of a shock, but this generally is just an exaggerated show of friendliness. Some old-school people may hold the hand shake longer, making it last throughout the initial exchange of pleasantries. This is generally meant to form a deeper initial connection. Unless you are grabbed anywhere above the elbow or on any other part of your body, it is likely innocent, and just the way they handle professional greetings. (Notice the boundaries here – just because you are there to interview, you do not have to subject yourself to inappropriate behavior. If they do it in the interview, they will do even more once you are working for them.) Introduce yourself with your full name, making sure to speak steadily and clearly, and offer another more informal name if you prefer it. (“ It’s a pleasure to meet you. My name is John Smith, but please call me Jack.”) Once the introduction is made , you will generally be directed to sit. Follow the interviewers lead if they don’t give clear direction, observing where they sit, and situating yourself accordingly.
5. How should I answer their questions? Think about your answer for a second before starting your response, but avoid long, pregnant pauses between the end of their question, and the start of your response. The best responses are delivered in a measured, yet conversational tone. Follow the 3 C’s – make sure your answer is clear, complete, and concise. Avoid running off into tangents. Most interview questions require no more than a minute or two for the complete response. The longer you talk, the longer it takes for them to get through their preplanned questions. Keep the focus on what was asked and related to professional experiences. Try to frame your responses using the STAR technique – Situation, Task, Actions, and Results. Frame

the situation you are describing in responding to their question, explain the task or problem involved, describe the actions you took to address that task or problem, and finally, describe the result. One question that can stump the applicant is when they are asked to describe a time they failed, and what they did as a result. Be honest with not only the failure, but your assessment as to why you failed, focusing on the things that you can control, what lessons you took from that, and if you were able to apply those lessons in a later situation, explain how you did that. Similarly, questions about weaknesses are important, too. Acknowledging a weakness indicates that you are self-aware, and describing how you deal with that weakness to prevent it from becoming an issue shows that you are able to self-correct and implement fixes to those weaknesses or behaviors. In both situations, be brutally honest with your failure or weakness. Things like “I work too hard” or the like, where the weakness sounds like a boast, miss what the interviewer is looking for with the question.

6. What do I do if I am unsure of how to answer a question? – There are a couple of ways to do this. You can rephrase the question in a way you believe they meant for it to be, and ask if you got it correctly. You can also ask for a clarification to any part of the question that is giving you trouble. There is no harm in asking for a clarification to a question, unless you are doing it for every single question. That may make it look like you have difficulties with comprehension, or may make the interviewer think that you are less versed in the subject area than they are looking for.
7. Should I ask questions? –During the interview, only ask clarifying questions. Have a pen and paper handy if questions about the job or company occur to you during the interview, so you can jot them down. Normally, after the interviewer has completed their questions, you will get an opportunity to ask questions of your own. At this time, you should definitely have some questions about the work or the company that go beyond the mundane issues of pay, benefits, etc. Consider questions that have to do with advancement opportunities, training opportunities, organizational goals, etc. The goal of these questions should demonstrate that you have done your research on the company, and reflect a desire to learn about the organization in greater detail. You can also ask about next steps in the process, such as when you can expect to hear back regarding the results of the interview.
8. What should I do when the interview is over? – This is like the introduction, just in reverse. A handshake will likely be involved again (same rules as before). Thank them for their time, and let them know you look forward to hearing from them soon. If not offered before, you may want to ask for a business card. It will have information that will be valuable following the interview. Wish them well (“Enjoy the rest of your day,” / “have a great weekend,”/ etc), and exit the room calmly and confidently.
9. When will I hear results about my interview? – Depending on where you are in the docket of interviews they are conducting and the number of people involved in the decision, a response can come anywhere from the same day to weeks later. Keep in mind, some jobs may have multiple interview steps, with candidates weeded out at each level.
10. Is it okay for me to call after the interview to ask about the results? – Not immediately. In fact, the best course of action is to send a brief but professional email within a day or two, thanking them again for their time, and letting them know how excited you are at the prospect of working for their company. (This is why you got that business card). You may or may not get a

response to that email, but it reinforces your name in their mind. Generally, you should have received a timeframe for a decision to be made. If you get past that time frame, it may be appropriate to call either the Interviewer or the Human Resources Office to follow up. Keep in mind, the intent to make a decision by a particular date can be delayed for a number of reasons you are not privy to, so try to be patient and understanding.

11. Should I ask about Money / Benefits? – If a salary range and benefit information was described in the job posting, use that as a way to frame your question so it does not sound overtly transactional and greedy. For example “I noticed you offer a 401K benefit. Can you tell me more about how that works?” “Your posting gave a salary ranges of X to Y. What considerations are used in determining where a person starts in that range?” “Can you tell me a little bit about your health plan?” The key is that you not come off like money and benefits are your primary concern. If these are the only question you have, that is a risk. Mix in some questions about the company, the workplace environment, etc. A good way to frame these is to start by asking how long the interviewer has worked for the company, were they always in their current position, how they would describe the management philosophy of the company, etc, then ask their opinion on things like health insurance, retirement plans, etc.