

PREPARING FOR THE JOB INTERVIEW

Phases of an interview

The interview has a beginning, middle, and an end. There are predictable phases of the interview, and each contains different types of information that the interview is trying to learn from interviewing the candidate. The interviewer wants to check out or verify your qualifications, your accomplishments, your goals, your personality, and your people skills. He or she wants to know if you would be a good “fit” for the job. Generally, the interview will include questions that will help the interviewer to uncover these areas.

Phase I – Opening

The interview begins the moment you enter the building. Be sure to make a good first impression.

- Establish rapport with the interviewer (small talk)
- Make a positive first impression
- Appearance, handshake, Attitude
- Learn the name of your interviewer and greet him or her with a firm handshake
- Don't be too familiar or act over-confident cocky; and try to be calm and relaxed
- Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last names). Only use a first name if they ask you to
- Use body language to show interest – use eye contact and sit up straight
- Be cooperative and enthusiastic
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly

Phase II – Middle

This is the section that most people consider the interview. It is important to keep responses crisp and on target.

- Be prepared to sell yourself, talk about your skills & qualifications
- Answer technical questions relating to your skills
- Provide specific examples about your work experience

For example, “I feel that I work well with others because, in my last job, I was responsible for coordinating the coffee fund, collecting monies, and ordering supplies”

- Relax and answer each question fully but briefly. Too much is just as bad as too little!
- Never lie or exaggerate about your background or experience
- Use proper English – avoid slang
- Take your time – it’s perfectly acceptable to take a moment to collect your thoughts

Phase III – End

This is your chance to close the interview on a high note, so prepare at least 5 questions.

- Ask closing questions to show your interest in the position and company

What are some of the challenges of this position?

What kind of room for advancement is there in this position?

When can I expect to hear from you?

- Ask questions about the position and the organization, but avoid questions whose answers can easily be found on the company Web site
- Also avoid asking questions about salary and benefits unless a job offer is made
- At the end, thank the interview for their time
- Thank the interview when you leave and shake hands

Explaining a Criminal Background in the Interview:

- Be straightforward and honest
- Take responsibility for your actions
- Address the concrete actions you have taken to make a change (education, training, community, etc.)
- Describe what you learned
- Keep your statement short and to the point
- Don’t let the employer draw you into talking in detail about your crime, court proceedings, or life in prison
- COPE Method

Comfort the employer. Own it. Stress Positives. Encourage the employer. 1

The 60-Second Commercial – Why should I hire you?

Your 30 to 60-second personal commercial: A sure-fire networking secret

In most job interviews, or even at a career fair, a question employer's always ask is, "Could you tell me about yourself?" This question can throw you off if you are not prepared. Fortunately, there is a simple and almost fool-proof method to handle this challenge: a 30 to 60-second commercial about you. It is a snapshot of you and the qualities that you would bring to the job. It should contain some basic components, such as:

- Who are you? This is your name and something important about yourself that can make you stand out to the person you are talking to
- What do you want? Type of job you are seeking or information you would like to know
- What can you do? Education and training, one to two hard and soft skills that you are strong in relating to the job

Hard Skills – Typing speed, Ability to operate specific types of equipment (forklift, office equipment, etc.), Computer knowledge, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Ability to operate a cash register

Soft Skills – Flexible, team player, hard working, dependable, friendly, excellent customer service skills, great attitude

- What have you done? Experience (includes skills, not just job titles, but experience in the field)
- What's next? This is when you set up a time for a phone call or meeting or give your resume or contact information

Example:

Hello my name is Marco Sanchez. I always shop here and I am very interested in learning more about your company. I am currently taking the Goodwill Retail Customer Service Training Program. I am excellent at professional communication, using a computer, and training new staff. I have two years experience in serving customers as a cashier and cook. I have led teams of four employees, made weekly purchase orders, and created weekly schedules. I think I am a great fit for this kind of business. Is there a time when we could sit down and talk some more about any opportunities with your company?

Commonly Asked Interview Questions

In an interview there are many common questions or types of questions that most employers ask. It is important to prepare for these kinds of questions before an interview.

Types of Questions

Icebreaker – These questions at the beginning of the interview might not feel like part of the interview, but they are. An employer is trying to get a sense of how friendly or talkative you are. Also, this is an excellent time to relate to your potential employer. Remember the importance of a first impression.

- How about the weather lately?
- Did you get a chance to look around the store?
- How about the Mariners' game last night?

Skills and Experience – These are considered to be standard interview questions. They are usually pretty straightforward. Your answers should highlight the skills and experience that relate to the job you are interviewing for and use specific examples whenever possible.

- Why should we hire you?
- What skills and experience would you bring to this job?
- What are your strengths?

Specific Work Examples – These kinds of questions are becoming more and more popular. They usually start with "Tell me about the time when..." You should have a few stories related to teamwork, customer service, and showing initiative ready for these types of questions. Keep these answers brief.

Generally our answer should go like this: 1) Describe the situation 2) What you did 3) How your action led to a successful outcome. Example:

1. One time at my last job there was a very angry customer, who needed to return an item that didn't work.
 2. I immediately went over to the customer, took the item back, and found the customer a new one. I also gave the customer my name and told them to call back and ask for me if they had any more problems.
 3. The customer smile and thanked me. They kept coming back to the store for the next few years.
- Tell me about a time when you worked under pressure.

- Tell me about a time when you delivered excellent customer service.
- When have you been successful working as part of a team

Situation – These questions test your ability to think on your feet and give employers a chance to see how well you work under pressure. They usually start with “What if...” or describe a situation and end with “What would you do or say?” These questions are difficult to prepare for, but try to keep the job in mind. If you are interviewing for a customer service job, try to make your answers all about customer service.

- What would you do if you knew a customer was purchasing something that they would not be happy with?
- What if you saw one of your coworkers breaking company policy? What would you do?

Trick Questions – These are questions where the employer is trying to throw you off and reveal something about yourself. If you are not ready or careful, these questions could have a negative effect on your chances of getting hired. It is important here to flip any negative answers into a positive.

- What are your weaknesses?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- Tell me about a problem you had on a job?
- What kind of salary do you expect from this job

12 Commonly Asked Questions and Answers for a Successful Interview

What can you tell me about yourself?

This is usually the first question an interviewer will ask. Prepare to answer in about 30-60 seconds. Avoid speaking about your personal situation, such as family or marital status.

Why did you want to work here?

Do your homework on your prospective employer. Be prepared to tell the interviewer what you have learned about the company. Do not mention that you heard they have great benefits or your best friend works there. Those may be important to you, but not to the interviewer. Tell what you can do for the company.

What training and experience has prepared you for this job?

Your response to this question shall be the proof of your experience that is written on your resume. When asked what training and experience you have, give specific examples of your work projects.

What are your weaknesses? What are your strengths?

When asked about weaknesses, be prepared to talk briefly about ONE of your work-related weaknesses and how you are working on improving it or how it has become less of a weakness over time. It is more important to build positively on your strengths.

What can you bring to this company?

The interviewer wants to know what sets you apart from others being interviewed. It is important to focus on YOUR skills and abilities that you can bring to the position. Appearing cocky or over-confident is negative.

What do you plan to be doing five years from now?

This question is often asked to see if you have goals for the future. Do not say that in 5-10 years you want to be president of your own company. Saying that you want to own your own company someday means that they are training you to leave and become a competitor. Do give general information about future career goals.

How well do you work with other people?

The interviewer wants to know if you are a team player and can get along well with different types of people. Keep any unpleasant encounters you have had with co-workers to yourself. Instead, focus on the positive team experiences, giving example whenever you can.

How well do you work under pressure?

Many jobs require that you handle multiple tasks, meet deadlines, or work with angry customers among other things. These jobs require you to keep your cool...So give an example of how well you work under pressure or time when you are able to keep your cool under stressful situations.

What are your hobbies?

This question is designed to find out how well-rounded you are, that is your interest other than work. Saying something like "Computers are my life!" is the incorrect approach. Yes, the interviewer wants to know that you love your work, but also that you can relate to others in a company because of your other interest. Also engaged in hobbies is a good indicator you have a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

Why are you leaving your present company?

This is one more opportunity to sell your skills and abilities to the interviewer. Tell only the positive points about yourself and why you are leaving.

What questions would you like to ask me?

Asking good questions is an important part of the interview. This presents another way to sell yourself. Ask what their expectations are for someone in this position over the next few months. You might ask about special upcoming projects.

Why should I hire you?

This question is sometimes the first question that is asked in an interview. This is your opportunity to make the interviewer want to hire YOU. Do not say you are the best qualified candidate for the job. You actually won't know about the qualifications of other applicants. Instead, emphasize your skills, motivation and enthusiasm. Stress how your presence will make a positive impact on their business.