

5.2.6: Preparing For a Job Interview

Learning Objectives

- Describe effective strategies to prepare for an interview

If your résumé and cover letter have served their purposes well, you will be invited to participate in an interview with the company or organization you're interested in. Congratulations! It's an exciting opportunity, and your prospects for employment are very strong if you put in the time to be well prepared.

In this section we look at how to get ready for an interview, what types of interviews you might need to engage in, and what kinds of questions you might be asked.

Preparing Effectively for a Job Interview

Review the Job Description

When you prepare for an interview, your first step will be to carefully read and reread the job posting or job description. This will help you develop a clearer idea of how you meet the skills and attributes the company seeks.

Research the Company or Organization

Researching the company will give you a wider view of what the company is looking for and how well you might fit in. Your prospective employer may ask you what you know about the company. Being prepared to answer this question shows that you took time and effort to prepare for the interview and that you have a genuine interest in the organization. It shows good care and good planning—soft skills you will surely need on the job.

Practice Answering Common Questions

Most interviewees find that practicing the interview in advance with a family member, a friend, or a colleague eases possible nerves during the actual interview. It also creates greater confidence when you walk through the interview door. In the “Interview Questions” section below, you'll learn more about specific questions you will likely be asked and corresponding strategies for answering them.

Plan to Dress Appropriately

Interviewees are generally most properly dressed for an interview in business attire, with the goal of looking highly professional in the eyes of the interviewer. In the article “[Here's What 'Business Casual' Really Means](#)” by Jacquelyn Smith, learn exactly what is meant by “business casual,” and see the specific types of attire appropriate for men and women.

Come Prepared

Plan to bring your résumé, cover letter, and a list of references to the interview. You may also want to bring a portfolio of representative work. Leave behind coffee, chewing gum, and any other items that could be distractions.

Be Confident

Above all, interviewees should be confident and “courageous.” By doing so you make a strong first impression. As the saying goes, “There is never a second chance to make a first impression.”

In the Interview

Once you are in the interview, there is that rush of adrenaline that comes with the desire to excel and land the next interview—or better yet the job itself. Perhaps the simplest trick in the interview is to quickly wonder, “Why did they ask that question?” There's a purpose behind each question asked—that person wants to know how you can do this new job. You quickly have to demonstrate that you have what it takes.

There are all kinds of memorable names for interview techniques. STAR is one such technique that quickly helps you present the stories of your career in a way to demonstrate skills to the interviewer. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Activity, Result. This is a way showcase your skills in under two minutes by setting the context of when you exercised a skill, describing what was required

of you, what you did, and how the situation concluded. Here is a nice summary with examples from the article “[Using the Star technique to shine at job interviews: a how-to guide](#)” by Michael Higgins.

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