

Interviewing Skills

Introduction

Once your resume has gotten an employer's interest, you may be contacted for an interview. If you are feeling overwhelmed, don't worry! Everyone is nervous about job interviews. Understanding **what interviews are all about**, how the **various interview formats** differ, and how a **typical interview may proceed** should put your mind at ease.



Interviews

In today's job market, you will likely need to go through some type of interview in order to secure a job. An **interview** is a meeting between an employer and a job applicant. This meeting can take place in person, over the telephone, or via video conferencing. The atmosphere may be formal or fairly casual. It may involve just you and the employer, or you and a group of people or panel. Regardless, your interview serves a distinct purpose for both you and your potential employer.

The hiring manager uses the interview to assess your qualifications and determine if you are the best candidate for the job.

The employer asks questions to see how well you understand the industry and the position, as well as to determine if you are able to perform the job duties. In addition, the employer is trying to decide whether you will fit well within the culture of the organization. If you don't meet every job qualification but you present yourself well in an interview, there is a good possibility that you could be chosen over candidates with similar or better qualifications who don't communicate as well.

The job interview is your chance to find out if the company—and the job—are a good match for you.

Ask questions of your own to learn more about the company and the position itself. Use this time to decide whether the job, the direction of the company, and the developments within the industry will maintain your interest and use your unique skills

and abilities. Your questions should help you determine if the work atmosphere is one in which you work well and one you will enjoy.

Types of interviews



When we think about interviews, we often imagine going to a place of business to speak with one person—usually a potential boss or hiring manager. However, job interviews can take a wide range of forms and can be held in person, over the phone, or via video

conference. Here are seven types of interviews you may encounter in addition to a face-to-face, one-on-one interview:

- An employer may use a **screening interview** to determine which of the top candidates to bring in for the actual face-to-face interview. A screening interview can be done in person but more often will be over the telephone. It may sometimes be conducted by the hiring manager's assistant or someone from HR, but is more typically done by the person doing the hiring.
- For a **group interview**, you'll usually meet with several people at once, possibly including the hiring manager and your potential peers or supervisors. Group interviews also sometimes include people from other parts of the company that you would have to work with in the position you're applying for. Interviewing potential employees in a group allows employers to see how well you communicate within a team environment. This type of interview is most common for government or education jobs.
- During **behavioral interviews**, the employer asks you questions about your previous employment behavior to try to gauge what your future performance would look like. Questions focus on how the skills, abilities, and accomplishments of your past can benefit their organization. These questions usually begin with **Tell me about a time you...** and ask you to give examples of times when you've worked in teams or resolved an issue. Most interviews will involve some behavioral questions, so you should always come prepared with examples.
- The **audition interview** allows potential employers to see you in action before they make hiring decisions. Computer programmers may be asked to write code, software testers may have to locate and fix a problem, chefs are often asked to prepare a dish, and a corporate trainer may be asked to present new material. These are examples of the audition interview, with the hiring manager—or the hiring team—serving as your audience. In some fields, such as computer

programming, an audition is a standard part of an interview, and you may not be told about it ahead of time. For other types of jobs, you'll usually be told before the interview if an audition is expected.

- **Interviews over lunch and dinner** can be nice, but they often cause anxiety for job candidates. Use basic meal-time etiquette in this case. Order something mid-priced and nonmessy, avoid alcoholic beverages, and pay more attention to the interview than the meal. Even if conversation is casual during the meal, the employer is assessing the appropriateness of your responses and manners. Avoid talking too much about yourself on a personal level, and stay away from comments about politics, religion, gender, and ethnicity.
- During a **full-day interview**, several members of an organization interview you individually, each with their own departmental interests in mind. For example, the head of the marketing department may ask about your communications background, while the project management team may want to know if you're able to manage large-scale team projects. Sometimes a full-day interview will include behavioral interview questions and an audition interview. The full-day interview will likely include a lunch interview, so be prepared for that as well.
- Sometimes a company may invite the top candidates for a **follow-up interview** if they are having a difficult time deciding or have neglected to ask an important question. Before going, ask what you can expect and what the company is hoping to get out of the follow up so you'll be prepared.

Every interview is unique; your interview may be a combination of the interview types discussed above, or it may be completely different.

The interview process

Regardless of which type of interview you will have, all should follow the same process. We suggest keeping the following **GOA²L Process** in mind during an interview:



1. **Greet** the interviewer with a firm handshake, introduce yourself, and thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you.
2. **Offer** additional copies of your resume. Have several copies with you in case you'll meet with multiple interviewers. If you have previous work samples, a list of references, or other materials to share, you can bring them out now or hold onto them until you are asked about them.



3. **Answer** the questions that are asked of you, making sure to be honest, clear, professional, and concise. If you don't understand a particular question, it is always acceptable to ask for clarification.



4. **Ask** whatever questions you may have about the job or the company. Remember, this is your chance to find out if you really want **this** job for **this** company. Not sure what to ask? [Read more about asking your own questions.](#)

5. **Leave** on a good note. When the interview is over, shake the interviewer's hand again. Thank the interviewer for taking time to talk with you, communicate your interest in being hired, and ask when you can expect to hear an answer about the job.

Don't forget to send a **thank-you note!** Less than half of job candidates send them, but all hiring managers are impressed by candidates who send thank-you notes. Either by phone, email, or letter, follow up. This is just one more way to put yourself ahead of other candidates. Use the note as a chance to:



- Thank the hiring manager again for his or her time
- Restate why you think you are the best fit for the job
- Inquire about the status of the position
- Ask anything that has come to mind since

the interview

What to Prepare Before an Interview

Introduction

Knowing that you have an interview coming up can be stressful. However, if you use the time before your interview to prepare yourself, you will likely look and feel more confident during the interview.

This lesson will guide you through different ways to prepare for an interview. It will explain how to **research the company** beforehand. It will help you identify **appropriate interview attire** and will provide you with a **checklist of items to bring along** with you. And it will help you both prepare to **ask the right questions** and **practice answering** the questions you are likely to be asked.

Research the company

During an interview, you will need to show an employer that you know about and understand the needs of the company. One way to prepare for this is to **research the company**.

In general, you want to find out:

- what products or services the company sells
- who its customers and competitors are
- how the company is doing within the industry
- what the company culture is like

Researching tools

- Use our [Company Research Guide](#) to gather essential information. Don't worry if you can't find every answer to every question. You'll likely use only part of this information in your interview, but it is better to go in with a good understanding of the company. Print it out, take notes on it as you research, and take it with you to your interview.
- If you can't find information on the company's website, consider using [LinkedIn](#) or another networking site to find someone who can tell you about the company.
- If you are a student or recent graduate, you can visit your college's career services office.
- If you are willing to pay for the service, websites like [Hoovers](#), [OneSource](#), and [LexisNexis](#) offer various types of information about a vast number of companies. If you don't want to pay, you may be able to access these websites for free through your local public library.

Other researching tips

- Drive to the interview location beforehand—preferably at the same time of day as your interview—so you can get a good estimate of how long the travel time

will be on the actual day of your interview. You don't want to be late for an interview!

- The actual job description or job posting will likely contain information about the company.



Decide what to wear to an interview

Like most people, interviewers are susceptible to first impressions, and one of the first things an interviewer will see of you is how you're dressed. Because you want to make sure your first impression is a good one, here are some things to keep in mind when choosing an outfit for an interview.

- A good interview outfit should be relatively **formal**, so don't wear jeans, T-shirts, or sneakers unless you've specifically been asked to wear them. A **business suit** is usually a safe bet for either a man or a woman. If you don't have a business suit, a **long-sleeved, solid-colored shirt** (button-down for men) or sweater and a pair of **dark-colored cotton or wool pants** will usually work.
 - When you choose your clothes, make sure they **fit well**, are **not visibly worn out**, and are **comfortable to sit down in**. Both men and women should avoid wearing clothing that's too tight because provocative clothing isn't seen as professional attire. Women should avoid low necklines and short skirts for the same reason.
- **Keep accessories to a minimum**. Wearing too much jewelry, makeup, perfume, or cologne is considered unprofessional, and it won't make a good impression on an interviewer. You may even want to avoid perfume or cologne altogether because you have no way of knowing whether any of the people you'll meet are allergic to it.
- Wear **dark or neutral colors**, even if these aren't colors you ordinarily wear. This applies not only to the clothes you wear but also to accessories and shoes. Women should also wear **neutral-colored stockings**, and men should wear **neutral or dark ties**.
- Make sure you're **well-groomed** when you're going to an interview. Check that your hair and nails are neat and clean and that your clothing is unwrinkled or ironed before leaving the house. This shows the interviewer that you took time to prepare for the interview and are taking it seriously.

- Keep in mind that not every tip on this list will apply in all situations. For an audition interview, for example, you may be expected to dress less formally, depending on what you'll be asked to do. If you're not sure what to wear, you may be able to call the **human resources** department of the company and ask what would be appropriate. You can also **ask friends or colleagues** who may have interviewed at similar workplaces.

Decide what to take with you to an interview

After you've decided what to wear, it's time to think about what you should bring along with you to the interview. It's also important to know what you should leave at home or in your car.

It is best to assemble the items you are bringing along in a briefcase or similar professional-looking organizer. Remember, your first impression should be as a neat, organized, and prepared individual!


Practice answering questions

Because the largest portion of your interview will be spent answering questions, the best way to prepare for an interview is to **anticipate the questions** you'll likely be asked and then **practice your answers** to these questions.

All interviewers will ask some **common interview questions** to determine if you are the best candidate for the job. These questions usually deal with your career goals, your level of interest in the job and company, your job skills and motivation, and your interpersonal communication skills.

The STAR method for answering questions

You may not know exactly which questions you'll be asked during your interview, but there is something you can do to make sure you are as prepared as possible to answer them. Practice using the **STAR** method for answering. The STAR method begins with a description of a **Situation**, then describes the **Tasks** that were necessary for the situation, the **Actions** you took to address that situation, and the **Result**. The following is a sample STAR answer for the question **Tell me about a time you were able to satisfy an upset customer**.



Situation: Our new product was set to be released in May and was highly anticipated in the industry. In fact, one of our biggest customers was already relying on our product to include in its own business platform. Unfortunately, one of our suppliers didn't meet our contract needs in April, which could have delayed our product release and would have made that customer dissatisfied.

Task: To address this problem, my team had to find a new supplier as quickly as possible or look for an alternate way to satisfy our customer.

Action: After conducting rapid research into likely suppliers, it became evident that none would be able to help us meet our product specs as written. Leading the product team back to the drawing board, we altered the design of our product in a way that let us utilize a ready supplier without compromising the primary functionality of our product.

Result: Because we worked with what the new supplier had readily available, we were able to complete production on schedule. The cost of the new supplier was less than the original, so our own price point was able to be reduced as well. Both of these results greatly pleased our customer, which ended up increasing its order and putting us over our sales goal within the first three months of product availability.

Have several of these **STAR stories** prepared before going into the interview. Use the accomplishments you included on your resume as a starting point, then outline three STAR stories to talk about in your interview.

Prepare your own questions to ask

An interview is as much for you as it is for the hiring manager. It is your chance to find out more about the job, the company, the industry, and your potential boss. Your questions should show your genuine interest in or understanding of the company. Knowing which questions to ask and which to not ask can help you get more out of your interview—and can perhaps even get you the job!