

Winning Job Interviews

A job interview doesn't have to be nerve-racking. With some planning and practice, you can arrive ahead of schedule, with confidence. Typically the person who will interview you is a nice person and remembers what it was like when they were learning the job interview process. Here are some steps to get you through the process and help you walk away with a possible job offer.

Before the Interview

Basics

- Take time to write out your answers to standard interview questions and read them over several times.
- Practice interviewing with someone with experience. Mock interviews may seem silly but will help you feel more comfortable in the actual setting. Include practicing a "business handshake." (See handout, "The Perfect Business Handshake.")
- Take a few copies of your resume and list of references, a pen and a notebook to your interview. Consider purchasing an inexpensive, simple folder or notebook at an office supply store. This gives you a more polished, professional look and keeps your resume and reference copies clean.
- Arrive a few minutes early. Know where you're going and do a practice run if you're unsure how long it takes to get there. This way you're not rushed or out of breath.
- Leave backpacks, gym bags, cell phones, water bottles, food, books, or large purses in the car or at home. If you want to carry a purse, make it a small, simple one.
- If you have to wait for the interviewer, occupy your time by checking your calendar or by reading periodicals or office materials in the waiting area – look engaged!
- Maintain eye contact when being asked questions or when giving answers. Show the interviewer that you're attentive, interested and personable. Be positive. Breathe naturally and try to relax.
- Good posture shows confidence. Don't slouch or use negative body language by crossing your arms, clenching your fists or twirling your hair. No GUM.

- Try not to reschedule, but if something unavoidable comes up, call at least a day ahead of time. Companies will usually try to accommodate you if you give them advance notice.
- Remember that the interview starts from the time you arrive and lasts until you leave. Put your best foot forward from beginning to end.

Dress for Success

- Dress similarly to the dress code for the company you're interviewing with. Keep it SIMPLE:
 - Do not wear open-toed shoes, low-cut shirts, tight-fitting clothes, heavy make-up, piercing or tattoos in obvious places, cologne or worn-out shoes.
 - Wear almost no jewelry and keep it simple.
 - Conservative hairstyles are recommended.
 - Jeans are okay only if that's what everyone is wearing at the company. Make sure they don't have rips or stains.

During the Interview

Saying the Right Thing the Best Way

- Be polite. Don't interrupt when the interviewer is talking. Use good manners and say thank you after the interview.
- A smile goes a long way when meeting the interviewer or anyone else at the company.
- Be friendly with everyone you meet. They may be checking to see how well you'll fit in.
- Don't be afraid to make yourself sound great. It's not bragging. It's okay to say you're good at things. You are selling yourself and want to get the job. It's important for you to convince the interviewer you're the person to hire. Employers like people who know who they are, both their strengths and weaknesses. Be prepared to share specific examples of how you've used your skills.
- Be honest even if it means admitting you don't know something. Many people exaggerate on their resume and during the interview and are bound to get caught. Show them you have great ethics right from the start and carry that with you throughout your career.
- Don't speak negatively of yourself or a former employer. For example, don't say you left your last job because the hours were too early and you're not a morning person or that you didn't get along with your last supervisor. Keep to the positives about your experiences and you.

- If you're asked a question you're not certain how to answer, it's okay to take a brief moment to think before you reply. The employer will see that you think before you speak.

Sample Questions You Can Ask

The interview process is a two-way street; be prepared to ask questions. Do a little research about the company before going to the interview. Find out how long they've been in business. Most companies now have Web sites. Show you've done your homework by mentioning things you've learned on their Web site. Here are some sample questions you could ask if not already covered in the interview:

- When can I expect to hear back from you?
- What will be expected of me as an employee?
- Once I'm hired, who will I report to?
- What are the typical hours I will work? Will there be any overtime?
- How many people will I be working with?
- What kind of training will I receive?
- How will I know if I'm doing the job right?
- Are there positions for me to advance to?
- My family is taking a vacation the last week in June. Would I be able to join them for part of that time?
- Will I need to buy uniforms or provide myself with anything special?
- If you don't have the interviewer's contact information, ask for it. Make sure you have the correct spelling of their name.

Don't Ask:

- Questions about salary, paid vacations, holidays with pay or paid sick days. These are things to deal with after a job offer.

After the Interview

Follow-Up

- Say thank you. It's also appropriate to send a thank you by e-mail or a handwritten thank-you note right away, especially if you're really interested in the job.
- Don't hesitate to call if you have further questions.
- If a couple of days go by and you don't hear back from the employer, it's okay to call and check on the status of the position.

Do You Want the Job?

Typically you don't get an offer on the spot. If you do and aren't certain you want the job, it's okay to say, "I'm interested in the job and I'm really glad I had a chance to talk with you about it. Could I call you with my answer tomorrow?" This gives you time to think it over, consider your options and maybe talk about it with a friend or family member.

Talking About Money

Most jobs you'll apply for don't involve pay negotiations. Usually the employer has a set wage in mind and that's what it will be. Depending on the type of work, you may be paid hourly (for example, \$6 an hour for babysitting) by the piece (for example, \$1 a T-shirt for silk-screening) or by commission (for example, 15% of each sale you close). Here are some questions you might have once you know the rate of pay:

- Will I be getting tips as part of this job? If so, do you know the approximate amount each week?
- How often will I get paid (weekly, biweekly, or monthly)?
- Are there bonuses that come with this job? (Some seasonal work includes a bonus for employees who stay for the entire season.)
- Are there any perks that come with the job? (If you're a retail worker, you may get a discount on the things you buy.)
- What benefits do you provide? (Some companies offer health insurance and retirement funds even to part-time or short-term employees.)

When You Don't Get the Job

Even though you may think you're the best person for a job, you won't always get a job offer. Getting a job is a competitive process and typically there is only one person that will get the job. That's why it's especially smart to do your homework and invest a little time in preparing for a job interview. It's a good idea to apply for several jobs and not count on one particular position. If you get a call from an interviewer who says they've hired someone else, sure, you may have a moment of disappointment, but keep moving ahead with the next opportunity and stay positive. There are other jobs out there and the next one may be even better.