

Steps to Successful Interviews

Steps to Success in Interviewing

Interviewers form opinions quickly, so thorough preparation is crucial. Practice your verbal communication and pay attention to dress and behavior.

Step 1—Prepare

Research the Position and the Organization

Obtain a detailed job description, if possible, and be prepared to mention job responsibilities during the interview. Attend employer information sessions and read the organization's website and literature, news articles on the employer, and other information sources to learn about products and services; size (sales and number of employees, locations, etc.); employer strengths, values, and distinguishing characteristics; recent stock performance, if a publicly traded firm; key staff and organizational structure; competitors and growth potential; and industry trends. Conduct information interviews with alumni and others in similar organizations to increase your knowledge of the career field and the industry.

Online resources such as wetfeet.com, vaultreports.com, hoovers.com, LexisNexis, and CareerSearch.net provide valuable employer information.

Identify Connections Between You and the Position

- List major points about yourself in relation to the position. Note specific examples to support each point and decide how to present them.
- Analyze your academic, experiential, and extracurricular activities to discover what they reveal about your strengths, values, and interests.
- Determine the answers to key questions: Why do I want this job? How am I qualified? What makes me a prime candidate? What are my strengths and weaknesses relative to the position?
- Review your resume and be prepared to explain what you accomplished, why you performed tasks a certain way, what you gained from the experience, and how it helped prepare you for your desired career field.

Develop Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Formulate questions covering a broad range of topics of interest to you—business direction and goals, business philosophy and management style, competitive stance and market growth projections, and career paths/career enhancements—based on your research of the organization and understanding of the position.

Take Advantage of Resources

A search of the CALS Library holdings in 177 Roberts Hall, using the keyword “interviewing,” will help you identify many resources on effective interviewing techniques, including:

- *Interview Excellence: 12 Step Program to Job Interview Success* by McDermott.
- *Sweaty Palms: the Neglected Art of Being Interviewed* by Medley.
- *Nail the job interview: 101 dynamite answers to Interview questions* by Krannich

Step 2—Practice

Analyze and Improve Your Communication Skills

- Use proper language, grammar, and diction. Avoid pauses using “um” and “uh,” and filler words such as “you know,” “like,” or “okay.”
- Eliminate nervous mannerisms.
- Be aware of what your posture, gestures, and facial expressions are communicating. For example, poor posture may be viewed as lack of self-confidence.

Become Comfortable Talking About Yourself

- Familiarize yourself with the types of questions interviewers ask and practice well thought out answers in front of a mirror, with a friend, or using a tape recorder.
- Rehearse responses, but do not memorize them.
- Overcome any discomfort in discussing your strengths.
- Be prepared to articulate your weaknesses. Try to focus your weaknesses on job inexperience rather than on personal limitations. Explain what actions you are taking to correct the weakness.

- Schedule a practice interview with a career advisor. Simulating the interview can help you develop responses to questions and heighten awareness of your body language. Videotaping of the interview may be available to assist you in analyzing your performance.

Practice Interviewing Techniques

- Be sure you understand a long or complex question before you answer. Do not hesitate to ask for clarification.
- Take time to think about your answer before you begin; short pauses are acceptable.
- Learn to generate answers that are neither too long (over two minutes) nor too short (under twenty seconds).
Frame your answer with introductory words when appropriate, for example, “I see three main points that relate to this issue.”

Step 3—Perform

During the interview, your primary objective is to demonstrate how you can meet the needs and goals of the employer.

- Focus your answers by emphasizing your accomplishments and experience.
- Be positive. Negative comments about past experiences could give the impression that you are hard to get along with.
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm and self-confidence by relaxing and smiling.
- Watch for clues that the interviewer is connecting with you. Change your approach if he or she does not seem interested and relaxed or fails to maintain eye contact. If the interviewer appears puzzled, stop and restate your reply. If he or she seems to have lost interest, ask if you have covered the point adequately.
- Before leaving an interview, ask about next steps, and make sure you understand the employer’s time frame for filling the job.

Step 4—Evaluate

Make it a point to learn something from your interview experience, even one that did not go as well as you had hoped. Analyze your performance immediately after each interview, asking yourself:

- Was I properly prepared?
- Was I able to keep the interviewer’s attention?
- Which questions were particularly tough?

- Did I learn enough about the job? Did the interviewer learn enough about me to decide whether I am right for the job?

Meet with a career counselor/advisor to discuss difficult questions or issues about the interview.

Step 5—Follow Up

Following each interview, write a short and timely letter of appreciation to the interviewer. This will demonstrate professionalism and give you an opportunity to make another positive impression.

- Include any information or documents requested during the interview.
- Briefly restate any points you believe may not have been communicated effectively, or add an important point you may have forgotten.
- After on-site visits, send a letter or e-mail to the key contact person who arranged the visit and request that your thanks be conveyed to others involved in the interview process.
- Consider sending a separate letter to your potential supervisor, if you interviewed with that person.

Expenses

If claiming reimbursable expenses, state an accurate total and include original receipts. Submit in a timely manner.

Application Status

- If you have not heard from the employer a week or so after the stated time frame, you may call and ask for an update on your status.
- Realize that activities and decisions may be delayed during holiday and prime vacation periods.
- If you receive a rejection from an employer for whom you would like to work, follow up with another letter reiterating your interest in the organization and expressing your desire to be considered for other positions in the future.