



Interviews

Learn what to expect ... and how to deal with the unexpected!

What is an interview?

Many people think of interviews as a “test”; it is better to think of it as a conversation between you and the employer about the work that needs to be done.

What does an interview do for the employer?

Interviews allow employers to assess your fit for the work that needs to be done day-to-day and over the long-term.

What does an interview do for you?

Interviews allow you to communicate relevant information about the match between you and the opportunity. It also allows you to assess your fit with the work or organization. Be prepared to talk about your interests, skills and personality and how they affect the way you work.

Timeline of Many Interviews

Invitation & Research	Getting There	First Impressions	The Introducing	Their Questions	Your Questions	Follow Up	The Offer
0 - 14 days in advance	10 minutes early	10 seconds	5 minutes	30 - 80 minutes	5 - 10 minutes	Within 48 hours	1 - 60 days

Before the Interview

Research the work and the organization - so that you know something about the uniqueness of the occupation and why it fits you. Visit company/organization websites for facts and editorial opinions about facets of the work. Build a list of questions that you have for the interviewer(s).

Friends and family to give you feedback - on general impressions, nervous habits or gestures, speech punctuated by “ums” and “ahs”. Ask for information on the speed and tone of your voice, the logic of your explanations, and the frequency of your eye contact. Perhaps record an answer a day on your answering machine. Listen to how clear you sound and whether there is any nervous rambling you would like to curb. Avoid credibility problems by reducing or eliminating “like” as fillers in your vocabulary. Stay away from “up talk” which tends to make every statement sound like a question, thereby undermining what you say. If you tend to speak quickly, slow down.

Types of Interviews

- Face-to-face
- Telephone
- Panel
- Tandem
- Group
- Carousel
- Video



Dress for success - by wearing something professional, yet “you”. Dress with care and avoid an appearance that is too casual by dressing 10% better than you would dress going to work at the organization on a regular day. Wear colours that make you feel confident. Polish your shoes, brush your teeth and use a lint brush.

Get lots of rest - so you can think clearly and communicate effectively during your interview.

During the Interview - General Strategies

Introduce yourself

It is wise to have a 30-second “blurb” about yourself at the ready. Hit the high points of who you are: perhaps what school and program you attend, a bit about your recent work/volunteer activities, and a quick summary of how people describe you. Be yourself. Be positive and not too detailed at this point. Help the conversation get going. Remember to make eye contact and smile at everyone you meet (receptionists, people in the hall, waiting room, etc.), not just the interviewer(s).

A Good Candidate Shows ...

1. That they **WANT** the job
2. That they will be **COMPETENT** at the work

What do you want them to remember about you after you

Give REAL answers, not “RIGHT” answers

Despite what many candidates hear through the grapevine, there are no right answers. Speak authentically using your own words and specific examples from your life. Avoid generalities: (“I am a team player with a variety of experiences”) and naïve statements: (“Being a ... requires patience, dedication and a thirst for learning...”). Tell succinct but vivid stories that enable the interviewer(s) to get to know you and to see your potential contributions to the occupation you aspire to and to their organization.

Your Questions for Them

What do you think will be the major challenges to your organization over the next x years?

Can you tell me what a typical day in this job would be like?

What changes would you like to see made over the coming year by the person who takes this job?

Types of Questions

The purpose of the interview is to help employers confirm the skills and experience you cited on your résumé and to gain additional information about your fit with the work and their organization. Types of questions and interview process vary somewhat by organization and area of work, but they are often composed of one or a combination of question categories including general/traditional questions, behavioural questions, and action-based questions. There are also sometimes the ones people fear: off-the-wall or illegal questions.



Off-the-wall questions

Questions such as “If you could be any kind of kitchen appliance, what would you be?”, “What book are you currently reading?” or “Describe your favourite sandwich” are not usually mainstays in interviewing. If you do encounter them, remember that these are usually simply about trying to see how you really think.

Illegal and unethical questions

You do not have to answer illegal questions, but you may wish to interpret what is really being asked and answer that question instead. e.g.: “Do you plan to have children during the next few years?” Possible answer: “My career is most important to me for the next few years and I will be focusing on that.”

During the Interview - 3 Main Types of Questions

1. General or traditional questions

Aim: to get to know you, get a sense of your ability to connect with people and find out about the match between you and the company/job:

Examples:

1. Why do you want to work here? What attracted you to the position?
2. What interests you most about the position? The least?
3. What did you choose to study_____? Have you ever changed your major? Why?
4. What do you know about our organization? What interests you?
5. What unique qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in the position? The field? What can you contribute?
6. What extra-curricular or volunteer positions have you held? What did you learn from them?
7. What kind of supervisor and work environment do you like?
8. What have you learned from any of the positions you have held? Any important lessons? Any significant failures?
9. What parts of the job do you think would be most/least satisfying? Stressful?
10. What are your ideas on salary?
11. What are your strong points? Weaknesses?
12. Tell me about yourself.

Use Your P-U-L-L

Brainstorm experiences from the following areas of your life:

Paid Work

Unpaid Work

Learning

Leisure

Using examples from these areas helps you:

Show diverse experiences

Show life/work balance

Increase examples available

Convey information from resume and cover letter



2. Behaviour-based or situational questions

Aim: to get concrete evidence of specifics of what you have done in the past that can be predictors of how you will work in the job for which you are interviewing. Behaviour-based questions often begin with the phrase: “Tell me about a time when _____?” (See the next page for the S-T-A-R responses).

Examples:

1. Tell me about a time when you had to lead people through a difficulty.
2. Tell me about a time when you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
3. Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker.
4. Tell me about a time when you failed at something you tried.
5. You have three managers all asking for major work to be finished on the same day. What would you do?
6. You see someone in your immediate working group who is cheating the employer. Has this ever happened in your education? What if anything would you do?

3. Action-based questions

Aim: intended to simulate a work/skill requirement; gives candidates an opportunity to showcase abilities.

Examples:

1. Please give us a 2-minute presentation on something you’ve learned in the last year.
2. Please explain to me the basic principles of fluid mechanics and how you would use that knowledge to build a simple wind turbine.
3. Read this information about our client, then present your suggested solution to the problem. Explain your rationale and evidence supporting your suggested course of action.

During the Interview: My S-T-A-R stories

Before the interview, think of examples from your life that show the following qualities + any others valued by the employer (check ad, job description, company info). They will help you prove your abilities when answering questions such as: “Tell me about a time when ...you showed your ability to lead people through difficulty”.

S-T-A-R Formula

A great framework for answering questions:

Situation
Briefly describe a specific situation you experienced

Tactics
Convey your rationale for dealing with the situation

Actions
Outline your step-by-step course of action

Results
Detail the tangible outcomes of your efforts



Leadership:

Motivation:

Related experience:

Multi-disciplinary teamwork:

Self-directed learning:

Decision-making:

Conflict resolution:

Communication (oral, written):

After the Interview

Learn from the experience – Make notes about what went well and what you would like to improve upon for the next time you meet with an employer.

Decide whether to accept an offer. You are looking for a two-way match—somewhere that you can contribute your strengths. Once you have accepted an offer, even verbally, employers will consider this a binding commitment. Treat people as if you will meet them again your career – because you probably will.

Send the interviewers a written thank-you letter – Thank them for the opportunity to learn more about them and the position. If appropriate, confirm your interest in the opportunity; otherwise withdraw from the process in writing.

Follow up an offer by responding in writing. Indicate whether you are accepting or declining the offer. Confirm any actions you were asked to take such as agreeing to a start-date, confirming salary, etc.