



Understanding the Interview Process

You will encounter several different types of interviews and need to understand and be prepared for each one. The interviewer's responsibility is to recommend the best qualified candidates to the hiring manager and will be looking at your special skills (accounting, computer, etc.) and transferable skills (organization, communication, etc).

The format and timing of the interviewing process also varies by organization. Your interview may be with one person, several people scheduled individually, or may be a group interview. It is fair to ask the person scheduling the interview with whom you will be interviewing and how long you should expect the interview to last. Allow yourself the proper amount of time necessary as some interviews may be 15 minutes and some may be 5 hours.

Preparing for the Interview

Time and Location

- Find out the exact place of the interview.
- Ask about parking and directions, if needed.
- Know the time of the interview and how long the interview will last. Plan to arrive around 10 minutes early. If you are there more than 10 minutes early, find a place to wait other than the interviewer's office.
- Be certain you have the interviewer's name and know how to pronounce it.
- Have a nice folder or notebook to bring extra copies of your resume, transcripts, letters of reference, work related samples, or samples of writing skills. Include a list of questions you will want to ask the interviewer.

Appearance.

- Make sure your interviewing clothes are clean and pressed a couple of days before the interview.
- It is important to have a neat and clean appearance.
- Dress appropriately.
- The best guide for both sexes is to dress simply and conservatively.
- Do not smoke or chew gum.
- Pay attention to details—Make sure your fingernails are clean and neat; your eyeglasses (if you wear them) are clean and in good repair. If you have any visible body piercings, other than ears, do not wear them—this includes tongue piercing. If you have any tattoos, try to cover them.

Research the Employer.

- It is imperative that you have information on the organization before the interview.
- You should know what their functional area is (education, service, manufacturing, telecommunications, etc.).
- What is their product or service?
- Who are their competitors?
- How many locations do they have and where are they located?
- What technological, societal, or regulatory trends are affecting this industry?
- What is the basic size of the organization?
- Who are the organization's major markets or clients?
- Use company web sites, newspaper and trade magazine articles, and people you know to learn about the organization.
- Some web sites to consider: hoovers.com and rileyguide.com

Analyze your skills, strengths, and accomplishments.

- Review your accomplishments that might relate to the skills required for the position.
- Anticipate questions and formulate responses.
- Prepare three good reasons why you are an outstanding candidate and work them into the interview conversation.
- Analyze everything on your resume and be able to answer questions regarding how, what, and why for all entries.
- Be positive.

Practice

- Practice answering the list of questions included in this guide. You may want to do this with a friend or in front of a mirror. Tape your answers and listen to your responses to determine quality of answer as well as verbal inflection.
- Be concise in your details - avoid long rambling answers.
- Practice listening attentively, which means good posture and maintaining appropriate eye contact, as well as paying close attention to what is said.

Know prohibited pre-employment inquiries and how you would handle such an inquiry.

- Pre-employment inquiries may not be asked for the purpose of discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, disability, gender, national origin or age.
- It is your decision how to handle a prohibited inquiry.
- You could politely reply that you don't think it is appropriate to answer that question.
- Some employers do not understand the proper method of questioning to determine the true concern they may have regarding the person's ability to perform the job. Example: the employer may ask if you have any children when what they want to know is will you miss a lot of work. When asked a prohibited pre-employment question, you may want to question the employer for their true concern. Example: *Could you tell me what your concern is when you ask the question about children so that I may best answer it in relation to the job. If you are concerned about my attendance, at my current job I have not missed a day all year.*

The Behavioral Interview

Behavioral based interviewing is interviewing based on discovering how the interviewee acted in specific employment-related situations. Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that the best way to predict future on-the-job behavior is to review past behavior in similar situations. To demonstrate that you have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities, you will need examples of past behaviors that prove you have them.

In What Situations Did You Exhibit These Behaviors?

Reviewing the job description will give you a pretty good idea of the behaviors necessary for the position. Then, think about your own experiences to determine when you exhibited these behaviors. Your experience can include social and school situations as well as on-the-job situations. You should describe the situation or task, what specific action you took to address it, and what the result was. This is usually called a STAR statement.

The STAR Statement and How It Can Help

Situation or Task	Describe the situation you were in or the task you needed to accomplish. Be specific and provide sufficient detail. Think of it as telling a story that has a beginning, middle, and ending.
Action	Describe the action you took and keep the focus on what you did, even if it was a team experience.
Results	What happened? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Even if you feel you did not handle the situation as well as you could have, telling what you learned and showing how you applied that learning in another situation will work also.

A STAR response might go like this:

Situation or Task: "I was assigned to a team in my marketing class to propose a method for increasing revenues for a particular business by 10%. One of the members of my team wasn't attending many meetings and didn't have his assignments prepared."

Action: "I decided to talk with him; in private, about how the group needed every member to complete their assigned tasks, and asked what he needed to get back on track. He told me that he was having trouble with one of his other classes and it took up most of his time. With his consent, we talked about this with the other members of the team. The team recommended that he ask the Student Tutorial Center for help on his other class, and we would help him get caught up with our team project. He agreed."

Result: "It took a couple of weeks for him to catch up, but after he did, he completed his assignments on time and our group got an A on the project. He also thanked the group during his part of the presentation for helping him do well in both of his classes."

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

Decision Making and Problem Solving

- Give me an example of a time when you had to keep from speaking or making a decision because you did not have enough information.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision

Leadership

- What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?
- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?

Motivation

- Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.

Communication

- Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?

Interpersonal Skills

- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.

Planning and Organization

- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
- What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.

Team Building

- Tell me about a time when you had to rely on a team to get things done.
- Provide an example of a time when you had to persuade people to do something they didn't want to do.

The 25 Most Popular Behavior-Based Questions

Tell me about a time when you...

1. Worked effectively under pressure
2. Handled a difficult situation with a co-worker
3. Were creative in solving a problem
4. Missed an obvious solution to a problem
5. Were unable to complete a project on time
6. Persuaded team members to do things your way
7. Wrote a report that was well received
8. Anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures
9. Had to make an important decision with limited facts
10. Were forced to make an unpopular decision
11. Had to adapt to a difficult situation
12. Were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours
13. Were disappointed in your behavior
14. Used your political savvy to push a program through that you really believed in
15. Had to deal with an irate customer
16. Delegated a project efficiently
17. Surmounted a major obstacle
18. Set your sights too high (or too low)
19. Prioritized the elements of a complicated project
20. Got bogged down in the details of a project
21. Lost (or won) an important contract
22. Made a bad decision
23. Had to fire a friend
24. Hired (or fired) the wrong person
25. Turned down a good job

How to prepare for a Behavioral Interview

- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.
- Always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary and make sure you answer the question completely.
- Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS COMMONLY ASKED IN AN INTERVIEW

SELF

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What did you learn from your high school/college experience that you could carry over to your adult life?
3. How would you describe yourself?
4. Why do you want to work here?

ABILITY TO WORK WITH OTHERS

5. Do you prefer to work alone or in groups? Why?
6. What kind of qualities would you like your co-workers to possess and why?

CUSTOMER SERVICE

7. Give a specific example of a time when you had to deal with an angry customer or co-worker. What did you do?

MOTIVATION

8. What motivates you to put forth your best effort?
9. Give a specific example that demonstrates your ability to be a self-starter.

DECISION MAKING

10. Describe one of the toughest decisions you have had to make. How did you reach that decision?
11. Give a specific example of a time you had to make a decision that impacted others. What factors influenced your decision? How was your decision received?
12. In your current position, what type of decisions do you make without consulting your immediate supervisor?
13. Do you prefer making decisions quickly or take time to research alternatives?

ABILITY TO MANAGE PRESSURE

14. Describe a specific situation when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
15. Give an example of when you had a very short time to complete an assignment. How did you go about meeting the deadline? What were the results?
16. How do you deal with co-workers who "don't do their share of the work"?

TEAMWORK

17. Give a specific example of when you were a member of a team assigned to a project or task. What was your role in the team? Did the team accomplish its task?
18. What qualities or skills do you possess that could contribute to a team goal?

19. Was one of your prior positions part of a work unit or team? If so, what were some obstacles or difficulties in being part of a work team? How did you overcome those obstacles?
20. Are there any benefits to being part of a work unit?

LEADERSHIP

21. Have you taken a leadership role in any of your work projects? How would you describe your methods of managing others?
22. What qualities do you feel the ideal supervisor should possess?
23. Are there specific qualities you think a supervisor should not possess?
24. Give a specific example of a situation you mismanaged.

ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

25. How do you feel about your ability to write, spell, and research information?
26. What suggestions have you made to improve how work is processed in your area? How did you communicate these ideas to your supervisor?
27. Describe in detail any group presentation you have made either inside or outside the organization. Were you comfortable making the presentation? How did you feel about your performance?
28. Give an example of how you communicated effectively in a one-to-one situation.
29. Describe the most significant written document or report that you have completed.
30. What types of written correspondence do you produce on your current and/or past job?

ABILITY TO PLAN, ORGANIZE, AND PRIORITIZE

31. Give a specific example of how you have demonstrated an ability to handle multiple priorities.
32. Tell me about a project you had to plan for in school, work, or outside activities. What was the project? How did you plan and prepare? What was the outcome?
33. Describe how you determine your priorities in your current and/or past job.
34. How do you organize your work in your current and/or past job?

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/LONG RANGE GOALS

35. Tell me about your greatest accomplishment.
36. What are your plans for the future? Where do you see yourself in five years?

CANDIDATES MUST ASK QUESTIONS, TOO!

Employers expect interested candidates to barrage them with pertinent questions during the precious minutes of every interview, but what to ask has tripped up many a prospective candidate. The following is a compilation of questions gathered from campus recruiters.

1. What are the opportunities for personal/professional growth?
2. Identify typical career paths for this position based on past records.
3. What is the realistic time frame for advancement?
4. How is an employee evaluated and promoted? How often and by whom?
5. What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
6. Describe the typical first year assignments?
7. Describe your initial and future training programs.
8. What are the challenging facets of the job?
9. What are the company's plans for future growth?
10. Is the company stable and financially sound?
11. What is the company's record of employment stability?
12. What industry trends will occur in this company?
13. How has this company fared during the recent recession/drought/crisis?
14. What makes your firm different from its competitors?
15. What are the company's strengths and weaknesses?
16. How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
17. Is it company policy to promote from within? Tell the work history of your top management?
18. What kinds of opportunities are currently available for my degree and skills?
19. What are your expectations for new hires?
20. Describe the work environment.
21. How can you utilize my skills?
22. What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
23. Why do you enjoy working for your firm?
24. What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
25. Why should I want to work for your organization?
26. What characteristics does a successful person have in your company?

JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WORKSHEET

Tell me something about yourself. (What do you really want to do?)

What subjects do you like the best? Why?

What jobs have you held? What were your duties and responsibilities?

What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?

What jobs did you enjoy the most? Why? Least? Why?

Do you have any outside interests or activities that would prevent you from being on time and at work every day?

What do you expect to be doing ten years from now?

What are your strengths? Weaknesses?

What have you done that shows initiative or willingness to work and learn?

What do you expect to earn on this job? How much do you expect to be earning in five years?

Why are you interested in this company?

What do you know about our company?

Write out your answers to other relevant questions or things you want to be sure to say here:

TEN TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING

1. Take one last look at your **appearance** after arriving. Make sure you look neat and confident. Make sure you do not have too much “stuff” to carry and hold. Have your right hand free to shake hands.
2. **SMILE!** And be polite to everyone, not just the interviewers.
3. Make **eye contact** with all interviewers. Do not look out the window or at other distractions.
4. The interview is about **YOU**, so do not be afraid or embarrassed to talk about yourself. Your first job in front of this person is to **SELL YOURSELF**. For future opportunities, do this job well.
5. **Be positive.** Think about questions where you are asked to give a negative, for example, what type of people do you have difficulty working with? How can you answer the question, but not give a negative perception of yourself?
6. Give **specific examples** for each point you make.
7. Do your **homework**. Talk to someone who does the job, use SIGI or Choices, or do Internet research to find out what responsibilities does the position entail? Learn about unfamiliar areas.
8. Decide the **most important thing** for an interviewer to know about you. Make sure you communicate this crucial experience, skill, etc. before you leave the interview. It might be the response to a question, or part of your opening or closing statement.
9. Make a **closing statement**. You may be given an opportunity, such as “What else do you want me to know about you in considering you for this position?” Or you may just get signs that the interview is coming to a close. This is a good time to summarize your skills and interests.
 - a. “I really want this job because...”
 - b. “I feel I am the best candidate for the position because...”
10. **Be yourself** and understand this is a conversation and the opportunity for you to determine if this is the right job for you

Don't forget to send a thank you note immediately after the interview.



General Thank You Letter Sample

1215 Houbolt Road
Joliet, IL 60431
(815) 280-2756

September 1, 2011

Thomas Johansen
Illinois Investments
123 Haven Court
Joliet, IL 60435

Dear Mr. Johansen:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss the insurance broker position at Illinois Investments, Inc., with me. After meeting with you and observing the company's operations, I am further convinced that my background and skills coincide well with your needs.

I really appreciate that you took so much time to acquaint me with the company. It is no wonder that Illinois Investments retains its employees for so long. I feel I could learn a great deal from you and would certainly enjoy working with you.

In addition to my qualifications and experience, I will bring excellent work habits and judgment to this position. With the countless demands on your time, I am sure that you require people who can be trusted to carry out their responsibilities with minimal supervision.

I look forward, Mr. Johansen, to hearing from you concerning your hiring decision. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe



A Thank You Letter that Aims at Damage Control

1215 Houbolt Road
Joliet, IL 60431
(815) 280-2756

September 1, 2011

Thomas Johansen
ABC Company
123 Haven Court
Joliet, IL 60435

Dear Mr. Johansen:

Thank you for the time you took to interview me for the seminar leader position. After our interview, I'm convinced that I have the three ingredients you're looking for in your workshop/seminar leaders. I know you expressed some concern in our meeting that I have not worked in a personnel department. I want to stress, however, that I have participated significantly in the hiring process for my sorority and have a solid record of achievement in my human-resources classes.

As for your requirement for public-speaking experience, my having been leader of new-student orientation groups at my college for three years, along with outstanding grades in my public-speaking classes, qualify me nicely.

Finally, I have enclosed some writing samples to further demonstrate the third ingredient, my communications skills.

Thank you again, Mrs. Mellish, for this wonderful opportunity to interview for the seminar leader position. I promise you I won't let you down if you give me the chance to show what I can do. I eagerly await the next step in the process.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe



A Thank You Letter that Mentions Interview Afterthoughts

1215 Houbolt Road
Joliet, IL 60431
(815) 280-2756

September 1, 2011

Thomas Johansen
ABC Company
123 Haven Court
Joliet, IL 60435

Dear Mr. Johansen:

I'd like to thank you for the time you spent talking with me about the marketing-research analyst position you have open at Razzle magazine. I am very excited about this position and convinced that my marketing training equips me more than adequately for the job.

I meant to mention during the interview that last summer I attended a three-week intensive seminar on SPSS, the foremost marketing-research software package. I know the job description mentions the ability to use SPSS, and I wanted to make sure you knew that I am extremely well-versed in the use of this software. Please contact me if you have any questions about my ability with this program or about any of my other qualifications.

As you know, my work-study position in the institutional research office here at Rutgers provided an excellent background for marketing- research work.

I look forward to hearing from you soon about the position, and I again thank you for meeting with me.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe