

Preparing For A Job Interview

Succeeding in job interviews takes research, practice, and persistence. The more effort you put into your interview preparation, the more success you'll see in obtaining job offers.

The #1 reason people are generally hired in a job is because the interviewers *like* them and feel they will fit in with the company's culture.

So how do you demonstrate your likeability? This does not require you be the best, the brightest, the most talkative or friendly. It **does require** you come to the interview **prepared** and **believing** you are a good choice for hire. The following are some of the things you should consider/do for a successful job interview:

1. Research the company/employer. You should know something about the company's product/services, job requirements, hours of operation, etc. before the interview. The more research you conduct, the better you will understand what the employer wants in an employee. This will help you answer their interview questions. Research the company's website. Talk with current employees and others who have had experience with the business.
2. Prepare to answer common interview questions. You need to PRACTICE answering the common questions asked a most interviews:
 - i. Tell me something about yourself.
 - ii. Why do you want to work for...
 - iii. What are your future goals/plans?
- b. Try to stay away from just "yes" and "no" answers. The best way to answer interview questions is to give a situational answer. That means giving a brief example of what you have done in the past that demonstrates your ability, interest, experience, etc.
- c. Don't memorize your answers; **BELIEVE** your answers and make them your natural response.
3. Go to the interview on your own. If someone drives you, don't bring them into the business with you.
4. Arrive on time for the interview. Strive to arrive 10-15 minutes before your scheduled interview. This demonstrates your reliability, willingness to do what is necessary for the job, gives you a chance to focus before the interview, and allows you to observe how employees operate in the workplace. There is no excuse for arriving late to an interview (including traffic, poor directions, flat tire, etc.), other than a true disaster. Plan ahead and give yourself more time than needed to arrive at the location.
5. Bring a copy of your resume and cover letter, even though you have already provided them.
6. Bring a pen and tablet of paper with:
 - i. Reminders of things you want to tell the interviewer (if not included in their questions).
 - ii. Questions you have for the interviewer.
 - iii. Room to take notes if needed
7. Turn your **cell phone OFF** before you walk in the door of the business. Do not leave it on vibrate because that is just as distracting.
8. Do not chew gum on the way to the interview. You will forget you have it in your mouth. When you get nervous you will start chomping on it and will look like a cow chewing its cud. Not a pretty sight.

9. Make a good first impressions — to **everyone** at the business. A cardinal rule of interviewing: Be polite and offer warm greetings to everyone you meet — from front counter person to the hiring manager. Employers often are curious how job applicants treat staff members and will ask the staff their opinion of an interviewee before offering them a job.
10. Once you meet the interviewer, make a strong first impression by standing to greet them, smile, make eye contact, and offer a firm handshake. (Remember the “**anatomy of a handshake**”.)
11. Remember that having a positive attitude and expressing enthusiasm for the job are vital in the interview. During the interview, be authentic, upbeat, focused, confident, candid, and concise. The key to your success is in the quality and delivery of your responses. You should answer the interviewer’s questions truthfully. Be sure to provide examples of your past accomplishments and experiences. But... keep your responses short and to the point.
12. Never badmouth a previous employer, boss, or co-worker. This will cause the interviewer to see you in a less than favorable light. Plus, if you are saying negative things about someone else, this will cause them to wonder what you will say about them when they are not around.
13. Ask meaningful questions at the end of the interview. Studies show that employers make a judgment about an applicant’s interest in the job by whether or not the interviewee asks questions. So even if the interviewer was thorough about the job and expectations, you need to ask a few questions. Your questions should be **prepared BEFORE the interview and written down**. This helps you to remember what you wanted to ask.
 - a. Be sure your questions are not canned or of no interest to you. Your questions should NOT be about money or how the job will affect your life. Focus on questions that will provide you with the information you will need to do the best possible if hired. Some examples are:
 - i. What would be some of the day to day responsibilities of this position?
 - ii. What do you think is the most important skill for a person in this position?
 - iii. What is the most difficult part of this job? (Then assure the interviewer you can handle this and give an example why.)
 - iv. What type of training would be provided?
 - v. When will make a final decision on who you will hire?
 - b. The person hired for the job is often not the one who is most qualified, but the one who does the best responding to interview questions and showcasing their past experiences and/or willingness to do the job.
14. Demonstrating courtesy and politeness will only benefit you in the hiring process, so it is important to thank the interviewer(s) for the considering you for employment. Start the process while at the interview, thanking each person who interviewed you. Then **send a thank note** to the interviewer(s) right away! Thank you notes can be through email, mailed through the post office, or hand delivered. Sending a thank you notes will not guarantee you will be offered the job. But if they are having a problem making a decisions, it just might tip their opinion in your favor.

The Importance of Your Appearance in an Interview

Like it or not, you are being judged by how you look, how you dress, and how you carry yourself. According to one internet study, an interviewee's physical attributes influenced employers in the following manner:

Attribute	No influence on the interviewer	Slight influence on the interviewer	Strong influence on the interviewer
Grooming	6%	21%	73%
Non-traditional job attire	13%	38%	49%
Handshake	22%	45%	33%
Body piercing	26%	43%	31%
Obvious tattoos	25%	46%	28%
Non-traditional hair color	26%	46%	28%
Unusual hairstyle	30%	49%	21%
Beard	73%	22%	5%
Mustache	83%	16%	1%

This validates the importance of your appearance throughout the interviewing process. Therefore you need to seriously evaluate your style of dress, grooming habits, and body language.

Style of dress:

- Dress for success; wear clothes that fit the company and its culture.
- Dress one step above how you would dress if you were going to work at that business.
- Avoid denim.
- Do not wear clothes that show ANY underwear (boxer shorts, bras, etc.).
- No spaghetti straps for the ladies, no tank tops for the gentlemen.
- Ladies should be conscious of skirt length.
- Gentlemen should wear pants that fit at the waist. No sagging pants.
- Wear clothes that fit.
- Clothes need to be clean, have no stains, be wrinkle free, and not worn out.
- Keep jewelry to a minimum; no jingling or dangling distractions.
- Wear shoes that are appropriate for job; NO FLIP FLOPS. Could you work all day in the shoes?
- Empty your pockets; no bulges or tinkling coins, keys, etc.
- Take off your hat. Hats are unprofessional and sloppy, plus they give you "hat hair". Do not even put one on before the interview.

Grooming:

- You should be freshly bathed/showered and be sure to use deodorant.
- Use perfumes/colognes sparingly or none at all. Your "scent" should **not** linger after you leave the interview.
- Hair needs to be clean, trimmed, and neatly combed or arranged.
- Gentlemen should be freshly shaved; mustache/beard neatly trimmed and groomed.
- Be sure to brush your teeth right before your interview, then do not smoke or eat anything until after the interview.
- Ladies should use light makeup.

- Pay attention to your hands... clean your fingernails AND cuticles. If you wear polish be sure you have no chips and the color is not too distracting.
- Remove body piercings, tongue rings, and cover tattoos if possible.

Body Language:

- Demonstrate positive body language from the moment you leave your vehicle until you return to it. Many people forget that they may be observed even after leaving the business.
- Shake hands.
- Remember to smile; with your mouth, face, eyes and gestures.
- Maintain positive eye contact.
- Display good manners (open doors for others, wait to be seated, offer assistance when needed).
- Do not interrupt and or argue!
- Do not chew on gum, candy or smoke at any time during the interview.
- NO cells phone use. Leave your cell phone in the car; do not even take it into the building.
- Positive forms of body language: smile, eye contact, solid posture, active listening, nodding.
- Negative forms of body language: slouching, looking off in the distance, playing with pen, fidgeting in chair, brushing back hair, touching face, chewing gum, mumbling.

Behavioral Questions & Answers

Employers want to know 2 critical things about you:

- Will you fit into our company culture? (Are you likeable? Do you have what we need?)
- How well do you manage change and respond to problems? (Can we trust you?)

Some interviewers ask the standard interview questions to learn this information:

Tell me about yourself.	Why do you want to work for this company?
What is your past experience?	What hours/days can you work?
Why do you want this job?	Why should I hire you?
What are your strengths?	What are your weaknesses?

But many employers are now gathering information through behavioral based interview questions. This is a growing trend because it helps interviewers see how you have handled situations in the past – which is a good indicator of how you may handle them in the future. It also gives them a glimpse of your personality and character.

Behavioral interview questions are some of the hardest questions to answer. You must think back to your work experience and come up with specific times you exhibited the behavior. Then you must describe how you handled the situation, and that answer must be one that impresses the interviewer.

Behavioral interview questions generally focus on the following areas:

- Teamwork – how well you work with others.
- Leadership – Your ability to lead and motivate others.
- Handling conflict – how you manage negative situations and/or challenging situations.
- Problem-solving – your ability to think through a problem and select a positive outcome.
- Biggest failure – how you have learned from your past mistakes.

Pearl of Wisdom: To prepare for behavioral based questions, think of times when you solved or improved one or more of the above situations. Then use the **STAR method** to describe your experience to the interviewer. Think of an experience that is related to the behavioral question. Then give your answer that includes the following informations:

S = Situation and **T = Task**

Describe a **situation** you have experienced that is relevant to the question. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. Include some of the **task** for which you were responsible. This experience can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.

A = Action

Describe the **action** you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did — not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.

R = Results

What was the **results** of your actions? What was the outcome of the situation? Was a problem resolved? Did you learn an important lesson? Was there a benefit to the company due to your actions? Was a customer satisfied? Did you make a sell?

Sample behavioral questions:

- Tell us about your experience working as a team?
- How would you describe your ability to work as a team member?
- Have you ever disagreed with your supervisor (or teacher)? Tell me about this?
- Tell me about a time you went above and beyond to give a customer good service?
- What would you do if you found a \$20 bill on the floor at work? (Sometimes you need to project how you “would” handle a situation.)
- Tell me about a time you made a mistake?
- Tell me about an accomplishment that you are proud of?

Interview Thank You Notes

Have you ever received a thank you note from someone? How did you feel about it? What did you think of the person who sent it? MOST times, people are positively moved when they receive a thank you note and appreciate the effort by the sender.

So...should you send a thank you note after you interview for a job? Let's consider both sides of this question.

You **do not send** a thank you note after an interview. Can this hurt your opportunity for employment with the business? Probably not. If the employer is interested in hiring you they will probably not reject you just because you do not send a note.

You **do send** a thank you note after an interview. Can this help you get the job? Probably not, if there was someone more qualified for the job. BUT.....What if the employer is having a problem deciding between you and someone else. Then they receive a thank you note from you, but not the other person. This then may help them to select you for the position.

And you should consider that there are no "downside" to sending a thank you note after a job interview. It will not HURT your chances for employment. Also consider – **most job candidates do not bother** to send a thank you note, so by sending one you will stand out in a positive way.

The value of sending a thank you note:

- A CareerBuilder survey showed that 91% of interviewers liked receiving thank you notes.
- Impresses employers with your follow-through.
- Shows courtesy towards the interviewer.
- Shows your understanding of professional courtesy.
- Conveys your interest in the position.
- Demonstrates your skill at written (or emailed) communications.
- Keeps you in the running in case your competitor sent a thank you.

Choose the right thank you note method:

- Hand-written thank you notes. These can be either hand delivered or mailed.
- Typed thank you notes. Again...hand delivered or mailed.
- Emailed thank you notes.

Your choice of method depends on the job you are seeking, what you feel most comfortable doing, and what you think the interviewer would prefer.

Do NOT's you should consider:

- Send a generic or canned thank you note.
- Fax your thank you note.
- Claim experience or qualifications you do not have.
- Hand a sealed thank you letter to the employer **at the end of the interview!**
- Be too wordy.
- Be too friendly (informal).

Sample Thank You Note:

4/25/16

Dear Ms. Jones,

Thank you for interviewing me for the cashier position yesterday. I know that you are looking for a cashier that will provide excellent customer service and I hope I demonstrated this ability. I am very excited about the possibility of working for Taco Bell.

I appreciate the chance to interview and I hope I will have the opportunity to work with you in the near future. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wade Wright

