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# HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

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# Key Steps to Prepare for Your Interview

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Follow these key steps, and see the rest of the packet for more details.

- **Prepare your 30-second intro**
  - Practice the 3 points until you are comfortable saying it. Don't memorize it word-for-word, or you may forget and become stuck!
- **Take a portfolio**
  - Bring a few copies of your resume and your separate list of references
  - Bring a printout of info on the company and interviewer(s), if known
  - Bring a **list of questions to ask** (that you couldn't find while researching the organization)
- **Practice answering the most common questions (see back of packet for more)**
  - Tell me a bit about yourself. (Answer with your 30-second intro)
  - Why do you want this job?
  - Why should we hire you?
  - Why do you want to work for this organization?
- **Dress and act professionally**
  - Remember the interviewer's impression of you starts the moment you leave your home
- **Say thank you!**
  - Say thank you when you first meet the interviewer(s), when the interview ends, and with a follow-up message (email, LinkedIn, etc.). A *thank-you card* is even better!

## 30-second intro: How to introduce yourself to interviewers

### Sample Introduction

**1** I have experience as a youth camp counselor and I'm pursuing a degree in psychology. **2** I'm an empathetic, engaged counselor, and I actively seek opportunities to help others. **3** I look forward to bringing my skills and abilities to benefit your team.

*Tip: Keep it under 30 seconds! People will listen for only a short time.*

**1** Qualifications **2** Characteristics  
**3** Handoff (*turn the conversation back to the interviewer*)

1. Qualifications—why you would be good at that job: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Characteristics—traits or skills that will help you succeed at that job:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Handoff statement: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Interviews

An interview is a two-way exchange of information. While the interviewer is interested in learning more about what you have to offer, the interviewee (you!) should be interested in learning more about the organization and the position for which you are interviewing.

There are two primary types of job interviews: **screening interviews** and **decision interviews**.

**Screening interviews** are usually conducted by recruiters or other human resources representatives rather than hiring managers. They are typically trying to verify facts stated on the resume and to screen out inappropriate/unqualified applicants. Essentially, this person is trying to answer the question: Are you a viable candidate for the job? Examples of screening interviews include many telephone interviews, career fair conversations, and on-campus interviews. Screening interviews are often conducted by human resources staff/recruiters rather than actual hiring managers.

**Decision interviews** are usually conducted by a hiring manager; a person with authority to make a hiring decision. Essentially, this person is trying to answer the question: Are you the best candidate for the job? That is, are you qualified and how well will you fit into the organization.

## THE FOUR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS YOU MUST BE ABLE TO ANSWER

### Why do you want the job?

You have to be able to explain and defend your reasoning for wanting the job for which you are interviewing. "Needing a job" is not a sufficient response. You have to explain how you think this job fits you.

### Why should they hire you?

You are not the only candidate, so why should they select you over the others? Again, "needing a job" is not a sufficient response. You have to explain how your combination of experience, education, skills and qualities/characteristics match up with the experience, education, skills and qualities/characteristics they are seeking in candidates. You have to explain how you think you fit the job.

### Why do you want to work for this organization?

You must demonstrate that you have done your homework. When you say - "I'd love to work for your company!" - you have to be able to back it up. What is it about the company that you find appealing? You have to be able to explain how and why you think you will fit in with their organizational culture.

### Why do you want to work in this profession/industry?

You must demonstrate that you have some knowledge about the profession/industry. They aren't going to just take your word for it. Just as every company's culture is unique, every industry and profession has its own unique features and characteristics; features and characteristics that - depending upon what you are seeking out of your career - can be viewed as advantages or disadvantages. You have to be able to

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explain that you understand, and will be able to fit in, their world.

One caveat! Employers do not expect college students or recent graduates to be able to answer these four questions with the same depth and detail as would an experienced candidate. They are realistic, but you still need to be able to answer them based on your knowledge, experience and research.

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Preparation for your interview should not begin the day before your interview. Start early to avoid the unnecessary stress, and keep the following three things in mind:

### Do your research.

When preparing for a job interview, research the organization. This research is important because it will enable you to speak intelligently about the organization during your interview; focus on what you can contribute to the organization; and obtain information that will help you decide whether or not you want to work there if you are offered a job.

### Consider your interviewing attire.

First impressions are critical, so you must make every effort to have the proper attire for the type of job you are seeking. Will dressing properly alone get you the job? No, but it will give you a competitive edge and make a positive first impression. It is better to be a bit overdressed than underdressed for an interview. If you are overdressed, you can always become more casual by taking off your coat and rolling up your sleeves. If you show up in casual attire, you're stuck in casual attire.

### Arrive early.

Arrive 10-15 minutes before your scheduled interview time. Doing so will allow you to gain your composure and to observe working conditions and company culture prior to your interview. If possible, do a trial run the day/night before to identify your travel route, parking options and the location of the building where the interview will be conducted. If, because of unforeseen circumstances, you are running late, call the person with whom you have the interview, briefly explain your reason for being late, and offer to reschedule. Don't wait until the last minute to make that call!

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

During the interview, you need to recognize the types of interview questions being asked and answer them appropriately. The two most common types of interview questions are trait-based and behavior-based questions.

**Trait-based interview questions** attempt to match the candidate's traits and skills to those required to do the job successfully. Examples of trait-based interview questions include "What are your strengths?"



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“What are your weaknesses?” and “How would your friends describe you?”

**Behavior-based interview questions** emphasize examples of your accomplishments. This interviewing technique is based on the belief that past behavior is a good predictor of future work performance. Candidates are asked to give examples of how they have handled specific situations or completed specific tasks in the past. When a question begins with “Describe a time when...” or “Give me an example...” you should recognize it as a behavior-based question.

## AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

Toward the end of the interview, you will likely be asked two questions: (1) Do you have any questions? and (2) Do you have anything else you wish to share?

Take this opportunity to ask questions that will assist you in making an educated decision about accepting or declining an offer and share important information about your qualifications that didn’t come up during the interview itself.

Always ask about next steps in the interviewing process and when you should expect to hear from them next.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Send a thank you letter within twenty-four hours of your interview thanking the interviewer for his/her time and reinforcing your candidacy by briefly recounting your qualifications and stating your continued interest in the position.

Even if you decide that the position is not right for you, a thank you letter ends the experience on a pleasant, positive note.

## TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone interviews are commonly used to screen job applicants. Your objective in a telephone interview is to obtain a personal, face-to-face meeting with a prospective employer.

Skills and characteristics to exhibit during a telephone interview include: enthusiasm, a positive attitude, superior verbal communication skills, problem-solving ability, and creativity. Also, unlike a face-to-face interview, you have the ability to reference materials during a telephone interview. Gather the following items and have them in front of you for your telephone interview: your resume, the job description, a list of references and a company description/overview. You might also want to have a glass of water nearby in case you need it as you’re speaking.

Do not do anything which can create an unpleasant impression. Do not speak too fast; speak too close to the receiver; have music, television or other distractions in the background; or chew gum, drink, eat, or smoke during a telephone interview. If you have roommates, let them know you will be on a telephone interview and



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ask them to be quiet and to limit distractions.

Keep the objective in mind - the face-to-face interview - and do not ask questions about money, benefits, etc. There will be time for that later.

If you have call waiting, NEVER interrupt your interview to take another call. Ever.

## WEBCAM INTERVIEWS

Webcam interviews are becoming more and more common, so don't be surprised if an employer chooses to skip the telephone interview in favor of interviewing you via webcam.

Webcam interviews are different from in-person interviews and telephone interviews. If you're not prepared, you might just miss that opportunity to make a good first "virtual" impression.

Here are five tips to help you prepare for your webcam interview:

### **Know Your Technology.**

Whether you are using Skype, Google, FaceTime or one of the other webcam apps available for your computer or smartphone, make sure you know how to use it. Check the speaker and microphone volume and settings; check the picture quality; know how to use the screen sharing functions; know how to set up a multi-person web conference. The day of your interview is the wrong time to learn how to use your webcam application! If you're worried about how to use the app during the interview, you're not going to be focused on interview. Don't wait until the last minute.

### **Control Your Environment.**

Eliminate all distractions! Roommates, pets, boyfriends and girlfriends, parents – ask them to leave you alone. Twitter, Facebook, Pandora and any other applications or devices not being used for the call - turn them off! Allow yourself to focus. Make sure you budget enough time - be ready to go a minimum of 10-15 minutes BEFORE the scheduled time and budget extra time in case the interview goes long. Have a glass of water nearby and have all of your notes ready to reference. Like an in-person interview, you can't get up and move around during your webcam interview. They can see you and everything you do.

### **Manage Your Image.**

The image you project on your webcam is a combination of you and your surroundings; and you control ALL of this. Take a look at yourself in your webcam. What do you look like? What do you see in the background? What you see is what the employer will see when they are interviewing you. Clean up the room; make sure the light from a nearby window isn't washing out your picture. Adjust the webcam so that it is capturing the image of you that you want to convey. Remember, you control the camera, how it is positioned and the image it captures. Manage that image!

### **Double-Check Your Connection.**

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Wireless communication is great, until it doesn't work or until the wireless signal strength is weak. Signal strength is particularly important when you are transmitting video, so make sure you have a fast and reliable internet connection (wired or wireless). Test your connection speed and/or wireless signal strength to be certain it can effectively handle webcam communication

## Have a Plan B.

You can check and double-check. You can do everything right and be as prepared as possible, and sometimes technology just fails to do what it's supposed to do. You need to have a Plan B ready just in case Plan A doesn't work. Make sure you know your interviewer's phone number and email address. Have both ready in case you need to use them. At the first sign of trouble, alert your interviewer and see if you can get the technology issues resolved. If you can't, suggest the telephone as an alternative.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO EXPECT FROM AN EMPLOYER

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- Tell me why you feel you are qualified for this job.
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Why should I hire you?
- Why did you select your major area of study?
- Are your grades a good indication of your academic abilities? Explain.
- Tell me about a decision you made that you later regretted.
- Define leadership.
- Define success.
- Give me an example of a time when you successfully worked with a team.
- How do you work under pressure?
- What have been the three most important events of your life thus far?
- What were you doing during this gap of time I see here on your resume?
- Give me an example of something that you have done that shows initiative.
- What types of people rub you the wrong way?
- Given that you have no background in this field, why are you interested in it?
- Who are our competitors?
- What do you predict is going to happen in this industry in the next five years?
- What do you know about our company?

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- What interests you most about this position?
- Demonstrate/illustrate skills that you can transfer from past experience.
- Give me three words that describe you with examples of what you mean.
- What new goals have you established for yourself recently?
- What are the attributes of an ideal job for you?
- Tell me about a time when you successfully resolved a conflict.
- What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?
- Give me an example of a leadership role you have held when not everything went as planned.
- Are you creative? Give me an example.
- What electives have you taken? Which did you enjoy the most?
- In terms of your work habits, do you prefer to work intensely on a few items at a time or to skim the surface of several items simultaneously?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- If you were hiring a recent graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Are you willing to travel and/or relocate?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate potential employers and jobs?

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS DURING AN INTERVIEW

- What does the typical day-to-day work include?
- What are your expectations for new hires?
- What kind of training program does the company have?
- How do you feel about working for the company?
- What are the position's biggest challenges?
- Is the position newly created, or is someone being replaced?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- What are the long-range goals established for this department?
- How was the salary range determined for this position?
- What is the management style of my immediate supervisor?
- How much travel is involved in the job?
- How has the company changed in the last 10 years?
- What specific skills or experiences would help someone do well in this position?



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- Who are the other people I would be working with?
- Will I be encouraged to attend professional conferences?
- What is the primary responsibility of this department?
- Will I have a chance today to meet the people who would be my co-workers?
- Who would I be reporting to?
- What is your time frame for hiring for this position?
- Can you tell me about the last two employees that held this position? What are they doing now?
- Where are the majority of job openings located?
- Would any budget cuts affect this position's availability?
- What is the company's policy on advancement?
- Could you describe some typical career paths employees have taken at your company?
- Would you describe your own advancement in the company?
- Does the company provide tuition support for a degree?
- Will/could there be relocation immediately or after a few years?