

Interviewing Tips

What is an interview?

It is a dialogue allowing you to expand on the information described in your cover letter and résumé, and an opportunity for the interviewer to provide more details about the job, to determine how you fit the job requirements. It is a two-way street: you each are assessing the match between you, your skills and experience and the position, co-workers, and organizational environment. The interviewer will ask you questions designed to gain information about your personality, background, and qualifications. You will ask questions concerning the job and the organization. During the conversation you have the opportunity to present yourself in a positive and confident manner.

Before the interview

Research. Get a complete job description. Get all the interviewers' correct names and titles. Ask the organization's receptionist to send you any brochures, catalogs, annual reports, so that you know about the organization's mission, history, staff size, and current projects. This information will help you gear your comments to the needs and interests of the interviewer.

Prepare. Take a personal inventory: analyze how your strengths, skills, experience, and interests can be applied to the position. Consider what the organizations' priorities are for this position, so that you "lead" with these attributes.

Review potential questions. Write out answers to commonly asked questions and practice out loud to make sure you are articulating clearly and concisely your qualifications for the position, and check for excessive "like uhm, ah, yeah, you knows." Create a list of questions you would like to ask.

Practice. Mock interviewing — do it with a professional acquaintance in your field, someone who you'll be a little nervous with, so that it will approximate the real thing. Remember first impressions are often lasting so clearly articulate your strong points early in the interview.

Find out time and place. Be sure you have the correct address and directions to the interview. Make sure you arrive with time to relax and collect your thoughts before the interview.

Check appearance. Your attire should be neat and professional. Even if it is a "casual" office, for the interview you should dress as a professional, appropriately for your intended field.

10 Critical Attributes Hiring Managers Look For

(Adapted from *National Business Employment Weekly*, Dec. 25-31, 1992, article by Ed Ryneski)

1. *Clearly show that you meet and exceed the position's requirements.* Your résumé should only include concise statements of your significant job duties while highlighting your most relevant skills and accomplishments.
2. *Explain the successes you've achieved in previous positions.* Specific examples and evidence of your accomplishments are the best indicators of your expected success in the new position.
3. *Show that you'll fit the organization and its image.* Managers want someone who will fit in. The reality is that people do judge on appearance, age, personality traits, accents, character — and managers do make decisions based on first impressions and assumptions.
4. *Explain how you can boost the bottom line:* cut costs, improve productivity and operational efficiency.
5. *Do your homework before each meeting.* Do the necessary research: know the organization's history, products, services, programs, mission, policy and direction.
6. *Express your career goals and interests.* Managers look for those workers who are motivated, focused, and enthusiastic.
7. *Show that you are a sound decision-maker.* Managers look for workers with interpersonal skills and problem-solving skills. If you have accomplishments that demonstrate these qualities, make sure you speak about these in the interview.
8. *If you have leadership qualities, display them.* Excellent managers are flexible; they know people, and they know how to motivate, communicate with, assess, and inspire them to be their best.
9. *Display confidence and composure.* Unfortunately, candidates often interview at times when their belief in themselves and their abilities has been shaken. You may need to consciously gear your self-confidence up for the interview.
10. *Create a rapport with interviewer(s).* This can be a determining factor in a hiring decision. “I really liked Karen or Rob” is a key statement you want the interviewers to say as you leave. “Developing chemistry” won’t get you the job, but all other areas being equal, this is a deciding factor.

During the Interview

1. Greet the interviewer by name, with a firm handshake and a smile.
2. Be self-confident, alert and interested.
3. Do not smoke or chew gum.
4. Sit comfortably; maintain good body posture.
5. Maintain good eye contact.
6. Listen carefully to the interviewer’s questions and comments.
7. Be articulate; don’t use slang.
8. Avoid rambling; think before answering.
9. Ask well thought-out questions.
10. Concentrate on your positive attributes.
11. Ascertain needed follow-up action.
12. Express clear interest in the position (if you mean it).
13. Express thanks to the interviewer.

Reply Hints for Some “Tough Questions”

Tell me about yourself. A common opener, this broad question can “throw” many candidates. It is in fact a “sell-me” invitation. Develop a brief summation of your background leading into your interest and desire to work in this field and for this organization as well as your qualifications for the position.

Why should we hire you? Know your strengths, skills, and relevant experience relative to the position. Articulate these clearly and concisely. Mention key functions of the job and discuss your skills in relation to these functions. Back up your attributes with specific examples from previous jobs, internships, and activities to support your answer.

What are your long-range goals? This question is popular because it gathers a lot of useful information: maturity, foresight and realistic outlook, degree of preparation in career planning, and commitment to the organization and to the profession. While you may be unsure of your future plans, demonstrate your knowledge of potential career paths.

What is your greatest weakness? Everyone has a weakness but remember not to answer in a negative way. Stay away from personality traits like, "I'm a pathological liar," or "I tend to embezzle." It's probably safer to stick to concrete job skills, and turn the negative into a positive, such as, "After leaving my last job, I realized I was not current with the latest computer programs, so I've recently taken three computer courses to bring me up to date." Or, "I see that this position calls for Lotus 1-2-3 for spreadsheet work and I don't know Lotus yet. But I'm a quick study, and I'm looking forward to picking up that skill."

Or try this one, "John, I suppose we all have our shortcomings, but as I understand what this job calls for, I must say that this looks like an excellent fit. I honestly can see nothing about my skills or personality that should cause you any concern or affect my ability to perform this job well."

Why did or are you leaving your last job? Don't air dirty laundry. Do not denigrate past jobs, supervisors, schools, anything or anybody. If a previous job was a poor fit for your interests or skills, explain that without trashing. Make sure you have something positive to say about each job or supervisor because it is very likely you will be asked about them.

Make sure you've got a reasonable, coherent answer for any gaps in your employment history. Many people are unemployed for long stretches these days, but you should be able to explain how you filled your time with productive, career enhancing activities. Such as, "I took this time off to re-examine my career priorities, take courses, and to explore the area of arts management, and worked as a development consultant for the local arts council."

Interview Questions

Ultimately, any job interview question you are asked has a sub-text of "Why should I hire you?" So gear your responses towards advancing the idea that you are the perfect match for the position. Show and tell the interviewer (with specific examples) that you are:

- Easy to get along with
- A team player
- Flexible, motivated, enthusiastic
- Equipped with skills and experiences that are a perfect match for the position and for the organization (even when they do not appear to be so at first glance)

General Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why should I hire you?
3. Describe the best manager you ever had.
4. Describe the worst manager you ever had.
5. Why did you choose this particular field?
6. Why would you like to work for our organization/company?
7. How long would you stay with us?
8. You may be over-qualified or too experienced for the position we have to offer. What are your thoughts?
9. What is your management style?
10. Describe what you feel to be an ideal working environment.
11. In your current or last position, what are or were your five most significant accomplishments?
12. Can you work under pressure, deadlines, etc.? Give examples.
13. What are your salary expectations?
14. What other types of jobs or companies are you considering?
15. What are your strong points?
16. What are your weak points?
17. How would you describe your own personality?
18. What was the last book you read? Movie you saw? Concert you heard?
19. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
20. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to this organization?
21. What 2 or 3 accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
22. How would your references describe you?
23. What are your long-term career goals?
24. Where do you see yourself in five years? In ten years?
25. How do you spend your spare time?

For management positions:

1. How many people do you manage?
2. How would you characterize your management style?
3. With what other departments do you deal?
4. Tell me about a crisis.
5. How many people have you hired?
6. What has been your biggest hiring mistake?
7. How do you maintain checks and balances on employee performance?
8. How do you handle poor employee performance?
9. How would you describe the best manager you ever had?

Suggested Questions to Ask the Employer

1. Reason the position is available?
2. How is this work being done now?
3. What the interviewer would specifically like accomplished on the job in the next 6-12 months?
4. Describe what you feel would be an ideal candidate for this job.
5. What do you feel would be the major problems / challenges that I would be facing in this position?
(Then interviewee should talk about how s/he would deal with them).
6. With whom will I be working?
7. Who will be my supervisor? What can you tell me about her/him?
8. What qualities do you look for most in your employees?
9. What kind of growth opportunities exists for the person in this job?
10. How would you define your management philosophy?
11. How does this organization / company reward personal and professional achievement?
12. Are performance reviews held on a regular basis?
13. Are employees afforded an opportunity for continuing education, and/or professional development?
14. What is the next step in the interview process? When can I expect to hear something?

10 Routinely Covered Interview Topics

1. Leadership: Give an example of how you exercised leadership in a recent situation.
2. Problem Solving: Describe a recent problem and how you solved it.
3. Change: You must have seen some interesting developments on your prior job. Think about the changes you have seen and tell me how you changed.
4. Decision Making: Tell me about a decision you made recently and how you reached it.
5. Criticism: Tell me about a time when you were criticized. What was the issue involved, who made the criticism, and how did you handle it?
6. Communication Skills: Tell me how you use your communication skills, written and orally.
7. Time Management: Think about a recent project you were assigned. How did you go about managing your time and organizing the project.
8. Teamwork: Tell about a recent team you worked on.
9. Persuasion: Have you ever had to persuade someone to do something they were initially reluctant about? What happened?
10. Pressure: Tell me about a time when you were under enormous pressure. What was the source of the pressure and how did you cope?

Material adapted from "The new interview: Tough & Targeted"—Bob Weinstein, Boston Globe

After the Interview

Evaluate the interview. Consider where you did well and with which questions you had difficulty. By reviewing and rehearsing the weak areas, you will improve your next interview.

Follow up. If you do not get a response soon after the date that the interviewers indicated it is a good idea to telephone and inquire about the position.

Continue your job search. Just because you have an interview, don't stop researching and following through with other job leads — keep the momentum going — it may take many interviews to find the right job offer for you.

Send a thank you letter

Write a thank you note immediately — send it the very same day. It makes a very good impression and too many candidates fail to do this simple and effective step. Hand written notes on good stationery is acceptable if your handwriting is presentable. Otherwise, type. Letters should re-state your enthusiasm for the position, and can re-state that you make you an excellent fit for the position. You can mention any points you may have omitted in the interview.

Tips for Thank You Letters- Adopted from the Boston Career Link

1. Make your thank you letter short, positive, and to the point.
2. Content: Limit to no more than four paragraphs. Make reference early to the position in which you are interested. Highlight one or two important points made in your conversation, and remind your reader of the date and time of your interview.
3. Maintain a positive and professional tone; even if you're acknowledging a rejection, you are still grateful for the time and consideration.
4. Remind the interviewer of your continued interest in the position or organization.
5. Include your contact information both at the top of the page and in the final paragraph.
6. A separate thank you letter should be written to each person with whom you interviewed, or came into direct contact. Remember at the interview to ask for business cards to get correct names and titles.
7. Do not create a generic thank you letter. Letters should always be unique, especially if you are corresponding with more than one person within an organization. Send the letter no more than one-week after the interview.
8. Look at examples to help you create a concise letter. On the following page is an example of a thank you letter.
9. Make sure that the format and type of paper used are consistent with your résumé, cover letters, and any other job search correspondence.
10. Spellcheck and proofread; have a friend proofread your letter twice. Make sure spelling of names, titles, and organization are correct.

Eugene Lewis

2289 Mello Cello Lane Boston, MA 02115 (617) 555-1212 elewis@email.net

May 5, 1999

Catherine Peterson
Executive Director
Arts/Boston
100 Boylston Street
Suite 735
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Ms. Peterson:

Thank you for taking time from your schedule to meet with me on Monday, May 3rd to discuss the opening of Administrative Assistant at Arts/Boston. From our discussion I gained a clear and comprehensive picture of your organization's leadership role within the Boston arts community.

It was extremely informative for me to learn of the milestones that have occurred with your programs, Tomorrow's Audiences and BosTix. Obviously, the collaboration with Greater Boston businesses and communities has helped foster audience development.

I would like to reiterate my interest in joining Arts/Boston. My three years experience in arts administration and six years in music would be an excellent match for your vacancy.

I will contact you next week to check on the status of the selection process. Should you wish to contact me in the meantime, I can be reached anytime at (617) 555-1212. Thanks again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Eugene M. Lewis

Typical reasons applicants “fail” on interviews

1. Lack of preparation for the interview
2. Not researching the organization/company
3. Treating the interview as a friendly, social event (especially lunch meeting)
4. Poor non-verbal communication: limp handshake, poor eye contact
5. Displaying lack of confidence
6. Not providing thought-out answers to questions
7. Failure to ask strong questions regarding the position
8. Telling faults of previous company or supervisor
9. Showing no interest or enthusiasm for position
10. Being caught in a misstatement

Material adapted from “Interview Tips,” Boston College Career Center

Interviewing Websites

CareerCity

<http://www.careercity.com/content/interview/index.asp>

Comprehensive section on interviewing, from collecting references to dress, questions and answers, interview techniques, and following up afterwards.

McKinsey & Company Case Interview

<http://recruiting.mckinsey.com/case/intro.html>

This sample interactive case is good practice for the consulting case interview.