
Interviewing Basics & Sample Questions

Interviewing Checklist

Advanced Preparation

- Research the industry and/or company, know the job requirements and possible salary ranges (in case the employer asks you).
- Know the name of the person(s) who will be interviewing you.
- Know your qualifications, skills, achievements, and why you want to work for the company.
- Complete a mock interview and prepare detailed answers using the STAR or PARK method.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer.
- Know the location of the interview and how long it will take to get there.
- Decide what is appropriate to wear for the interview (see “Dress for Success”)
- Get a full night sleep before the interview.

The Day of the Interview

- Bring copies of your resume, list of references, and letters of recommendation (if applicable).
- Have paper and pen for notes and list of questions to ask.
- Pay special attention to personal hygiene and dress professionally.

The Interview - Arrival and Setting the Scene

- Plan to arrive early, 10-15 minutes.
- Be relaxed, friendly and business-like to everyone you meet. Introduce yourself to the office manager.

The Interview

- Greet the interviewer by name and shake their hand (or what is acceptable). Be confident and enthusiastic.
- Sit down after the interviewer sits down or indicates where you are supposed to sit.
- Speak clearly; don't mumble or use space-fillers such as “ah” and “you know.”
- Be aware of nonverbal body language – use eye contact and good posture. Don't fidget!
- Listen carefully to all questions and respond with positive and complete answers. Take time to organize your answers and follow the STAR method.
- Be positive and honest. Don't embellish information or complain about former coworkers.
- Stay on topic. Ask for clarification if you don't understand the question.
- Use examples of your past work to show how you accomplished something.
- Use caution if asked about salary requirements – don't be the one to bring it up.

The Interview – Conclusion

- Ask intelligent questions that haven't already been answered, don't unnecessarily extend the interview.
- State your appreciation for the interview, reiterate your interest in the position, and confirm follow up.
- Shake hands if appropriate, say goodbye and leave promptly.
- Send a thank you note to those who interviewed you within 24 hours.
- Make a list of how to improve your next interview.

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Dress for Success

- Dress professionally and appropriately for the job you're applying. Research and know the company's dress code to plan your outfit. If the organization promotes a business casual or trendy environment, use your best judgement and adjust accordingly. You can always call and ask for clarification before your interview. For most business settings, choose conservative colors like blues, grays and blacks. It is better to err on the side of too conservative/professional than too casual.
- Grooming is important, no matter the job location.
- Minimize jewelry. Keep it small and wear no more than two pieces per hand or ear.
- In traditional business situations, women should wear hose and close toed shoes. When in doubt, wear pants. Men should wear suits and ties; socks should match the suit.
- In general: NO short skirts (hemlines more than three inches above the knee); no leggings, leather jackets or blazers, spaghetti straps, sequins; printed/trendy/oversized handbags, briefcases, or clothing.
- NO cell phones or drinks! Leave them in your car.

Your dress should not distract from who you are and the skills you offer. You want to be remembered for what you said and not for what you wore!

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral based interview questions are more focused than traditional interview questions. These questions assume that the most accurate predictor of success is your past success. Employees use behavioral questions to learn more about team work, communication, problem solving, leadership, etc. STAR (Situation, Task, Action and Result) or PARK (Problem, Acton, Result, Knowledge learned) interview response techniques are methods for answering behavioral interview questions. STAR and PARK are acronyms for four key concepts, and each concept is a step the job candidate can take to answer a behavioral interview question. By completing all four steps, the job candidate provides a thorough answer.

Situation: Describe the context of the job/volunteer/relevant experience or challenge.

Task: Describe your responsibility in that situation. Did you help your group complete a project under a tight deadline, or resolve a conflict with a coworker?

Action: Describe how you completed the task or endeavored to meet the challenge. Focus on what you did, rather than what your team, boss, or coworker did.

Result: Explain the outcomes or results generated by the actions taken. Emphasize what you accomplished or what you learned. Focus on experiences that showcase positive results.

Problem: What was the situation/problem? What were you trying to solve?

Action: Describe the process, the how you worked through the problem

Result: What was the end product, the positive outcome?

Knowledge gained: What did you learn, how will this knowledge provide value to the employer?

Use the STAR/PARK techniques to formulate your response for these example questions:

- Working with people from different backgrounds or cultures can be a real challenge. Have you had this experience, and if so, can you tell me about it?

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- Give an example of a time when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle him/her?
- Give an example of a team decision in which you were recently involved. What did you do to help the team reach a decision?
- Have you ever been in a group situation in which one member was unproductive or uncooperative? How did you handle it?
- Describe a time when you made an unpopular decision at work. What was the result?
- Describe a situation in which you got people who didn't like each other to work together. How did you do it? What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you faced a particularly demanding rush situation (emergency, deadline, etc.). How did you respond?
- Describe a situation in which you have seen another employee do something that you thought was inappropriate. What did you do?
- Give me an example of a situation in which your ethics were challenged. How did you handle it?
- What are some of your strengths in dealing with people? Tell me about a time when you used one of these strengths to resolve a conflict.
- Listening is a valuable tool. Describe a time when good listening skills helped you overcome a communication problem.
- What has been one of the most difficult decisions you have had to make in a past job? What was the outcome?
- How do you prioritize tasks when you are working on several things at once?
- Tell me about a time when you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do?
- Describe a situation in which you identified and resolved a problem.
- Tell me about a problem you tried to solve, but couldn't. Describe the efforts you made.
- Tell me about a time when you were participating in a team project and somebody dropped the ball. What did you do to help the team finish the project on time?
- Describe a specific problem you solved for an employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?

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Sample Traditional Interview Questions

Job interview questions vary by industry. Use these typical interview questions to help you think of key points and examples to convey your skills and accomplishments. You want to practice but not memorize your answers.

- What goals have you set for yourself, and how are you planning to achieve them?
- Who or what has had the greatest influence on the development of your career interests?
- What factors did you consider in choosing your major?
- Why are you interested in our organization?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a position?
- What kind of work do you want to do?
- What are your expectations of your future employer?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
- What was the most useful piece of advice you ever received and who was it from?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- Why did you choose your major? What were the biggest problems you have encountered in college?
- What interests or concerns you about the position or the company?
- What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- How do you think you have changed personally since you started college?
- Why did you choose the extracurricular activities that you did?
- What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
- What frustrates you the most?
- How would you react to having credibility questioned?
- What characteristics are most important in a good manager? How have you displayed one of these characteristics?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- Are you willing to relocate or travel for this position?
- Which accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- How are you conducting your job search and how will you make your decision?
- We are looking at a lot of candidates; why are you the best person for this position?
- How would your friends describe you? Your professors?
- What else should I know about you?