



## Preparing for a Job Interview

Knowing how to interview for jobs, internships, and other professional opportunities is a key skill to develop as you continue through school and build your professional identity. Getting interviewed by people you don't know in a professional setting can seem overwhelming at first, but there are several tips, tricks, and strategies you can use to navigate job interviews and build your confidence in the process.

### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

It's important to know not just the position you're applying for, but the company/institution itself. Look over their website and social media pages – as well as the job description! – to get the best possible idea of what they're looking for in a candidate. Interviewers may ask you specific questions about their company to see just how interested you really are!

### MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Wear formal, professional clothing to an interview and carry a positive attitude. Make sure you are standing up straight, making eye contact, and really listening to what the interviewer(s) has to say. Arrive to the interview 10-15 minutes early and when you meet someone, give them a firm handshake. These little details really add up in the eyes of an employer.

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

The best way to ensure you perform at your best during an interview is to practice beforehand. Whether it's answering basic questions about yourself, practicing your handshake, or even working on your posture in front of a mirror, every bit of work you put in prior to the interview will help you succeed! Ask a friend, coworker, or family member if they can help you practice beforehand.

### BUILD YOUR BRAND

Bring several copies of your resume to your interview, as well as a pen and notebook to write things down. You never know who you'll run into when interviewing, and you may meet someone who hasn't seen your resume yet. Remember that an interview is a meeting with industry professionals, so be ready to get the word out about yourself as a candidate!

### FOLLOW UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

No matter how the interview goes, always follow up within 24 hours. This can be as simple as sending a quick thank-you email to the interviewer and mentioning that they can contact you if they have any additional questions. Keep the lines of communication open!

### ASK QUESTIONS OF YOUR OWN

Towards the end of an interview, you will likely be asked if you have any questions. *Don't say no!* Come prepared with a few questions about the company, the position, and the work environment, conveying an eager attitude and your own interest in getting hired.

# Commonly Asked Interview Questions

Job interviews can be stressful, and you want to do everything you can to make a great first impression. There's no better way to do this than to *be prepared!* While you probably won't know exactly what an interviewer will ask you, practicing your answers to a few of these sample interview questions will help build your confidence and get you used to talking about yourself in a positive way that will be appealing to employers.

## **HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE JOB?**

Employers want to hear how you found out about the job opening, whether it be an advertisement, job posting, referral, or job search engine.

## **TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.**

Prepare a 30- to 60-second "elevator speech" discussing your education and work experience. Your response should be positive and clearly demonstrate how you can contribute to the company. Do not talk about your own personal traits; keep things professional. This is a very common question so be sure you practice it often!

## **WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN OUR COMPANY?**

Research the company before the interview: Visit their website, browse their social media pages, and search for content about the company that describes its mission and values. Try to incorporate these in your answer to show your interest.

## **WHY DID YOU LEAVE (OR ARE LOOKING TO LEAVE) YOUR CURRENT/PAST EMPLOYER?**

Express positive points when talking about previous employers. If you were terminated, speak honestly, but don't go into the situation in detail. Try to turn the negative situation into a positive one.

## **YOU HAVE HAD LITTLE EXPERIENCE WITH (NAME OF FIELD). HOW DO YOU INTEND TO PERFORM THE DUTIES OUTLINED IN THE JOB DESCRIPTION?**

Discuss your transferrable skills or, if you wish, focus on your education. Remember, the classroom experience is still experience!

## **WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST STRENGTHS?**

Your strengths should relate to the skills outlined in the job description. If you have a specific skill you know the employer is looking for, be sure to mention it.

## **WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES (OR AREAS YOU NEED TO IMPROVE IN)?**

Turn your weaknesses into strengths. For example: "I often commit to several projects at once. I am working on this by keeping track of my projects on a planner and setting realistic deadlines."

## **WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 3 TO 5 YEARS?**

Keep your response relevant to career progression, not personal development.

## **WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?**

Focus on your qualifications and skills related to the job requirements. Reiterate excitement for the company and what you can bring to the table, as well as how your own values fit in with the company's.

# Situational/Behavioral Interviewing

Interviewers will often ask you specific questions about your past experiences to best determine how you'll handle future situations. To answer these questions, you'll need to tell stories that prove you have the experience and skills to excel at the position you're interviewing for.

Every good story has a beginning, middle, and ending (ideally a positive one!), so with that in mind, consider using the **S.O.A.R.** method to answer situational or behavioral questions:

**S – situation;** what was the setting of the experience you'll be describing?

**O – objective;** what was going through your mind at the time and what decision did you make?

**A – action;** what did you do to address the situation and how did you do it?

**R – result;** what *positive* outcome was achieved from your action?

Remember that educational or volunteer experience can be used as well as professional experience; what matters is that you accurately convey your skills and abilities in your answers. Practice the S.O.A.R. method with some of these sample situational/behavioral interview questions:

- ❖ Describe a time when you went above and beyond to help a customer.
- ❖ Think of a project you recently participated in. What was your role and what did you do to help the group accomplish its goal?
- ❖ Tell me about a time you demonstrated strong leadership skills.
- ❖ Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Why?
- ❖ Give me an example of how you had to change your communication style to accommodate a customer or colleague.
- ❖ Tell me about a time when you had to meet an important deadline. What steps did you take to ensure things got done on time?
- ❖ Have you ever had a difficult working relationship with another individual? What did you do to improve that relationship?
- ❖ Give me an example of how your values align with our company's.

As a reminder, these are just examples of some of the questions you may be asked in a Situational/Behavioral interview. When practicing, be sure to consider questions related to your specific skill set and degree program as well, such as:

- ❖ Accounting: Tell me about your experience with Quicken and QuickBooks.
- ❖ Education: Can you talk about your classroom management techniques, and tell me about a time you had utilize them in class?