

INTERVIEWS

CONGRATULATIONS

Now that you have an interview you have already convinced the employer you are potentially the right candidate. The interview is your chance to make a meaningful connection with your potential employer. This is also an opportunity for you to assess whether this position, employer and organizational culture is a good fit for you.

Three Things to Research Before an Interview

Yourself

Reflect on your experiences, and be comfortable and familiar with all aspects of your résumé, cover letter, and your application responses. Know your strengths, values, and specific details of your relevant experiences, and how they apply to the skills and values of the position and organization.

Position

Study the job description to pinpoint the set of skills the position requires, and assess how your experiences relate directly to the position.

Employer/Industry

Obtain any information about the employer (via LinkedIn, the company website, business journals, etc.) to help you feel more confident preparing questions to ask.

How to Answer Questions: The STAR method

There is no way to know exactly what you will be asked in an interview. Recognizing potential interview themes (e.g., organizational skills or teamwork) and reflecting on your personal experiences two to five days before the interview is an excellent way to prepare. Telling specific stories and sharing examples is one of the best ways to give employers an opportunity to know you and keep employers engaged; they want to make sure you would be a good fit.

Situation

First, describe the situation you experienced. Be concise and clear - this is not the focus - but it is important for the employer to understand; simplify if necessary.

Task

Concisely explain a related task, problem, or objective to the situation with which you were faced or had to complete.

Action

This is the most important part of your answer, and you are encouraged to explain and expand. Your response, ideally, can help the employer envision you working for their company.

Result

How did you resolve the situation; what was the result? An excellent strategy is to answer concisely: "That was an example of" or "as a result..."

The STAR method will help keep your answers on topic and be complete. When you prepare, you should spend 60-70% of your response focusing on the Action and Result.

Preparing Experiences to Share

When getting ready for your interview, think about past experiences where you used skills applicable to the job for which you are interviewing. Try to brainstorm three to five stories from work, volunteering, or school related activities that demonstrate how you have the skills needed for the position. During the interview you'll only have to decide which story to tell, rather than think of a new story for each question.

Example Question

Describe a time when you disagreed with a co-worker; how was that resolved?

Example Answer

[Situation]

I worked at Macy's last holiday season. I was placed in a team of three to achieve sales goals and increase customer loyalty.

[Task]

Initially, one of the team members and I had very different approaches, which led to some tension between us. I was very customer-oriented, and the other team member didn't interact much with customers. This resulted in our department not meeting sales goals.

[Action]

I organized a meeting with my manager and co-worker to develop strategies to work better as a team. During the meeting I suggested we provide each other constructive feedback while recognizing and respecting our different perspectives.

[Result]

By understanding each other's styles and approaches, we were able to better support each other. (cont.)



COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(cont.)

For the next two weeks our team exceeded our sales goal by \$100. This is an example of a time when I used diplomatic communication skills/ conflict-resolution techniques.

This experience could be used to answer a variety of questions, and would be fairly easy to adapt to answer any of the following questions:
What role do you play in a group?
Tell us about a time that you failed. What did you learn? What is your communication style? What is a strength that you could bring to the team? How do you deal with conflict?

Four Types of Questions You May be Asked

Every question asked has a reason behind it. Learning to analyze and thoughtfully respond to questions you are asked are important interview skills - why are they really asking that question? This will help you highlight your most relevant experiences (which is why researching yourself is so important!). Many of these questions can be answered using the STAR method, especially the behavior questions.

1. General/Open Ended Questions

“What strengths do you offer?”

These questions can be difficult, and you will not want to divulge irrelevant information. Answering with specific stories can be very effective.

2. Behavior-based Questions

“Describe a time when...”

These questions are based off the theory that past behavior predicts future behavior.

3. Case-study Questions

The employer may ask you to read and then analyze a scenario. These are designed to see and hear your thought processes. Make sure to share aloud how you arrive at a decision, and feel free to ask for more time.

4. Off-the-wall Questions

Usually asked towards the end to understand your personality and observe your reaction to something unexpected.

The best responses tend to be honest and humorous.

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are challenging and are often used as screening interviews for employers to identify the strongest candidate for in-person interviews. Since you are not present to demonstrate your enthusiasm or able to assess visual cues, keep answers concise and relevant to keep the employer engaged. Do not be so brief as to “look” unprepared or to appear indifferent. Even during a phone interview, do not forget to smile.

Practicing for an Interview

Meeting with a career advisor, conducting a mock interview, or sitting down with a friend to practice are all great ways to prepare. Dressing up for an interview will help it feel like a real interview.

What to Bring With You to an Interview:

- Portfolio/Padfolio (containing résumé & cover letter copies, a pen, and blank notebook paper)
- Proper attire, being well-dressed and groomed shows employers you are professional, enthusiastic and genuinely interested in the position
- References (these should not be listed on your résumé, but should be listed on a separate paper) with résumé heading

Promptly Write a Thank You Note

- Emailed thank-you notes are acceptable, handwritten is preferred
- Send one to each person with whom you met
- Send a thank you note within 24 hours

Sample Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What encouraged you to apply to this position?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What role do you typically assume on a team?
- Describe a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker.
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- Why should I hire you, or what sets you apart from others?

Questions to Ask at the End of an Interview

It's important to prepare at least three question for your employer at the end of your interview. This will demonstrate your interest in the position and display your commitment to being successful should you get the job.

Here are a few suggestions:

- What are some challenges faced by the organization?
- Can you provide an example of someone who excelled in this position and what made them successful?
- How would you describe a typical day's activities?
- What are some of the organizations short term goals? Long term goals?



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