

An interview is a structured conversation between an applicant and an employer that's intended to evaluate the applicant's qualifications, skills, and experience, and overall fit for a specific role in the company. The process is a two-way exchange, where both the employer and applicant determine whether their goals and values align. Interviews are conducted in different formats including phone screenings, virtual meetings, or in-person discussions.

COMMON INTERVIEW FORMATS

PHONE SCREEN

These brief conversations involve general questions to determine if you meet the basic qualifications. They're used to narrow the applicant pool and help hiring managers decide which candidates to invite for an in-depth interview.

VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

Virtual interviews are held over Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. Be sure to test your technology in advance, limit noise and distractions, and ensure your location has adequate lighting. *Tip: Look at the camera, not the screen

IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

In-person interviews usually follow a phone screen. Individual interviews involve the interviewer and applicant. A panel interview consists of a committee that often includes the hiring manager, direct supervisor, and several coworkers.

THREE THINGS TO RESEARCH BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

The Position

Carefully read the job description to make sure you understand the duties, responsibilities, and skills you'll need to demonstrate in the role. Identify the top three qualifications listed and reflect on how your knowledge, skills, and abilities directly align with them. This will help you communicate why you're a good fit for the position.

Yourself

Your tasks during an interview are to convince the employer that you're an asset to the company, you're passionate about the work, you're excited to be part of the organization, and to determine if the position is a good fit for your career goals. Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

- What are your top 3 strengths?
- What are your top 3 values?
- What issues do you care deeply about?
- What unique characteristics do you bring?
- Why do you want to work for this organization in particular?

* Tip: If any of these questions are difficult to answer, try imagining how a close friend or family member would answer if they were asked these questions about you.

Be prepared to address mistakes, areas for growth, or skill gaps. One of the best ways to do this is by stating what you learned from a mistake or failure, or describe steps you're taking to continue learning and developing professionally.

Employer/Industry

Research the company by exploring their website, social media platforms, and LinkedIn page to learn about their mission, services, culture, and any current events or trends impacting their industry. This knowledge will help you tailor your responses during the interview and ask insightful, well-informed questions at the end of the interview. Here are a few examples:

- Can you describe the team I would be working with and how this role collaborates with others?
- What support is typically provided to help employees achieve their career goals?
- Can you provide an example of someone who excelled in this position and what made them successful?
- What diversity, inclusion and cultural competency training does the company provide to their employees?

It can also be helpful to learn about the person who will be interviewing you to see if you have common interests. This may help spark a meaningful conversation and help you connect with them.



THE STAR METHOD

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! Ideally, your response should include specific details to 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.

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 different approaches, which led to some tension between us. I was customer-oriented, and they 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. For the next two weeks our team exceeded our sales goal by \$100."

This story can be used to answer a variety of questions!

Practicing for an Interview

Meeting with a career advisor for a mock interview, or practicing with a friend or family member and asking them for feedback are great ways to prepare. Dressing up for a mock interview can make your practice session feel more realistic. You can also try recording yourself to create awareness of nervous habits or speech (for example, saying um frequently, tapping fingers, etc.)

MAKE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

One of the first questions you'll be asked is "Tell me about yourself." Here are a few things to include:

- Your name, education, work experience, 1-2 top skills, what excites you about the position you're applying for.

"Hello, my name is Lance Lute, it's a pleasure to meet you! I graduated with a BA in Communications from PLU in 20xx. I'm excited about the opportunity to apply my content writing and social media management experience to the communications manager position, and learn more about implementing effective communication strategies."

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early
- Dress in proper attire
- Bring printed copies of your resume, references, and a list of questions to ask the interviewer
- Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing, visualization, or repeating a mantra
- Silence your phone
- Be polite and considerate to all staff members
- Take note of every interviewer's name and get their business card if possible
- Listen to the questions carefully and ask for clarification if anything is unclear before responding

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Try to send a thank you note to each person you met with. Emailed thank-you notes are acceptable, handwritten is preferred.
- Consider any difficult questions, and think about how to improve your responses for the future
- Consider how the position could meet your goals and whether the culture seems like a good fit
- If you haven't heard back after the initial hiring timeline, check in with the interviewer once to reaffirm your interest in the positions and ask about a new timeline.

What if I Have to Come Back for Another Interview?

- Often, questions asked during a second interview are focused on assessing the candidates' understanding of the company, its objectives, and the specific tasks of the position.
- Be prepared to answer additional behavioral questions. Employers often assume the way you handled previous situations will be similar to the way you'll handle similar situations in the future.

MOCK INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

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. This will help you highlight your most relevant experiences. 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. Focus on what is relevant to the position and use the STAR method to strengthen your answer.

2. Behavior-based Questions:

"Describe a time when...." These questions are based off the theory that past behavior predicts future behavior. The STAR method is key for these questions.

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 process. Make sure to share aloud how you arrived 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.

Question	Example Response	Objective
What motivates you?	"Making a true difference in the lives of my patients and their families motivates me to strive for excellence in everything I do. I look forward to seeing my patient's reactions when we get a positive outcome that will change their lives forever. That's why I became a nurse and why I'm pursuing a position in pediatrics."	To gauge a candidate's level of self-awareness & assess whether their motivations align well with the role & company overall. Preparation: Try to be as specific as possible & relate your response to the role and/or company's mission. Try answering the following questions as you prepare your response: What did a great day at work look like in a previous job & why? Why did you choose this field/profession? What prompted you to apply for this position when you read the job description?
What are your salary expectations?	"My salary expectation is between \$00,000 and \$00,000, which is the average salary for a candidate with my level of experience in this city. However, I have some flexibility." "Before I answer, I'd like to ask a few more questions to get a better idea of what the position entails. That way, I can provide a more accurate expectation." "I'm currently earning \$00,000. I'd like an increase in compensation but I'm willing to consider other forms of compensation, including paid time off and bonuses, to increase that number."	To make sure your salary expectations are consistent with the amount budgeted for the role. Preparation: Strategies to answer include: research what the typical salary is for the role in your area, provide a salary range, show that you're willing to negotiate for other benefits like flexible schedules, paid time off, or bonuses, or in some cases deflect the question until you know more about the role.

Tell me about yourself & your qualifications

"I've been a bookkeeper for the past three years where I track accounts payable and receivable, as well as oversee payroll. I've been able to find and resolve discrepancies between amounts owed and received, which has ended up saving our company thousands of dollars in underpaid bills. I recently earned my CPA degree and think my experience with bookkeeping and attention to detail would make me a great fit for your open public accountant role."

To learn more about your skills, accomplishments, and why you think you're a good fit for the position.

Preparation:

Focus on clear, concise answers and highlighting your strengths as they relate to the role.

Why do you want to work here?

"This company is always ahead of tech trends and is constantly looking for ways to improve their products, and that sort of innovative thinking really inspires me. I also appreciate how much this company has given back to the community, especially in efforts to produce more eco-friendly products. I'm always looking for ways to lower my own carbon footprint."

To determine whether a candidate took time to research the organization and whether they would be a good fit for the company's culture. **Preparation:** Research the products/services values, history, and culture of the organization. Mention specific aspects of the company that align with your values and career aspirations.

What interests you about this role?

"The job description mentioned that this role would be responsible for onboarding new employees, as well as compiling and distributing an updated employee handbook. In my current role, I enjoy working with new employees to help them feel welcome and confident in their roles. And I've found that an updated employee handbook can be an excellent resource to help them adapt to company policies, such as rules for hybrid roles, and often helps employees adjust more quickly."

To learn how well a candidate understands the role.

Preparation: Carefully read the job description & relate them to your experience. This can be a great opportunity to highlight specific skills and/or responsibilities you would enjoy.

How do you work under pressure?

"Throughout my career, I've discovered how to embrace working under pressure. I find that routine can make us complacent, so I try to look for challenges that push me to grow. One time, I was supposed to deliver a project to a client in five days. A colleague who was working with another client had the same deadline, but he had to take a leave of absence due to personal reasons. I was asked to take up both projects at the same time. While I felt an initial sense of panic, I came up with a very detailed time management plan and found new ways to boost my efficiency that enabled me to deliver both projects on time."

To assess the candidate's ability to stay calm and think/act rationally under stressful conditions.

Preparation: Focus on using the STAR method to describe a specific scenario you faced and how you calmly handled it & found a solution.