

# Interview Techniques



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# Interview Techniques That Work

Being mentally prepared for anything that might happen during the interview is the next step in landing the job. Many times, the person who is offered a job is not the best-qualified candidate, but the one who gave the best interview performance. And that takes practice and preparation. Here are some tips to help you improve your “interview fitness”:

**Research the employer.** Employers appreciate job applicants who take the opportunity seriously. It is your job to find out about the employer before the interview. This may mean searching online, talking to someone who works at the organization, contacting the local chamber of commerce, reading articles or brochures, or finding other sources of meaningful information. You will sound well-prepared and interested when you can comfortably discuss the employer’s products, services, or mission using real information. Empty flattery is obvious.

**Do practice interviews.** Find someone to work with you who will approach this practice seriously. This person must ask you tough questions and make the situation as realistic as possible. Prepare good answers to possible interview questions (see the next chapter). If any of your responses seem weak, work out a way to express them as positively as possible without being misleading. Video the practice interviews and review them to see where you need more practice or polish. Most people don’t love hearing their own voices or watching themselves on video, but you might notice something to correct before the real interview. You could also practice interviewing via Skype or other electronic method.



**Think of ways to express your qualifications.** Have three good reasons why you are a good candidate for the job. Plan how to work them into your interview responses without being too obvious. Use valid examples based on your skills, experience, or personal qualities.

**Keep a positive attitude.** No matter how unhappy you may have been in a previous job, keep your unhappiness to yourself. Most employers will recognize that a job candidate who criticizes a former employer will likely do so again. An optimist is a much more valuable employee than a pessimist in any organization. A positive, enthusiastic attitude during the interview communicates the image of someone who is willing to contribute and be productive.

**Be prepared for tough questions.** This is so important that the next chapter shows you how to turn potential negatives into positives by answering sticky questions skillfully.

**Practice listening.** Be prepared to listen to the interviewer. You could be asked a question in stages—with pauses—and if you are not really listening, you may interrupt and create a negative impression. Listening helps you determine what the interviewer is trying to find out. Employers value



employees who do not require instructions to be repeated. The interview is a natural place for employers to identify whether you are a good listener.

**Learn to be complete without rambling.** While interviewers want more than simple “yes” or “no” answers, you should avoid long answers. Keep your answers to the point, accurate, and interesting without trying to entertain the interviewer.

**Pinpoint the reasons for your interest in the employer and the job.** What motivated you to apply for this particular job? The interviewer does not want to hear, “I’m so desperate for a job, I’ll take anything with anybody.” You should know why you would want to show up for work each day with that specific employer. Take the opportunity toward the end of the interview to mention your interest in the job. The employer may be waiting for some sign of initiative on your part.

**Be prepared to ask questions.** In the small notebook you carry with you to the interview, write down 2-3 questions to ask about the organization or the job and its duties. This is a way to show your interest in the employer—as well as to show your self-confidence in a positive way. The interviewer may mention salary and benefits, but if not, it is perfectly appropriate for you to ask those questions toward the end of the interview. By waiting until the close of the discussion, you give the impression that you are more concerned about the job responsibilities and how your skills will be used.

**Fill in any gaps.** Make a note to yourself to ask whether additional information will be needed, whether reference information is complete, what the next stages are in the employment process, and when they might occur. This kind of closure to the interview on your part gives an interviewer the impression of you as a well-organized, thoughtful person.





# Getting Ready For Those Tough Questions

The interviewer really wants to know the answers to three basic questions: (1) Can you do the job? (2) Are you reliable and dependable? (3) Do you get along well with other people?

Here are some ways that these questions may be asked, with hints for answering them in a way that puts you in the best possible light:

**“What would you do if..?”** While your answer is important, your attitude and how you project it when giving your answers is very important. A calm approach is the best bet. Do not rush into an answer. Take time to consider your response and begin your statement with a phrase such as “One of the things I might consider would be. . .” If you commit yourself to one plan of action and it is not what the employer wants, you have backed yourself into a corner. Try to keep your options open in this way.

**“In what type of position are you most interested?”** Job titles and the responsibilities that go with them may vary from employer to employer. Since you may not know for certain which direction the interviewer is going with the question, try to cover both possibilities—position and function: “I’m good at accounting, math, and organizing information, and I’m most interested in positions related to those skills, such as accounts payable.”

Be sure to give the employer an overview of what you do best, not just your last job title or the name of a program or class you completed. Avoid going into discussions of future ambitions unless you are asked. The employer’s main concern is filling the opening today with someone who will work hard in that role, not making people’s dreams come true. Address the needs of the employer and you may find that dream job.

**“What other jobs have you held? How did you obtain them? Why did you leave?”** Answering the first question is simple. The second question is no problem unless you have been given one job after another by your relatives. If that is the case, explain that you were fortunate to have opportunities through family-owned businesses. The last question is the toughest if you have left jobs under difficult circumstances. You should always (1) tell the truth, and (2) never reflect badly on a previous employer. Keep your responses optimistic and take time to answer this question thoughtfully in a calm, comfortable voice. Often, the way in which you deliver your answer makes more of an impression than your actual words.

**“Why do you want to work here?”** Just as people want to feel special and appreciated, employers like to know that their workplace stands out from the crowd in a positive way. However, most people looking for a job are more concerned with being employed than with where they will work. Think of 2-3 things about the employer that would make you look forward to working there every day. Is the workplace modern and well organized? Have you noticed that the people who work there are very friendly and helpful? Have you heard good things about the employer from people who work there company’s salary range with me? I would or from customers? Knowing why you would like to work for the employer could help you get the job.



**“How long do you expect to work here?”** The interviewer may be looking for several kinds of information. Do you plan to skip out the door as soon as the first better offer comes along? How much can you and the employer reasonably be expected to commit to each other? A good answer might be, “I plan to stay with Acme, Inc., as long as it is a productive relationship for both parties.”

**“Are you willing to relocate?”** Some people are unwilling to move, even to another city or state. In some cases, better salaries are paid to employees willing to relocate to an area where their skills are in higher demand. An employer may not be able to guarantee that you will not be assigned to a different area. If the employer requires flexibility in its workers, then job candidates who cannot or will not move are unlikely to be hired. You must decide whether you are interested in the job enough to relocate if needed.



**“Would you accept part-time or temporary work?”** Think carefully about your own personal situation before you answer this question. If you accept part-time work, you may still have time to continue looking for a full-time job while receiving some pay. But, be honest by telling the employer that a part-time job is not your goal. A temporary job would still mean full-time pay for as long as the job lasts, so you might decide to accept it until a permanent position opens. Many employers prefer to hire full-time or permanent employees from their pool of temporary and/or part-time workers.

**“Tell me something about yourself.”** This casual statement may cause you to freeze as you try to quickly think of a response. Take a slow, easy breath. Ask the interviewer what kinds of things he or she is interested in hearing about. This gives you a little more time to think. If the interviewer becomes more specific, you can respond easily. If not, then simply talk about why you chose the area of training that you did, what elements of your work you like best, and the things that give you the most satisfaction on the job. This is your best opportunity to sell yourself!

**“Why should we hire you?”** The most obvious answer might seem to be, “Because I’ll do a good job.” You should be able to say more than that. One of the best approaches is to acknowledge that you are not able to rate the other applicants, but you believe you are well trained, responsible, and committed to giving the employer a solid day’s work each and every day. Show you are eager to become a valued member of the team.

**“Have you had any serious illness or injuries?”** If you have any chronic health problems or job-related injuries, be prepared with a signed clearance from your doctor. This clearance should state the condition of your health and your physical ability to do the work required without any negative



impact because of your previous injury or illness.

**“How do you feel about working with a younger or older supervisor?”** This is your chance to be tactful. State that age is not a factor, that you expect that the employer has chosen its supervisory staff based on their skills and qualifications, and that you think of supervisors as a resource to help you do a better job for the employer.

**“What kind of salary do you expect?”** If you ask for more than the employer is ready to offer, you might knock yourself out of a job offer. If you ask for less, then you could short-change yourself. If you ask for a salary that is in the ballpark, you can probably negotiate the actual salary. Even if the interviewer does not quote the salary, the employer still has a pay scale in mind. One approach is to ask, “Can you discuss your salary range with me?” This signals to the interviewer that you want to work within reasonable limits. You will also get a better idea about what your time, training, and experience are worth to the employer.

**“What kind of references do you have?”** The status, position, and credibility of your references are important. The best references are current and past employers, co-workers, instructors, or community leaders. Use ministers, scoutmasters, etc., only if you cannot obtain other references. Neighbors, relatives, and friends are very poor references from the employer’s point of view. Include the telephone number of your references when you list them. Remember to get permission from each of your references in advance.

**“What would you say are your weaknesses?”** Avoid listing all of your shortcomings for the interviewer. Instead, be prepared with one weakness and how you are overcoming that weakness. For example, are you taking classes, working with a more experienced person to improve a skill, getting involved in a related activity, etc? You want to convince the employer that your weakness is not an obstacle to your performance on the job.



Some other tough interview questions can include those listed below. Come up with honest but positive responses to these questions, so you won’t be surprised by them during an interview:

- Have you ever been fired from a job?
- Why have you been unemployed for all this time?
- How did you get into this field?
- If you were starting all over again, would you still get into this occupation?



- What job do you see yourself doing in five years?
- Have you ever thought about going into business for yourself?
- How do you think you will fit into this operation with our other employees?
- Why do you want to change jobs?
- Why have you held so many different jobs?
- Does your employer know you are planning to leave?

Employers should not ask you some types of questions in an interview. Laws protect job applicants against certain types of discrimination in the hiring process. It is illegal to discriminate based on answers to questions like the examples show.

Examples of unacceptable questions and types of discrimination appear below:



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|-----------------------------------|--|
| • Age Discrimination              | “How old are you?”                             |
| • Child Care Discrimination       | “Do you have children at home?”                |
| • Religion Discrimination         | “Can you fit in with [specific denomination]?” |
| • National Origin Discrimination  | “Where were you born?”                         |
| • Marital Status Discrimination   | “What does your spouse do?”                    |
| • Gender Discrimination           | “Are you planning to have a family?”           |
| • Americans with Disabilities Act | “Do you have any physical disabilities?”       |

If an interviewer asks a question from one of the categories above, how should you respond? Instead of telling the interviewer that he or she is asking an inappropriate question, you could reply, “I’m not sure how that information relates to my ability to do this job. Can you clarify that for me?” If this kind of questioning continues, carefully think about whether you really want to work for this employer.

