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The Ultimate Interview Playbook

Preparing for a job interview can feel overwhelming, but with the right strategy, you can walk in with confidence and leave a lasting impression. From preparation to follow-up, every step counts toward securing the role you want. Here's a complete guide to help you stand out before, during, and after the interview.

1. Before the Interview: Laying the Groundwork

Preparation is the key to confidence. By investing time upfront, you'll be ready to answer questions thoughtfully and show that you're a strong fit for the position.

- Research the company and role: Study the organization's website, explore their mission, and check out employee insights on LinkedIn. Use the job description as your roadmap.
- Highlight your experiences: Be ready with specific examples from your education, work, or personal projects that align with the company's needs. Adding something that makes you unique will help interviewers differentiate.
- Prepare questions: Draft 4–5 thoughtful questions that demonstrate your interest in the company's goals and culture.
- Practice, practice, practice: Run through a mock interview with a mentor, advisor, or career office professional.
- Plan logistics: Know how long it will take to get there, where to park, and the expected time commitment so nothing catches you off guard.

2. Day of the Interview: Making the Right Impression

The day of the interview is all about showing professionalism and confidence.

- Dress appropriately: Even if the office is casual, lean toward more formal attire.
- Bring the essentials: Pack a professional folder with two copies of your resume, a list of references, a pen, calendar, and notepad.¹
- Show enthusiasm: Smile, make eye contact, and greet everyone respectfully including those not directly involved in the interview.

¹ <https://www.goucher.edu/career-education-office/documents/Preparing-for-an-Interview.pdf>

3. During the Interview: Showcasing Your Best Self

The interview is your chance to connect your skills and experiences to the company's goals.

- Answer clearly and concisely: Use specific examples that highlight your strengths and accomplishments.
- Share your career goals: Show how your aspirations align with the role and organization.
- Stay positive: Avoid speaking negatively about past employers or colleagues.
- Skip salary talks (for now): Unless the employer brings it up, save discussions about pay and benefits for later stages.
- Engage thoughtfully: Ask two or more of your prepared questions to show genuine interest.
- Maintain composure: Keep eye contact, avoid fidgeting, and keep your phone on silent mode and in pockets.
- Be authentic²: Honesty and sincerity leave the best impression just be yourself.
- Request for clarity: if anything is not clear or you want to be sure what question was asked, request for details or reiterate the question to confirm what is expected.

4. After the Interview: Following Up

The conversation doesn't end when you leave the room. Following up shows professionalism and genuine interest.

- Send a thank-you note: Within 48 hours, email or write to each interviewer.
- Collect business cards: This ensures correct names and emails for your follow-up.
- Follow up politely: If you don't hear back within three weeks, a short phone call or email is appropriate.
- Submit requested materials quickly: Whether transcripts or references, provide them promptly (if required).

² Plung, D. (2024). *Job interview preparation: A practical exercise in the rhetoric of oral argument*. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 87(1), 177-193.

Types of Interview Questions (With Common Examples)

When preparing for an interview, it's important to understand the different types of questions you may face. Employers typically use your resume and the job description as a guide, so always think about how your skills, experiences, and goals align with the role.

1. Traditional Interview Questions

These are the most common questions where employers want to learn about your background, motivations, and career goals.

➤ Examples and Tips:

- **Tell me about yourself.**

Tip: Provide a concise summary of your skills, experiences, and what brings you to this interview. Keep it professional and focused.

- **Why did you choose this career?**

Tip: Highlight what excites you about the field and how your strengths will help you succeed.

- **What do you consider your strengths?**

Tip: Choose skills that directly align with the job description and explain how they make you an asset.

- **What do you consider your weaknesses?**

Tip: Be honest but constructive. Acknowledge an area for improvement and explain the steps you're taking to manage or improve it.³

2. Other common questions:

- How would a professor, colleague, or friend describe you?
- What motivates you to put forth your best effort?
- In what ways do you think you'll contribute to our company?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?

³ https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/2023-03/Interview%20Preparation_0.pdf



- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction, and why?
- Describe your most rewarding college or work experience.
- Why did you select your college/university?
- What led you to choose your major or field of study?
- What do you know about our company?

2. Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral questions are designed to predict your future performance based on your past experiences. The **STAR Method**⁴ is the best way to answer these:

- **S – Situation:** Set the scene with background details.
- **T – Task:** Explain your responsibility or challenge.
- **A – Action:** Describe the specific steps you took.
- **R – Result:** Highlight the outcome, what you accomplished, and what you learned.

➤ **Examples:**

- Tell me about a time when you worked on a group project and disagreed with a team member's idea.
- Give me an example of a goal you set and how you achieved it.
- Describe how you handle working under pressure.
- Share an example of when you used logic to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a mistake you made and how you managed it.
- Describe a stressful situation at work (or school) and how you handled it.

⁴ Plung, D. (2024). *Job interview preparation: A practical exercise in the rhetoric of oral argument*. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 87(1), 177-193.