



When seeking employment, an interview is often required as a part of the hiring process. The way an employer conducts an interview and the questions they ask will vary depending on the company or the position. However, there are common ways you can prepare and ease the stress of going into an interview. This guide is intended to help you prepare for a job interview by walking you through what to expect and how to answer the most common types of interview questions.

Before the Interview

1. Do Some Research

Regardless of the position or company, it is important to do some basic research before arriving at the interview. First, look at the company's website, especially the "About Us", "Who Are We", or "What We Do" pages. Also, take some time to read about the products or services the company provides.

This research is a critical part of interview preparation and will give you some insight into whether the company and its culture are a good fit for you. Make note of anything else you'd like to know, because interviewers will always ask whether you have any questions for them.

2. Analyze the Job

Carefully review the job description and how the role fits within the larger company or organization. Take some time to consider what the employer is looking for from the candidate and what the key responsibilities of the position are.

Consider making a list of the skills, knowledge, and professional and personal qualities that are qualifications of the job and make sure you can speak about the credentials and skills you have. Analyze the job description for key words describing skills, qualities, or experiences that you can relate to your professional or personal life.



Tip: If the job description is too short to reveal the employers' expectations, check their website to see if there is a longer description in the jobs section. You can also search job sites for the same title in order to get a sense of what other employers expect from similar positions.

3. Consider Your Answers to Common Interview Questions

During an interview, employers want to get to know you better and determine whether you can do the job. Here are some common questions you can expect interviewers to ask and how to prepare thoughtful answers to each:



Tell me about yourself.

Many employers will start the interview by asking you to tell them about yourself. Consider preparing an “interview elevator pitch” that is concise, compelling, and gives the interviewer a good sense of who you are professionally. The idea is to give a short summary of your present, past, and future. First, talk a little bit about your current or most recent job and what you did. Then tell the interviewer how you got there and any previous experience or education that is relevant to the role. Finally, end with what you’re looking to do next.

Example Elevator Pitch for an Executive Assistant Position:

Thank you for sitting down with me today. After graduating with my associate degree in Business, I spent the last three years building my professional experience as an Executive Assistant. I’ve successfully managed end-to-end event coordination and have generated a strong professional network for my colleagues. I was excited to learn about this opportunity in the sports management space. I’ve always been passionate about the way sports bring cultures together and would love the opportunity to bring my project management and leadership abilities to this position.

It’s not uncommon for interviewers to ask how you heard about the job or company. This question might seem simple to answer, but it’s a great opportunity to stand out and show your passion or connection with the company. Make sure to mention if you found out about the job from someone specific or if you discovered the company through an event, article, or something else. If you found the listing through a job board, mention specifically which one it was.



How did you hear about us?



Why are you interested in this job? Or why do you want to work for us?

At the beginning of the interview, you will also most likely be asked why you’re interested in the job or why you want to work for the company. This is where your previous research comes in handy. To prepare for this question, identify some key reasons you are excited about the position or some unique ways that particular company or organization appeals to you. This is the time for you to make a pitch about why you’re right for the role. Go back to the job description and identify where your skills or experiences fit within the responsibilities of the role.

Finally, another frequently asked question that you should prepare an answer for is what your greatest strength is. Talking about what you’re good at is sometimes hard. If one strength is too difficult to identify, try to come up with three attributes you want to mention. Think quality over quantity. You’ll want to think strategically about which skills will show you’re qualified for the job, which could include education, training, soft skills (non-technical), hard skills (technical), or past work experience. It is also important to back up each strength with an example of how you’ve used it in the past.



What is your greatest strength?

4. Review Other Types of Interview Questions

After preparing answers for the most common interview questions, it's also a good idea to prepare for some other types of interview questions. These include behavioral questions and situational questions. Examples of both types of questions can be found in the **Practice Questions** section at the end of this guide.

Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral interview questions ask the job candidate to share examples of how they've handled different work situations in the past. They often begin with the phrase, "Tell me about a time when..." These questions are unique because they ask you to share concrete examples of skills and experiences that relate to the position. Essentially, it's a way to let your past performance prove what you're capable of doing in the future for this potential employer.

These types of interview questions are tough to answer and tend to make job candidates the most nervous. However, there is a strategy to answering these difficult questions. The STAR method provides a straightforward format for helping a candidate tell a meaningful story about a previous work experience.



Image courtesy of <https://www.giveagradago.com/>

This method breaks down an answer into four components that together provide a detailed and comprehensive answer. It also allows the interviewer to easily follow along with the story you tell. To use the STAR method, begin by finding an appropriate scenario from your professional history that you can expand on. It might help to prepare by coming up with a few stories and examples that you can tweak and adapt for different questions. Think of stories from when you solved a problem, overcame a challenge, made a mistake, took on a leadership role, or worked with a team.

Next lay the situation out by painting a clear picture of who was involved and what your specific responsibilities were. Then you want to explain exactly what steps you took to reach the goal or solve the problem in the situation. Finally, explain the positive results of the actions you took. Even if the question asks you to explain a challenge you faced or a mistake you made, make sure to end on a high note by talking about what you learned or the steps you took to improve. Remember that employers ask these questions not only to learn how you handled specific situations, but also how your actions made an impact.

Situational Interview Questions

Similar to behavioral interview questions, situational questions attempt to understand how a job candidate might handle specific workplace situations. While behavioral questions ask about past experiences, situational questions are often hypothetical. Because every industry and job have a unique set of challenges and opportunities, employers may ask situational questions to assess how well a candidate is prepared to manage these circumstances before they make a hiring decision.

Situational questions can also be challenging to answer because unlike questions like, “What is your greatest strength?”, it is difficult to prepare answers in advance. Situational questions are often slightly ambiguous and force the candidate to think on their feet. However, there are some techniques you can use for these hypothetical questions to ease the stress:

- First, take a moment to pause and reflect. Employers don’t expect you to jump into an answer right away and it’s ok to take a moment to process the question before transitioning into answer mode.
- As you begin to answer, it’s important to show the employer how you work through the question, rather than simply stating what your answer is. Hypothetical questions allow the interviewer to see how you think and how you solve problems. Walk the employer through your approach.
- Stay on point and explain your thoughts in a structured way with a beginning, middle, and end. Start with explaining your assumptions about the situation, what specific actions you might take to solve the problem, and what the desired outcome of those actions is.
- Don’t hesitate to draw examples from past experiences. If you’ve encountered a similar situation in a previous job, use the STAR method to explain how you handled the problem. However, make sure to circle back to the original questions and explain how you would react to a future situation and what you learned from the previous experience.



Tip: In addition to preparing for questions you will be asked, don’t forget to come up with a list of questions you want to ask the interviewer about the position or the company.

5. Practice Answering Questions

After reviewing common interview questions and creating a strategy for how you will answer them (see **Practice Questions** at the end of this guide), it is then important to take the time to practice. Try to conduct a practice interview in the same format as the real interview, whether it be in-person, over the phone, or by video call. You may try looking in a mirror, practicing with a friend, and, if your interview will be virtual, practice looking into your computer camera. At the very least find some time to sit by yourself and practice your answers out loud, so you get used to how the words feel coming out of your mouth.

6. Prepare for the Day

Regardless of the type of job you're interviewing for, your first impression to the company should be a great one. Don't wait until the last minute to decide what you're going to wear to the interview. Have a professional outfit ready ahead of time so that your clothes are one less thing to worry about. Look at the company's website and social media presence to get a sense of how employees dress, and then kick it up a few notches!



Tip: Even if the interview is over the phone, it's not a bad idea to put on a professional outfit to put yourself in the right mindset.

Assemble the items that you will bring to the interview, including your resume, a copy of the cover letter you submitted (if applicable), a list of three references and their contact information, a list of questions for the employer, and something to write notes. Find the exact location of where the interview will be conducted and make sure you have directions to that location.

If you plan to drive to the interview, find out where you can park beforehand. If you're walking, walk there a few days before so you know how long it takes to get there and exactly where it is. If you're taking the bus, practice how you will get there so you know what bus to catch and how to get to the interview location from the bus stop. Allow at least an extra 10-15 minutes to ensure that you arrive early. Add additional time to your travel to account for any possible delays (e.g., traffic, transfers, etc.)

If you're interviewing virtually, make sure that you're comfortable with the technology that will be used, whether it's Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, or another platform. If you're not sure which platform you'll be using, make sure to ask. And don't forget to download all the necessary software beforehand to avoid technical trouble at the start of the interview.

During the Interview

- When you arrive, greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and introduce yourself.
- When you respond to their questions, listen carefully, take time to craft your responses by pausing, and ask the interviewer to repeat the question if you're not sure what they are asking.
- Take notes and write down any questions that come up throughout the interview.
- It's also a good idea to write down the names and job titles of the people you meet so that you can follow up.
- Stay attentive and engaged throughout the interview.
- Toward the end, it's appropriate to ask what the next step in the hiring process will be and when you might expect to hear back.
- Make sure to thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you.



Tip: Always follow up immediately after the interview with a thank you email. Taking the time to say thank you not only shows that you appreciate the interview, but it also gives you an opportunity to reiterate your interest in the job and clarify any questions you may have answered.

Interview Follow Up

Always follow up immediately after the interview with a thank you email. Taking the time to say thank you not only shows that you appreciate the interview, but it also gives you an opportunity to reiterate your interest in the job.

- Mention something specific you talked about in the interview, so they know it's not a cut and paste email.
- Clarify any questions you felt you may not have answered as well as you would have liked
- Invite them to contact you if they have any questions/concerns or need clarification on anything discussed.
- Show that you're confident you can perform well in this role and explain why. Tell them why you feel you could excel in the position.

If You Don't Get the Job

What if you don't get the job? How do you respond? You should always follow up if you want to be considered for future opportunities at the company or organization. You may write:

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to be considered for the position. I enjoyed learning more about the role and your experience at [X company]. I was so impressed by the company culture and [Insert something specific here about the company/role that you discussed in the interview]. I will continue to check for future openings. Thank you again for your time and consideration. I wish you the best of luck with the rest of the hiring process.¹

¹ From careercontessa.com

While it may make you feel vulnerable, you may also use this follow up as an opportunity to ask for feedback. You may write:

Would you be able to share what I could have done to present myself as a better candidate for the role? I'd like to be continually improving and would be so appreciative of any feedback you can provide.²

² From careercontessa.com

Conclusion

The purpose of the interview is to not only convince a potential employer that you are the best person for a job, but also for you to decide if the job is a good fit for you. When interviewing, remember to:

- Research the company.
- Prepare answers to and practice answering questions.
- Plan ahead.
- Dress appropriately.
- Send a prompt thank you note.

Practice Questions

Most Common Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How did you hear about us?
3. Why are you interested in this job? Why do you want to work for us?
4. What is your greatest strength?
5. What do you like to do outside of work?
6. What are you passionate about?
7. What should I know that's not on your resume?
8. When can you start?
9. Are you willing to relocate?
10. Do you have any questions for us?

Examples of Behavioral Interview Questions

1. Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership skills.
2. Tell me about a time when you had to work as a part of a team. What was successful about that team and what could you have done better?
3. Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet it or achieve it.
4. Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do, and you were required to prioritize your tasks. How did you prioritize your tasks?
5. What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
6. Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or coworker.
7. Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
8. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Examples of Situational Interview Questions

1. What would you do if you were asked to perform a task you've never done before?
2. What would you do if an angry and dissatisfied customer confronted you? How would you resolve their concern?
3. How would you handle it if your team resisted a new idea or policy you introduced?
4. How would you handle it if the priorities for a project you were working on were suddenly changed?
5. What steps would you take to make an important decision on the job?
6. What would you do if you disagreed with the way a manager wanted you to handle a problem?
7. What would you do if you were assigned to work with a difficult client?
8. How would you handle working closely with a colleague who was very different from you?
9. You're working on a key project that you can't complete because you're waiting on work from a colleague. What do you do?
10. You realize that an early mistake in a project is going to put you behind the deadline. What do you do?