

Interviewing Successfully



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Dressing to Get the Job: Interview attire

The way you dress for the interview speaks volumes before you utter your first words. Make sure that what you wear is not a distraction in reaching your ultimate goal.

Do not take for granted you can "get by" with what is already in your wardrobe, because this may not be true. Dressing for your future career, and to be taken seriously on a first impression, is quite different from what we mostly wear on a day to day basis. Remember that **stylish** is not usually conservative. This is not the time or place to make a statement of your individual style. This is the time to prove that you can conform to **their company's style** if given an opportunity.

When you purchase interview attire, go for quality over quantity. One or two well-chosen business suits will serve you all the way to the first day on the job and beyond. For now, no one will fault you for wearing the same sharp outfit each time you interview (and the interviewer does not know this is the 4th time you wore this suite this week). If you desire some variety within a limited budget, you might consider varying your shirt/blouse/tie/accessories as a simple way to change your look without breaking your wallet.

Here are some guidelines for successful interview dress:

Men and Women

- Conservative two-piece business suit (solid dark blue or gray is best)
- Conservative long-sleeved button down shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- Make certain that your cloths fit and hang well. Nothing should be oversized or too tight
- Clean, polished conservative shoes
- Well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Empty pockets--no bulges or tinkling coins
- No gum, candy (or cigarettes before interview as you may smell like smoke which could be distracting)
- Light portfolio case
- No visible body piercing other than earrings for ladies (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.)

Men

- Consider wearing a necktie. If you do, it should be silk/poly with a conservative pattern (**If you have chest hair, please wear a T-shirt or tank under your dress shirt.)
- Dark dress shoes (black are best)
- Dark socks (black is best)
- Get a haircut (short hair always fares best in interviews)
- No heavy beards (unless you are interviewing for a job as a lumberjack!)
- Mustaches should be neat and trimmed. Smaller is better.
- No rings other than wedding ring or college ring
- No earrings (if you normally wear one, take it out for the interview)

Women

- Always wear a suit with a jacket; dresses usually do not fair as well
- No super high heels. No open toe shoes. Closed toe pumps work, or a small heel on a loafer with a pantsuit.
- Conservative hosiery at or near skin color (and no runs!). Black is appropriate with a black suite.
- No large purses if possible; If possible, do not carry a purse, only a portfolio
- If you wear nail polish (not required), use a conservative color. Make sure the lengths of you nails are also conservative.
- Minimal use of makeup (it should not be too noticeable)
- No more than one ring on each hand
- One set of earrings if possible, but definitely no more than two.

Important TIPS

Arrive at the interview 15 minutes early! Allow plenty of extra time for parking, walking, inclement weather, etc.

If presented with an application, do fill it out neatly and completely. Don't rely on your application or resume to do the selling for you. Interviewers will want you to speak for yourself.

Be aware of the importance of good first impressions. The first five minutes are critical. Your appearance should reflect professional dress and grooming. Give the appearance of energy as you walk. Smile! Shake hands firmly. Be genuinely glad to meet the interviewer and show genuine enthusiasm for the interview.

Greet the interviewer by the name they give you. If you did not catch the pronunciation, nicely ask the employer to repeat it.

Maintain good eye contact and give a firm handshake. (Exit the interview with the same mannerisms).

Upon entering the interview room or office, take the lead from the interviewer. Take a seat when and where he/she asks. Sit comfortably with good posture. Appear attentive and relaxed (but not over relaxed, i.e. slouching in the chair).

Carry an attractive folder/portfolio, and include extra copies of your resume, references, and transcript (just incase). Also include questions on a notebook pad that you may want to refer to later in the interview. Do not, however, open your portfolio and take notes during the interview.

Listen carefully to the questions being asked and answer them completely! Maintain good eye contact, as this shows confidence. Be careful not to ramble.

Memorize the key selling points you want to present in the interview. Be prepared for the appropriate time to communicate these. Select and be prepared to describe situations and events that you have dealt with effectively, in the case that your interview is behaviorally based.

Avoid discussing salary, vacation, or benefits until it appears an offer will be made or unless the interviewer initiates the discussion.

➤ **Do not chew gum.**

➤ **Do not answer with a simple "yes" or "no."** Explain whenever possible. Describe those things about yourself that relate to the situation.

➤ **Do not lie.** Answer questions truthfully, frankly and succinctly.

➤ **Do not make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers.** Obviously, there were issues or else you would not have left a prior company or be looking to leave a present employer. However, when explaining your reasons for leaving, limit your comments to those necessary to adequately communicate your rationale.

➤ **Do not over-answer questions.** And if the interviewer steers the conversation into politics or controversial issues, try to do more listening than speaking since this could be a sensitive situation.

➤ **If asked to give a "negative" about yourself in the interview, give one.** Do not avoid the question. Just be certain to follow the negative with how you positively turned the event or situation around/and or learned from the situation.

Winning The Body Language Game

Everybody uses body language during the interview, but very few people are prepared to be a winner in the body language game. Body language is merely the nonverbal cues that we give others while communicating. Below are some typical interpretations of body language cues:

- **Openness and Warmth:** open-lipped smiling, open hands with palms visible, unbuttoning coat upon being seated.
- **Confidence:** leaning forward in chair, chin up, putting tips of fingers of one hand against the tips of fingers of other hand in "praying" or "steeping" position, hands joined behind back when standing.
- **Nervousness:** smoking, whistling, pinching skin, fidgeting, jiggling pocket contents, running tongue along front of teeth, clearing throat, running fingers through hair, wringing hands, biting on pens or other objects, twiddling thumbs, biting fingernails (action itself or evidence of), tongue clicking, repetitive words or phrases (examples: "like", "ok").
- **Untrustworthy/Defensive:** frowning, squinting eyes, tight-lipped grin, arms crossed in front of chest, pulling away, chin down, touching nose or face, darting eyes, looking down when speaking, clenched hands, gestures with fist, pointing with fingers, chopping one hand into the open palm of the other, rubbing back of neck, clasping hands behind head while leaning back in the chair.

As you can see, there are far more negatives than positives--including many that we are not typically consciously aware of. This list is given not so that you can artificially adopt the positive body language techniques, but more to help you recognize and avoid the negatives. If you have a habit of doing any of the above negatives, remove that action from your pattern of behavior before it sends the wrong signal. Concentrate on removing it now so you will not have to think about it during the interview.

And keep in mind the opposite side of the desk. As you talk with an interviewer, be aware of their body language and nonverbal cues (just do not become preoccupied with it). Do not try to read in more than is actually being communicated, but try to develop a sense of the interviewer's reception of you. The most obvious example is the smile connection--when your smile brings about a smile from the interviewer. Do your best to stay connected with your interviewer--both verbally and nonverbally.

Fifty Standard Interview Questions

You need to be prepared for the full spectrum of questions that may be presented. Don't just read these questions--*practice them*. Don't let the company interview be the first time you have actually formulated an answer in spoken words. It is not enough to think about them in your head--practice! Sit down with a friend, a significant other, or your roommate (an especially effective critic, given the amount of preparation to date) and go through all of the questions. Make the most of every single interview opportunity by being fully prepared!

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you want to do with your life?
3. Do you have any actual work experience?
4. How would you describe your ideal job?
5. Why did you choose this career?
6. When did you decide on this career?
7. What goals do you have in your career?
8. How do you plan to achieve these goals?
9. How do you evaluate success?
10. Describe a situation in which you were successful.
11. What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
12. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction in your life?
13. If you had the power reverse time, what would you change?
14. Would you rather work with information or with people?
15. Are you a team player?
16. What motivates you?
17. Why should I hire you?
18. Are you a goal-oriented person?
19. Tell me about some of your recent goals and what you did to achieve them.
20. What are your short-term goals?
21. What is your long-range objective?
22. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
23. Where do you want to be ten years from now?
24. Do you handle conflict well?
25. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or a teacher? How did you resolve it?
26. What major problem have you had to deal with recently?
27. Do you handle pressure well?
28. What is your greatest strength?
29. What is your greatest weakness?
30. If I were to ask one of your professors to describe you, what would he or she say?
31. Why did you choose to attend your college?
32. What changes would you make at your college?
33. How has your education prepared you for your career?
34. What were your favorite classes? Why?
35. Do you enjoy doing independent research?
36. Who were your favorite professors? Why?
37. Why is your GPA not higher?
38. Do you have any plans for further education?
39. How much training do you think you'll need to become a productive employee?
40. What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?
41. Why do you want to work in the _____ industry?
42. What do you know about our company?
43. Why are you interested in our company?
44. Do you have any location preferences?
45. How familiar are you with the community that we're located in?
46. Will you relocate? In the future?
47. Are you willing to travel? How much?
48. Is money important to you?
49. How much money do you need to make to be happy?
50. What kind of salary are you looking for?

Behavioral Interviews - Katharine Hansen

Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant's potential for success. The interviewer identifies job-related experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that the company has decided are desirable in a particular position. For example, some of the characteristics that companies look for include:

***Critical thinking * Being a self-starter *Willingness to learn *Willingness to travel**
***Self-confidence *Teamwork *Professionalism**

The employer then structures very pointed questions to elicit detailed responses aimed at determining if you, the candidate, possesses the desired characteristics. Questions (often not even framed as a question) typically start out: "Tell about a time..." or "Describe a situation..." Many employers use a rating system to evaluate selected criteria during the interview.

As a candidate, you should be equipped to answer the questions thoroughly. Obviously, you can prepare better for this type of interview if you know which skills that the employer has predetermined to be necessary for the job you seek. Researching the company and talking to people who work there will enable you to zero in on the kinds of behaviors the company wants.

In the interview, your response needs to be specific and detailed. Candidates who tell the interviewer about particular situations that relate to each question will be far more effective and successful than those who respond in general terms. Ideally, you should briefly describe the situation, what specific action you took to have an effect on the situation, and the positive result or outcome. Frame it in a three-step process:

1. situation (or task, problem) 2. action 3. result/outcome.

It's also helpful to think of your responses as stories. Become a great storyteller in your interviews, but be careful not to ramble.

It's difficult to prepare for a behavior-based interview because of the huge number and variety of possible behavioral questions you might be asked. The best way to prepare is to arm yourself with a small arsenal of example stories that can be adapted to many behavioral questions. Despite the many possible behavioral questions, you can get some idea of what to expect by looking at Web sites that feature behavioral questions. Knowing what kinds of questions might be asked will help you prepare an effective selection of examples. Use examples from internships, classes and school projects, activities, team participation, community service, hobbies and work experience -- anything really -- as examples of your past behavior. In addition, you may use examples of special accomplishments, whether personal or professional, such as scoring the winning touchdown, winning a prize for your artwork, surfing a big wave, or raising money for charity. Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers always impress employers.

Remember that many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to *negative* situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or -- better yet, those that had positive outcomes.

Here's a good way to prepare for behavior-based interviews:

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.
- Use fairly recent examples. If you're a college student, examples from high school may be too long ago. Some companies may specify that candidates give examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples in story form.

To cram for a behavioral interview right before you're interviewed, review your resume. Seeing your achievements in print will jog your memory. In the interview, listen carefully to each question, and pull an example out of your bag of tricks that provides an appropriate description of how you demonstrated the desired behavior. With practice, you can learn to tailor a relatively small set of examples to respond to a number of different behavioral questions.

The Close of the Interview

Most companies end their interviews by asking if you, the candidate, have any questions. A lack of questions on the candidate's behalf may be mistaken as a lack of interest or preparation. What you will find below are just some examples of the types of questions you might ask at a job interview:

- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- Can you discuss your take on the company's corporate culture?
- What are the company's values?
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization? Of your department?
- What is the organization's policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
- Are lateral or rotational job moves available?
- Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
- Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
- How is this department perceived within the organization?
- Is there a formal process for advancement within the organization?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?

Be sure to research information on the company and the position when possible. Come up with questions that pertain and show you have a sincere interest in the company and performing the job they are looking to fill. Rehearse these questions in your mind in the days before the interview, that way you are less likely to forget.

Your last words

- **If you are interested in the position, let the interviewer know.** Say something like: "I'm very impressed with what I have seen today; your company, its products, and the people I have met. I am confident I could do an excellent job in the position you have described to me." The interviewer will be impressed with your enthusiasm.
- **Don't be too discouraged if no immediate commitment is made at the interview.** The interviewer will probably want to communicate with other people or possibly interview more candidates before making a final decision.
- **If you get the impression that the interview did not go well, do not let your discouragement show.** Once in a while an interviewer who is genuinely interested in you may just not "appear" interested, and you do not want to give him/her a valid reason to lose interest.
- **Most importantly:** Always Thank the interviewer for his or her time and consideration. If you answered these two questions to the best of your ability you have done all you can do: 1) Why are you interested in this position? 2) What can you offer?