

CAMPUS EXCLUSIVE

Interview Tips and Strategy



How to ace your interviews

We know it's difficult to get a job in this competitive environment so we've compiled some info to help you ace your interviews. The info in this section is based on our own experiences and on the experiences of many others who were recently able to ace their interviews and receive job offers.

In this document, you'll find tips on how to establish a personal connection with your interviewers, examples of questions employers love to ask and questions that you can ask your interviewer.

An interview is a form of conversation -- it is a two-way process. As a job candidate, you want to let a potential employer know what knowledge, skills and abilities you have to offer. At the same time, you want to evaluate how well the organization and the people who work there match what you want out of a position. You may feel nervous or anxious while interviewing, because you are competing for a job and people are evaluating you. To make the best impression and to minimize your anxiety, the best thing to do is prepare ahead of time by working with your friends and family to conduct mock interviews, brainstorm about potential questions that may arise, research the company you're meeting with and prepare your own set of questions.

Industry specifics

See the Career Center for a listing of websites that provide helpful guides on almost every major industry. These guides can be very helpful but most of them charge a fee.

An interview offers you and an employer the opportunity to learn whether or not there is a "fit" between you and the interviewer's organization. The ideal interview is a two-way street, allowing the employer to sell the job to you and permitting you to elaborate on the information contained in your resume. Also, don't forget to assess whether or not you like the company, people and culture of the company that you're meeting with.

The invitation to interview means that, in general, you are qualified for the job; however, the employer wants to determine if you are the best qualified candidate to serve the firm's interests. This determination is made strongly on the basis of your enthusiasm and honesty. The more interest, enthusiasm and motivation you display in an interview, the better your chances are for moving forward in the process. Regardless of industry, most employers are interested in the following:

- Communication (written and verbal)
- Technical skills relevant to the job
- Interpersonal and teamwork skills

- Leadership qualities/potential
- Business acumen and basic knowledge of industry
- Organizational skills – ability to learn quickly and multitask in fast paced environment
- Analytical and problem-solving ability
- Maturity
- Poise
- Fit with the organization's culture

Depending upon the nature of the job and the firm, other competencies may be evaluated more rigorously. Expect quantitative and analytical questions in finance and consulting interviews. Be prepared to discuss case situations with consulting firms. Sales jobs will place even stronger emphasis on verbal communication skills, enthusiasm, and personality. Pay attention to the qualifications described in the job description, as these are attributes that are likely to be evaluated during the interview process.

How you present yourself is just as important as what you say. Nonverbal communication can give as much information, if not more, than words. Be conscious of slouching back in a chair, twiddling your thumbs, and crossing your arms. If you are asked a particularly tough question, maintain your composure and take extra time to think before replying. Be sure to maintain good eye contact, which conveys confidence and honesty.

Also, physical appearance plays a role in the outcome of the interview. Be sure to follow the guidelines that are set forth by your employer as proper interview attire. Men and women should wear a suit for most interviews. Be sure to minimize jewelry and cologne/perfume. If you have long hair (men or women) that gets in your face, consider wearing it "up" or in a ponytail.

Very rarely does an interviewer make an offer during the first interview. It is likely that he/she will get back to you within a few weeks with an offer, a rejection, or an invitation to visit his/her organization to interview with other people. The second interview is typically longer in length. You will probably interview with several different people in the department, all of whom participate in the hiring decision.

It is a good idea to keep track of your interviews. You may need the name, title and address of your contact at a later date.

Preparing for Interviews

Preparation is vital. While it is difficult to anticipate every question, you can prepare yourself to make the most of whatever topic or question may arise.

Know Why You Are Applying

It is important to know yourself and your career objectives. Employers are not interested in students with undefined career goals; they aim to fill jobs with qualified candidates who have some sense of direction and know how their skills support their job objectives. Even if you don't know exactly what you want to do, you have to be able to confidently tell an employer why you are interested in this particular job at this time and that you won't give up after working at the organization for a short period of time (most companies look for a minimum commitment of two-years). Think about your own abilities and experience in relation to an employer's needs. Be able to discuss why you want to work in this type of industry, division, and/or company. Identify your strengths in relation to each job for which you interview. Review your resume for experiences - whether they are related to education, work, or extracurricular activities - that you can use as examples to support your skills.

Know the Company

Know the company and the position. Spend time reviewing organization homepages, familiarizing yourself with each firm's divisions, mission statements, and the like. Read the organization's literature. Talk to alumni from your university currently working at the firm to get more detailed information about what it takes to be successful in this particular company. Search online for recent news about the company including recent deals they've been involved in and clients they've worked with. You are not expected to be an expert in the particular field, but you should have enough knowledge to formulate meaningful questions to present to the interviewer.

Know What to Ask

Be certain to prepare questions to ask the interviewer. You want to evaluate the company and the opportunities provided by this position in order to determine whether or not you are even interested. In addition, the questions you ask convey interest and enthusiasm; if you fail to ask anything of the interviewer, s/he might assume you aren't particularly interested in the job or the organization.

Thank You Letters

After every interview it is appropriate to send a thank-you letter. Even if you don't think that the interview went well or you are no longer interested in the position, it is important to say thank you for the time the interviewer spent with you. It is not necessary for the letter to be long. Possible content to include:

- Address the letter to the person who initially invited you for the interview. If you saw more than one person, you can write to each of them, or refer to them in your letter to the primary interviewer.
- Mention the title of the position for which you have interviewed.

- If you are interested in the position, express your enthusiasm and reiterate your desire for the job and your qualifications for it.
- If you are not interested, you can still express appreciation for the consideration extended to you during the interview, and focus on the positive aspects of the interview.
- Your thank-you letter should ideally be sent within 24 hours of your interview either via email or US mail.