

The Insider's Guide to Interview SUCCESS!

What is an Interview?

An interview is a meeting between an employer and a job applicant to discuss potential employment. It is a meeting where the interviewer and interviewee have much to gain or lose, and can hopefully negotiate a positive outcome for both, meaning a hire.

Job seekers:

the interview is an opportunity to:

- Communicate key information about yourself to the interviewer: your skills, experiences and accomplishments
- Present yourself as the ideal candidate for the job
- Get more information about the position being offered
- See whether there is a "match" between your strengths and abilities and the employer's needs
- Assess whether the company's core values are a fit with yours
- ➤ Show the potential employer how you can **be of value** to their organization

For potential employers, the interview is an opportunity to:

- Evaluate the interviewee's qualifications: their skills, experiences and accomplishments
- Assess the interviewee's communication skills and behaviour during an interview
- Assess the interviewee's suitability for the job
- Fill their job vacancy at a price the company can **afford**
- Assess whether the interviewee will "fit in" with the organization and existing staff
- ► Ensure their organization will **run smoothly** if they offer the job candidate the position
- Assess whether they feel the job candidate can "do the job"

KEY: The employer has only a **brief time** to decide to hire you - or not. <u>How you perform</u> in an interview will make the difference between **becoming employed** or having to **continue your job search**. The "7/11 Rule" says it will take a hiring manager only 7 seconds to have made 11 impressions about you. The hiring manager will probably decide to "yes", hire you, or "no", not hire you, within the first 30 seconds of the interview based on their "gut instinct" or "first impressions".

Remember, the best candidate does not necessarily get the job.

The best interviewee often does!

What Employers Want and Fear!

In general, employers want an employee to have the following:

- ➤ The ability to communicate effectively
- ► The willingness to take initiative
- The willingness to accept responsibility
- Leadership potential
- Ambition

- ► Interpersonal and organizational skills
- Maturity and chemistry
- ► The willingness to continue learning
- ► The knowledge of how they relate to the position
- Motivation

Activity: Select 3 items from the list above. Using specific examples, show you can demonstrate that you possess these characteristics to employers. Here's an example: "The evening course I took and was certified in last year proves my willingness to continue learning."

Characteristic 1: Your sentence:			
Characteristic 2: Your sentence:			
Characteristic 3: Your sentence:			

In general, employers fear the following:

- You will not be able to do the job
- ➤ You do not have the necessary skills
- ➤ You do not have the necessary experience
- You will not put in a full work day
- ► You will be sick or absent frequently
- ➤ You will only stay for a few weeks or months
- You will take too long to master the job
- ➤ You will not get along with co- workers
- You will do the minimum instead of the maximum
- You will always need to be told what to do
- You will have a work-disrupting character weakness such as gossiping, lying or just being incompetent

Activity: Select 3 items from the list above. Using specific examples, demonstrate how you can eliminate these fears for the employer: Here's an example: "My attendance record is stellar: Last year I only missed one day of work due to illness."

Fear 1: Your sentence:			
Fear 2: Your sentence:			
Fear 3: Your sentence:			

The Interview Experience

The following are the 5 R's of the interview experience:

- 1. RESEARCH: Learn about the workplace; identify the location; ask who will be interviewing you in advance
- 2. REHEARSE: Write out your 60 second answers (or less) to tough interview questions (for as many as you can) and practice them in the mirror, with a friend, or with a video camera
- **3. RELAX:** Breathe and smile. Visualize the interview process and picture yourself relaxed, confident and at the top of your game. The day before your interview, meet a friend for dinner, watch a movie or treat yourself to a spa day
- **4. REVIEW:** During the interview, **make mental notes** of when you might have not been at your best. After the interview, make written notes and problem solve **so you do not repeat the same behaviours in your next interview**
- **5. REWARD:** You have worked hard. **Now it is time to reward yourself!** Plan something fun or nurturing for after your interview, but nothing with a specific time commitment, as that may make you feel rushed during your interview

Before you go into your interview, **make sure you have done the necessary research and are thoroughly prepared**. Also, **make sure you take the time to rehearse** until you are very comfortable responding to all typical interview questions. If you are feeling tense, do some relaxation exercises. There is a lot of information on these kinds of exercises and relaxation techniques available in the internet. **Remember, everyone gets nervous! It is natural.** Try to think of your nerves in a positive light: they are your **"excitement"** about the interview - rather than in a negative light, as something that will hinder you.

Afterward, take stock. **Do not wait too long after your interview to review your performance.** The longer you wait to take notes, the less fresh your memory will be of the experience. Make sure you make a note to send the interviewer a thank you note, then follow up. It could just make the difference between getting hired or not.

And last but not least, **DO reward yourself!** Every interview is a chance to step up to the plate and challenge yourself. No matter how you did, pat yourself on the back for trying, and get as much out of the experience as you can.

References

A résumé reference is someone who can verify the information in your résumé. They can be former teachers, professors, clients, former project managers or supervisors, or other contacts from industry associations. Your references must be able to answer questions regarding your professional conduct and personal character, academic qualifications, work experience (job titles, responsibilities, employment dates), communication skills (oral and written), strengths and weaknesses, management or leadership skills and attitude (attendance, punctuality, dependability).

Here are some tips on putting together and maintaining an effective reference list:

Think about who your reference choices should be. Former co-workers or managers in other departments who know your strengths and abilities provide the best references	Always get permission from your desired reference before you include them in your reference list
3. Get your reference's contact details: ask when it is best to contact them, and at what phone number	4. Keep your references informed periodically as to what is going on with your job search
5. Always thank your references for their help	6. Only provide references upon request, usually at the end of an interview

NOTE: There are sample reference letters in separate attachments that can be found in the Learning Library section of the TCF website for you to review or download.

Researching the Company

When preparing for an interview it is important to research the organization in advance. You need to find out as much as you can about the company so you can: prepare an appropriate outfit for your interview, get answers to questions likely to be asked, get information regarding the job duties of the position you're applying for, and try to understand the company culture.

Where to research:

Trade directories	Newspapers
Business directories	Company Financial statements
Internet (especially the company website)	Trade magazines
Company annual reports	From individuals via networking

Information you should know:

▶ About the workplace	► Their financial situation (net worth)
About the company	About other sister companies
The company's historical background	► Their location(s)
▶ Their Mission Statement	Who the President/CEO is
The company culture	The number of employees
► Their products	About their customers and/or market
► Their services	Their growth patterns

NOTE: Gather as much information as you can about the company in question and record it on a separate sheet of paper. Keep it handy so you can review it before your interview.

Dressing for SUCCESS!



- Dress one notch higher than you normally would at work
- > Statistics tell us that most interviewers make up their minds about a candidate within the first five minutes of meeting them. Therefore, the first impression you make with your clothing will set the tone of your interview
- Exactly how to dress will vary depending on the level of the position you're applying for, the type of company you are applying to work for, and the specific industry
- lt is a good idea to have an interview outfit always ready to go: you never know when you will be called in for one
- ▶ Research the company to find out what their standard everyday attire for the entry level you are applying for is If it is formal, of course, dress formally. If informal, dress a notch or two above that

Clothing: Select muted tones: black, blue, beige, gray, or brown, avoiding loud colors or loud prints. Ladies: no plunging necklines, see-through blouses, short skirts or extreme trends. Clothes should be clean and wrinkle-free

Scent: Shower, use deodorant and mouthwash. Do not drink alcohol or smoke before the interview

Breath: Avoid foods that will leave an odour on your breath like raw onions or garlic

Perfume & Cologne: Use only very light or no perfume or cologne at all because many individuals are allergic to synthetic scents. Or the company may have a policy restricting the use of perfumes and colognes. Best to research that ahead of time to be on the safe side

Hair: Keep your hair nicely trimmed whether it is long or short, and keep beards/moustaches trimmed and clean Accessories: Ladies, keep make-up, jewelry and other accessories to a minimum

Glasses: If you wear glasses, make sure the lenses are clean and remember to maintain eye contact with the interviewer Hands: Keep nails clean and clipped. If your hands are sweaty, wash them, then spray lightly with anti-perspirant

Shoes: Must be polished and mud or snow-free. Ladies, avoid opened-toed or very high heels

Last check: Check your appearance in a mirror before entering the office: especially zippers and buttons

Styles and Types of Interviews

Formal Interviews:

- Are held at a specific time, place and date
- Consist of questions designed to elicit specific facts, attitudes, and opinions from the interviewee that help the hiring manager decide whether or not to offer the interviewee the job at hand

Group Interviews:

- There are two types: 1. When each job applicant is interviewed by multiple interviewers, typically including a Human Resources representative, the manager, and maybe even co-workers from the department they are applying to
 - 2. When a group of applicants for the same position are interviewed all together by the hiring manager

Human Resource (HR) Interviews:

- Generally involve the interviewee meeting with a representative from the Human Resources department of the company Are sometimes also referred to as a "screening interview"
- However, not all screening interviews are Human Resource interviews: a screening interview might take place with a hiring manager who is simply trying to find suitable candidates quickly while rejecting others who are not suitable

Departmental Interviews:

- Are where one or more members of the department where you are applying for a job sit in and ask questions of you that are specific to their department and the job at hand
- Are designed to determine whether you will be a good "fit" for the department
- Can be behavioural (situational), technical or otherwise

Behavioural (Situational) Interviews:

- Are based on the assumption that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour
- Focus on behaviour "on the job" as opposed to the job candidate's credentials
- Consist of questions that are situation-based in anticipation of specific behavioural answers
- When answering behavioural/situational types of questions, use the STAR Technique found on page 7 to create your answers

Telephone Interviews:

- Take place if a recruiter wishes to reduce the number of prospective candidates to interview in person
- They also take place if a job applicant is a significant distance away from the premises of the hiring company
- Remember to have a script and your résumé ready, and only answer the phone at time when you can concentrate on the conversation

You Are Not Your Résumé!: Developing the Right Mindset

Most job seekers neglect to address two critical issues before going into an interview: **their mindset and their anxiety level**. If you have not done the prep work or have not practiced sufficiently before your interview, your stress level will show, **if just by the lack of confidence**.

The **ANTIDOTE** to **STRESS** and **ANXIETY**...



...is being PREPARED and WELL-PRACTICED

If you have a negative mindset, you are setting yourself up for failure - and for even more anxiety.

The **ANTIDOTE** to a **NEGATIVE MINDSET**...



...is being POSITIVE and BELIEVING IN YOURSELF

Activity: Name 3 things you have done in the past that have helped you relieve stress. How can these activities be adapted when it comes to interviews? Use the back of this sheet of paper to write your answers.

Interview Preparation

Here is a checklist that covers everything you need to do to be prepared for your interview:

Research the company thoroughly
Understand the position and know the job description
Prepare and practice common questions
Have a reference sheet ready
Prepare your outfit including shoes/boots and coat, and have an umbrella handy
Decide how you are going to get there. If driving, have a back-up plan in case your car malfunctions
Have supporting documents like extra résumés, references and/or a portfolio ready to go
Schedule your babysitter or any required caregiver to arrive 1 hour before you need to leave for your interview: if they are late, they could make you late. Aim to arrive 10 to15 minutes early
Review your résumé. Be familiar with its contents and be prepared to answer questions about it

During the interview: Do's & Do nots

- > **DO** be friendly and courteous, and SMILE!
- > DO arrive early and shake hands firmly and confidently if prompted to: do not lead
- > **DO NOT** interrupt
- > **DO NOT** focus on money: never mention vacation time or benefits
- > **DO** be enthusiastic: enthusiasm cannot be taught
- > **DO** display good posture
- > **DO NOT** put your notes on the desk without asking permission
- > DO listen carefully and understand what is being asked
- > **DO** seek clarification if you do not understand something
- > **DO** remember names
- > **DO NOT** smoke immediately before the interview
- > **DO NOT** get too relaxed and make inappropriate or personal comments
- > DO keep your answers to no longer than a minute: ask if the interviewer wants more information before continuing
- > **DO NOT** be aggressive, pushy or over-confident
- ▶ DO check your mindset: are you feeling POSITIVE?
- > DO check your anxiety level: a small dose of nervousness is healthy, and will keep you on your toes
- > DO get the interviewer's correct coordinates: send a follow-up email/phone call, or a thank you card after the interview
- > DO NOT sit until the interviewer offers you a chair or until after they sit down
- > DO lean slightly forward with good posture and make sure you are not slouching or slumping in your chair
- > **DO** keep both feet together on the ground and try not to fidget
- > DO watch your hand movements: it is a good idea to use them to express yourself but do not overdo it
- > DO keep enthusiasm in your voice: change the tone and pitch frequently, and use nods to reinforce attentiveness
- > **DO** listen carefully to the questions asked before responding
- DO STAY CONFIDENT AND POSITIVE: your inner thoughts will be reflected through your actions and body language

Be a STAR with the "STAR" Technique

Interviewers ask questions to help them gain an understanding of you. Using the "STAR" Technique in your responses will help you **get your value as an employee across to the hiring manager**. "STAR" stands for:



Here is an example of a STAR Answer:

- S: "During my internship last summer, I was responsible for managing various events."
- T: "I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 30% over the past 3 years and I wanted to do something to improve these numbers."
- A: "I designed a new promotional packet to go out to local community businesses.
 I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events, and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees."
- R: "We utilized some of the wonderful ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient and visible, and raised attendance by 18% the first year."

Here's a STAR answer from a Sales Representative:

 "My extensive network of contacts in the perfume and cosmetics industry includes more than 1,000 buyers, both domestic and international. These are professionals who know my name, and who listen to my recommendations."

Here's one from a **Marketing Manager**:

 "Here's my secret: I use bold, unusual marketing strategies to achieve phenomenal results in half the expected time, and at half the cost!"

From an Office Manager:

- "You know you have the right person in the position when you can:
 - Count on your office operations to run smoothly
 - Access accurate information about your finances at any time
 - Make efficient use of your computer hardware, software and other equipment
 - Know that your office technology is configured to meet your needs
 - Feel the team spirit in your office!"

From a **Public Relations Professional**:

- "Here is an idea I'd like to discuss with you:
 - A Public Relations Programme: I increased Friday Night Club's media coverage by 500% over a two year period. (PR contributed \$650,000 to their yearly sales.)"

Activity: Create a larger version of the template below on the back of this sheet of paper and write your own compelling "STAR" statements. Practice them out loud in front of a mirror, speaking them to a friend, or recording and viewing them over and over again on video.

SITUATION:	
TASK:	
ACTION:	
RESULT:	
STAR STATEMENT:	

Developing Effective Communication Skills

An interview is <u>your invitation to sell yourself and your skill set to a potential employer.</u> The ability to sell yourself in "sound bites" during an interview is your greatest sales tool. What does that mean? It means that keeping your answers to around a minute is a good idea. If you go on and on in your interview and speak for too long a period of time, you will be in danger of losing the interviewer's attention.

If you feel you have more to say than around a minute's worth on any subject, **ask if you should continue**. If the interviewer says yes, then do! However, chances are, anything you have to add after a minute's worth will be unnecessary, and **the interviewer will have already been impressed by your brevity and focus.**

Always follow the 4 C's of communication: be Clear, Concise, Correct, Conversational.

Sometimes an interviewer will pause and use **silence** as a way of testing you to see how you perform under pressure. They will pause for several minutes to see if you begin to fidget, squirm, sweat, twiddle your thumbs, tap your fingers on the table or start babbling. **By all means, do not!**

If this happens to you, just relax, be patient, radiate confidence, and wait for the interviewer's next question.

"Tell me about yourself..."

These four words, most often asked at the beginning of an interview, can put an interviewee on the spot in a way no other question can. What should you do? **BE PREPARED FOR IT!** Many quickly lose control of the interview during the most critical time, which is the first **three minutes**. Therefore make sure your response is **focused and purposeful**.

Having your response prepared is a must, and you should always be prepared for it. However, here's another option: many recruiters tell their candidates that when they are asked, "Tell me about yourself..." they should say, "I will gladly answer that question, but may I first ask you a question?" The hiring manager will usually say, "Yes". Then they should respond with, "So that I can better focus my answer, what are the issues you want me to address should you hire me?" Once they tell you what they would like to learn about you, tell them how your training, education, skills, and experience can best address those issues. When you answer that way, you are showing that you can focus, and that you have what it takes to fulfill the potential employer's hiring needs. Of course, make sure you thoroughly prepare and practice your answers before the interview.

Here are two good examples of answers:

Example 1: "I'm a seasoned Retail Manager, strong in developing training programs and loss prevention techniques, that have resulted in revenue savings of over \$2.3Million for (employer's name) during the past 11 years. I'd like to discuss how I might be able to do something like that for you."

Example 2: "I would describe myself as a self-starter. At Acme Corporation, there was an issue with (describe the issue), so I created a new inventory system (give details) that reduced expenses by 30 percent. I'd like to discuss how I might be able to do something like that for you."

To create your answer to "Tell me about yourself...", follow the steps below. Remember to include at least three highlights of who you are and how that pertains to the job you are applying for. Do not just recite a list of chronological events about where you worked and when. Instead, talk about what was in your résumé, namely about your skills and attributes, and what value they bring to the potential employer.

NOTE: Write out your answers on a separate piece of paper, or on the back of this sheet.

Step 1: Write out your preliminary answer: start with your name, and a brief introduction of yourself which could include the school you graduated from, a previous employer or something else of particular interest, but only if it is relevant to the job you are applying for.

Step 2: Write down what you do now professionally: "I am currently employed (My last job was) as... My responsibilities include (included)..."

Step 4: Using that information, write the top three skills you possess and how you have used them in the past:

Skill #1: "I used (skill) in the past..."

Skill #2: "I used (skill) in the past..."

Skill #3: "I used (skill) in the past..."

Step 5: Write down how you intend to use those skills or attributes to add value to the job you're applying for: "I intend to use (skills 1 - 3) (to benefit the employer)..."

Step 6: Using all the above information, write out your final response.

Practicing Out Loud

Take your final response and stand in front of a mirror. Pretend you're addressing the interviewer and deliver your response.

Remember, it is your sales pitch, and it should sound like one. If you can, use a video recorder to practice with. You get to see yourself as you "really are" on playback and can make any adjustments you feel you need to from there. If you are speeding up and stumbling on your words, rambling, searching for words or saying 'um' a lot, do not be too hard on yourself: it takes practice to perfect your delivery, especially if you are going to do it successfully under stress. Here is a trick that really works:

Imagine you are a celebrity you admire, or a spokesperson, or a colleague or superior whose communication skills are exceptional. Imagine taking on their most positive characteristics and try again. Keep practicing, every day, over and over again, until your delivery is confident and flawless. Do this, and you are soon guaranteed interview success!

How much should you practice out loud? You have probably practiced enough out loud when you find you have memorized the answer. Keep it up, though: **practice each day** to make sure you **have not forgotten your answer**, and to make sure you **do not start hesitating or stumbling again.**

Having the answer to this question **"in your back pocket"** is a good marketing tool, aside from being impressive in an interview. You never know when you might bump into a potential employer who might ask you just that. **So always be prepared!**

The next step is to write out responses to all the interview questions* you expect to be asked using the "STAR" Technique (when applicable). *See the "Interview Questions" guidebook found in the Learning Library next to this guidebook.

Closing the Interview

When you leave the interview, it is important to quickly assess if you have conveyed all relevant information about yourself to the employer. Never leave an interview without 1. reprising your qualifications and the benefits you will bring to the job, 2. knowing what happens next, and 3. opening the door for your follow-up.

Re-establish eye contact with the interviewer as you thank them (using their name) for their time and **reiterate your interest** in the position and the organization. Offer to **shake the interviewer's hand**, but only if you did so at the beginning of the interview.

Definitely ask closing questions such as: 1. "May I feel free to call if I have any further questions?" 2. "What is the next step in the hiring process and when do you expect to make a decision?" 3. "I know you are not done reviewing candidates..." 4. "When can I reach you to check up on the progress or your search?"

Follow-Up

Always thank the interviewer after an interview. After all, they took the time to talk to you! Doing so will:

- Enhance your chances of getting the job because nobody wants to hire someone who is ungrateful or impolite
- Show your determination and commitment, and reaffirm your interest in the job in the eyes of the interviewer
- Give you a chance to communicate additional selling points
- Demonstrate that you are well organized

When making follow-up phone calls:

- Be short and to the point
- Be prepared to leave a message should the person be unavailable
- Remind the receiver of who you are, why you are calling, when you were interviewed, and for what position
- Be straightforward when you ask the status of the hiring process
- Express your interest in the position and why you can do the job

Phone calls should be used:

- When you are more comfortable expressing yourself verbally than in writing
- You have not been contacted by a mutually agreed upon time
- You have received another job offer and you need to know where you stand before you make a decision
- You want to give the interviewer new or important information immediately

Salary Negotiation

Your salary negotiation should begin with research into several key areas, namely:

- Your BASIC salary requirement: what you absolutely have to make to meet monthly cash requirements
- Your ACCEPTABLE salary requirement: what you would accept making
- Your DESIRED salary requirement: what you would hope to be making

Your "value" in today's market is based on the skills and experience you have for the position you are considering. Four factors will determine how much You will get paid:

- The **type of work** you are applying for
- Supply and demand of workers in that field
- The degree of experience required
- The **degree of education** required

Research and take into consideration **fringe benefits** included in your compensation package such as: health, dental or vision insurance, paid vacations and holidays, retirement or pension plans, life and unemployment insurance, and sick leave. In addition, compensation can include promotional opportunities like perks, travel, etc. Also take into consideration any **non-monetary rewards** that could increase job satisfaction and compensate for reduced monetary rewards such as: working for a large or small organization, having a low or high level of responsibility or authority, a short or long commute, working alone or with people, working indoors or outdoors, and varied or routine work duties.

Some Reasons Why People Do not Get Hired

- Speaking negatively
- Poor personal hygiene or appearance, or grossly inappropriate dress
- Unprepared or underprepared for the interview
- Inability to be speak in a positive way about potentially negative characteristics like long gaps in employment history or lack of education
- Improper behaviour during the interview such as eating or chewing gum
- Answering the cell phone during the interview
- Failing to ask questions at the end
- Arriving late
- No interest or knowledge of the company or industry
- Making little to no eye contact
- Displaying a visible lack of confidence
- Displaying a negative or poor attitude
- Too much interest in money
- Limp or lifeless handshake
- Failure to thank the interviewer(s) for their time
- Poor manners or lack of maturity
- Poor diplomatic skills or lack of tact
- Intolerance
- Being overly aggressive
- Inability to express information clearly
- Lack of interest or enthusiasm
- Having no career plan; no purpose, no goals
- Being cynical
- Having narrow interests
- Making excuses for failures or weaknesses

- Excessive nervousness
- Lack of confidence and poise
- Unwillingness to start at the bottom
- Making excuses
- Lack of tact and courtesy
- Lack of maturity
- Condemning past employers
- No genuine interest in the company or job
- Failure to look the interviewer in the eye
- Sloppy application form
- Arriving late for the interview
- Failure to express questions about the job
- Responding vaguely to questions
- Getting caught lying
- Being rude or impolite
- Showing a lack of interest in the interview
- Putting feet up on the desk
- Lacking in sincerity
- Being evasive
- Trying to bluff during the interview
- Being unable to concentrate
- Displaying a lack of initiative
- Appearing indecisive
- Appearing unable to make decisions
- Having an arrogant, "know-it-all" attitude
- Displaying a persecution complex
- Trying to use pull to obtain admission
- Showing little sense of humor
- Lacking knowledge about the field

Activity: Circle any statements that might have resulted in you not being selected for a position. Think about what you could do differently next time and write it down on the back of this sheet of paper.

Good luck at your next interview!

From all of us at The Career Foundation, thank you for the opportunity to assist you in developing your human potential!

