

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS

Whether you are preparing for a mock/practice interview or a real one, this is your time to shine. It is your opportunity to talk about your skills, your potential, and how you can help the company and the hiring manager succeed. It is an opportunity to connect with people in the company, to learn about the company, and to build your network. The following are tips for any interview, practice or no:

TIP: Arrive 5-10 minutes early. This shows that you respect the interviewer's time and know promptness is important.

TIP: Bring a copy of your resume to the interview. You can refer to it, then leave it behind so they remember you.

TIP: Anticipate likely questions. There are many common interview questions. Be prepared for them. (See page 2)

TIP: Practice. Say your answers out loud. Practice with other people. Get feedback and then practice again.

TIP: Breathe. Just before you enter the room, take a deep breath and exhale slowly to help you relax.

1. Do your research ahead of time.

If you know the company you'll be interviewing with, do some research on the company (sometimes in larger mock interview events, you might not). Understand what they do, what they sell or services they supply, and any recent news or events that they are proud of. Talk to people in the industry, if possible, to learn more about the company in that context. In the interview, try to mention what you have learned.

2. Dress professionally.

Your clothing will be the first impression that you make. Dress for the job that you're interviewing for. Don't wear jeans with holes, shorts, saggy pants, shirts that show your stomach, or t-shirts with words. Make sure your clothing is clean and wrinkle-free. Inspect yourself before you go into the interview to sure you don't have buttons or zippers undone, lipstick on your teeth, or anything that could make a negative first impression.

3. Use appropriate language.

Your verbal communication can make or break the interview. Use professional language in the interview. Avoid filler words such as "like" or "you know". Stay away from slang and references to age, race, religion, politics, or sexual orientation.

4. Have your 30-second elevator speech ready.

Many interviews open with "tell me about yourself." In this situation, you want to have something already prepared. This is where a practiced 30-second elevator speech comes in. It is a short statement that summarizes who you are, your past accomplishments, what knowledge and skills you offer the employer, and career goals that you have.

5. Demonstrate good communication skills: listen, smile, lean in, use eye contact.

Employers are looking for people with good communication skills. These are not just verbal but include body language and non-verbal communication as well. From the beginning, the interviewer(s) will be giving you information. Listen to it, nod, or somehow let the person know you have heard them. Lean into the conversation to show your interest and that you're engaged. Avoid crossing your arms. Instead, keep them on the desk or table to avoid fidgeting. Smile and use eye contact to show confidence.

6. Have questions prepared about the job and company.

You will likely be invited to ask questions at the end of the interview. Have some that show you have done your research and are genuinely interested. If there is a job description, read it and only ask questions that are NOT already answered there. Ask questions that show you want to know more about the position or company. For example:

- What have past employees/interns done to succeed in this position?
- What have you enjoyed the most about working here?
- What is the top priority for the person in the position for the first three to six months?
- What challenges do you perceive for the person in the position?
- What are the next steps? When might I hear from you? May I call or email for an update?

7. Write a thank you note to each person in your interview or that you meet.

Thank you notes make a last impression. It can be in the form of an email, typed letter or legible, hand-written note. This is also an opportunity to say something you forgot, correct something, or make a personal connection.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Whether you are preparing for a mock interview or a real one, you should be prepared to answer some common questions that you will likely be asked. If you are prepared for the interview, you will be more relaxed and are less likely to forget to include skills or experience that are important to convey.

TIP: Remember the interviewer is looking for you to 1) fit their culture and 2) positively impact their business.

TIP: Try to use examples and stories to give the interviewer context to your answers and a chance to know you.

Here are a few examples of common questions:

1. Tell me about yourself. (Alternative: Why do you think you're a good fit for this position?)

Many people ramble with this question. Be prepared to explain your background, what you are studying, and extracurricular activities or hobbies. Try to tie your skills and experience into why you are qualified for the position. If you have a 30-second elevator speech, this is where it comes in handy.

2. Why are you looking for a job?

Of course, everyone wants to make money at a job, but the reasons you should share with a potential employer should reflect your interest in the field, or in helping to develop your skill set. Think about your reasons for wanting employment while you are still in school, then explain why these motivations can make you a good employee.

3. Why should we hire you?

Even if this isn't asked, it can be a closing statement for you at the end. Try to connect your strengths, skills and enthusiasm for learning new things to the job description or the position as you know it.

4. What are you learning in your classes that will help you succeed in this position?

This is an opportunity to talk about the skills you have gained in your education that will make you an ideal candidate for the position. You can speak about extra-curricular activities or hobbies, as well as academics when you respond.

5. What are your strengths?

You should have a mental list of your greatest strengths, walking the fine line of between arrogant and humble. This is a chance to brag, but try to connect your strengths with examples of accomplishments or activities.

6. What are your weaknesses?

It is important to acknowledge that everyone has weaknesses. Pick a non-threatening weakness that can be improved upon without impeding performance, or something you have already made progress on.

7. What has been your most rewarding accomplishment?

Share an accomplishment that relates to some of the qualities or experiences required for the job you're interviewing for. It can be at school or not -- whatever you think is appropriate and relates to the job.

8. How would you describe your ability to work as a team member?

There have likely been many times you have worked as a team, on projects, in sports, or while volunteering. The interviewer will want to hear a specific example of a time you worked successfully in a team situation.

9. Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor or teacher?

This question addresses how you relate to authority. Always answer honestly, but make sure that you have a positive outcome. Remember that the most difficult situations are sometimes the best learning experiences.

10. Do you have any questions?

The answer to this question should always be "yes, I do, actually." Then follow up with a few smart, well thought-out questions that show your genuine interest in the position.

Sources:

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