

# Interviewing Basics



- ✓ How to Prepare for the Interview
- ✓ Styles of Interviews
- ✓ What to Do During the Interview
- ✓ Sample Questions
- ✓ Qualify Review and Follow-up

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# **An interview is a mutual exchange of information between an employer and a candidate for a position.**

## **Before the Interview...**

*Know the Job; Know the Company; Know Yourself*

- Research the job, company, and industry
- Review your qualifications against the requirements listed in the posting
- Prepare and practice your answers to possible interview questions

## **Take to the Interview...**

- Company contact information and directions to the interview site
- Questions to ask the interviewer
- Copies of your references, and your resume if the job required it
- Past employer addresses and dates

## **Dress for Success**

- One step above job requirement
- Clean and neat (good hygiene, pressed clothing)
- Conservative is usually better (dark or neutral colored clothing – avoid trendy)
- No distractions (strong fragrances, too-bright clothing, dangling/flashy jewelry)

## **Appropriate Dress and Grooming Suggestions for Women**

- Limit jewelry to a minimum; Avoid charm bracelets
- Keep heels low or mid-height and comfortable
- Generally, stick to conservative hem lengths, depending on current fashion
- Perfume reminder: Don't wear it. The interviewed might be allergic, or not care for the fragrance's associations
- Wear clear or light-colored nail polish; Dark colors may distract
- If you're on a limited budget, shop at thrift or consignment shops for bargains, but be sure to get a good fit and good quality

## **Appropriate Dress and Grooming Advice for Men**

- Buy a white or button-down oxford shirt that can be versatile – suits to jeans
- Wear a cotton T-shirt or undershirt under your dress shirt
- Make sure your fingernails are clean and cut to an appropriate length
- Do not wear cologne or aftershave lotion (the interviewer may be allergic)
- Wear a watch (shows that time is important to you)
- Wear shoes appropriate to your clothing – well polished or cleaned

## Arriving at the Interview

- Arrive Alone
- 10 to 15 minutes before the interview
- Respectfully announce yourself to the receptionist
- RELAX!

## During the Interview

### Styles of Interviews

#### **Phone:**

This type of interview is obviously not in person, but it's important

#### **One-on-One:**

This is the familiar old standby – one Interviewer and You

#### **Informal:**

We're all just buddies here – but it's still All Business

#### **Group:**

You are one of many being interviewed at the same time

#### **Panel:**

You are being interviewed by more than one individual at a time

## Interviewing Etiquette

- Handshake – be firm but don't break their hand
- Being seated – wait until they tell you to have a seat
- Eye contact – look speaker directly into his or her eyes, but be aware of other cultures
- Posture – sit up straight and lean towards the interviewed
- Respect the interviewer's personal space
- Don't raise the issue of money – but be prepared to discuss salary if the employer brings it up
- Listen, ask, learn

## Interviewing Etiquette, continued...

### Interview Do's

- ✓ Be natural and friendly, but businesslike
- ✓ Smile
- ✓ Relax
- ✓ Cover tattoos if possible and if workplace is businesslike
- ✓ Turn off cell phones and/or other portable electronic devices
- ✓ Take time to think before you answer the interviewer's questions
- ✓ Be prepared to explain what you can do for the company and/or position

### Interview Don'ts

- × Give rambling, irrelevant answers to questions
- × Talk too much or too fast
- × Arrive late for the interview...or not show up at all (call ahead if this is unavoidable!)
- × Use slang words or casual language
- × Be overbearing, overaggressive, or conceited
- × Appear to have little confidence
- × Condemn past employers, co-workers, or school
- × Want a position for a short time...and not let the interviewer know about it
- × Chew gum or smoke (even if the interviewer does or offers)
- × Make personal comments or flirt with the interviewer
- × Be defensive or have a "chip on your shoulder"
- × Be too casual or obtuse
- × Call the interviewer by his or her name (unless he/she invites you to)

# Interviewer Gathers Information: Competency-Based Question Format

## How it works

The competency-based questioning format – sometimes called the “behavioral” question format – is different from that of traditional questions. Notice the differences in competency-based interview questions and traditional interview questions.

### Traditional:

How do you communicate with other people?

### Competency-based:

Tell me about a time when you had to communicate with a co-worker about a problem.

### Traditional:

How well do you handle stress?

### Competency-based:

Give me a brief overview of what happened when you were put in a stressful situation.

## Here are some examples of typical Competency-Based Questions:

1. “Tell me about a time when you were in conflict with your supervisor...a coworker...”
2. “Give me a brief overview of a project you oversaw...were involved in”
3. They may follow-up with specifics: “What was the timeline for this? When did it start, when did it end, and what were the major phases or steps along the way? What was the outcome?”

To be successful in this type of interview, it’s important to prepare yourself in advance. Look over the job description and determine what competencies are crucial for someone to be successful in that position. Then ask yourself these questions when thinking about your past experiences:

- What experience demonstrated this competency?
- What were the details of the experience?
- What were the results of the experience?
- How did it influence the company?
- What did you learn from it?
- How will this benefit the employer I am interviewing with?

## STAR Method for Answer Organization

S-situation   T-task   A-action   R-result

The following are samples of the kinds of competencies for which good interviewers will be looking:

- |                           |                             |                         |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Ability to Communicate | 5. Self-knowledge           | 9. Interpersonal skills |
| 2. Flexibility            | 6. Accepting responsibility | 10. Imagination         |
| 3. Intelligence           | 7. Conflict Resolution      | 11. Direction           |
| 4. Initiative             | 8. Leadership               | 12. Job-related skills  |

## Most Frequently Asked Questions

- Why did you choose your career?
- Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
- How do you think a friend who knows you well would describe you?
- What motivates you to put forward your greatest effort?
- Why should I hire you?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think you will successful?
- What can you bring to our company?
- Describe the ideal relationship between a supervisor and those reporting to him/her.
- What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- How do you work under presser?
- How would you describe the ideal job?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
- What do you know about our company?
- What are 2 or 3 things that are important to you in a job?
- Are you willing to travel or relocate?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now? Ten years from now?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- What are your long range career objectives?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?

## The Most Common Tough Questions Job Interviewers Ask... ...and How to Answer Them

### 1. Tell me about yourself.

*Respond in a way that assures the interviewer that you are well-adjusted, stable and positive.* “I thrive on change and pressure and consider myself to be very versatile.” “I tend to seek out challenging assignments and situations.”

*Don't say anything that could be taken as negative.* “I don't like working with people, just computers.” “I don't enjoy controversy; I would rather everything go well.”

*Don't give them your life story.*

### 2. What can you do for us?

*Stick to facts and figures if at all possible. Point to past accomplishments or forecast future capabilities.* “As manager of ABC Company, I reduced turnover by 25%. I cut overtime to almost nothing and bring those skills to work here.” “I have been named Salesperson of the Year 2-years running and can carry those successes here as well.” *Always stay positive.*

### 3. What are your strengths?

*Tailor your answer to meet the needs of the employer.* “I see myself as a goal-oriented individual. I was once charged with the task of increasing sales 20%. I set a personal goal of 30%. I put together a plan and followed each objective to the letter, which helped me to reach each goal. As a result I increased the sales more than 33%.”

*Properly showcased, the answer can be a gold mine.*

### 4. What are your limitations?

*This is one of the toughest questions for those who sit in the interviewee chair. It is; however, not that difficult. Think about transforming your answer and the question into a strength.* “I'm the kind of person who likes challenges and gets involved. Some may see that as 'butting in,' but I'm sure it could be looked at as a strength because I like to make sure the job gets done right. Without forcing my views, I feel that I do a good job leading people to the right solution.”

## The Most Common Tough Questions, continued...

### 5. What do you want from this job?

*Be prepared to respond with answers that reveal a desire to do the kind of work the position requires. Avoid vague answers such as, "I enjoy working with people," or "I desire challenge in my work." Rather, use answer that pack a punch, such as, "I inspire confidence in co-workers and subordinates and see this position as a place to put those talents to work." "I am especially interested in creating a new software package, which would enhance the performance of this company's hardware."*

### 6. What do you see yourself doing in 5-years?

*Don't be flippant. "I want your job." I'm sure you can see where that would take you. Rather, focus on your skills as they would relate to the company. There are several ways to use the information to your advantage. "I see myself using my managerial skills and technical background in an upper management position, where I would be mentoring others and helping the company to achieve their corporate goals." I want to be the best widget maker you have."*

### 7. What is your reason for seeking this position? What was wrong with you last/present job?

*NEVER criticize your last boss or any previous employer. Resist all temptation; it WILL cost you! "I'm looking to change positions so that I can better utilize my talents and energy. My current position is limited in growth potential and as someone who is a goal-setter and achiever, I am looking forward to an opportunity with (company you are interviewing for) in using my talents and energy to help achieve new and challenging goals."*

### 8. What are your hobbies?

*It's a good thing if your hobby relates to the job, but if it doesn't relate, don't make up one to make you "fit." Obviously if you are applying for a position at a library and love to read, that's a fit, but if your hobby is skiing, say so. If you don't have a hobby, explain how you spend your spare time. "I spend my time outside of work taking my children to their activities...volunteering at the hospital...." If your hobby puts you in a negative light ("gambling" or "drinking till I pass-out"), go with the spare time response instead.*



## The Most Common Tough Questions, continued...

### **9. How would you handle [some realistic problem situation]?**

*Although they're trying to see how well you "think on your feet" – or in your seat – don't be stampeded into a glib or simplistic answer. Emphasize that you would seek out facts, look at precedents, and use your own knowledge/experience to make a decision and act.*

### **10. Why have you been unemployed so long?**

*Anyone with long periods of unemployment is suspect. They suspect you as unemployable, a job-hopper (who left out multiple short-term positions), or that you have been in prison. Say something like "Good Jobs are hard to find, especially with a company such as yours. I have interviewed for a number of jobs, but rather than take a position that I was not going to stay with, I waited for the right job. I hope that won't discredit me for this position, because I really do want to become part of your organization."*

### **11. Do you think you are overqualified for this job?**

*The interviewer sees that the job does not require the qualifications you have, and that you obviously have more to offer than the job requires. Mainly, the employer does not just want to become a "stepping stone" for you, or a temporary stopover job until something better comes along. You need to anticipate and override the interviewer's fears. Say something like this: "I do have excellent qualifications, but your company has several advantages over other firms. Your company is well-known and has a reputation for quality and steady work." The idea is to suggest that this firm is a better opportunity for you despite the fact that your qualifications might be higher. You can also suggest that you have the potential to become an even more valuable member of the organization as you "learn the ropes." You want to reassure them again that you are not planning to leave prematurely. Employers hate turnover!*

## Check Point

If the interviewer says at this point, "thank you for coming in. We'll be in touch when we have made our decision." This generally is not a good sign, but doesn't necessarily mean that you will be totally excluded from further consideration. But, if the interviewer at this time begins to

tell you more about the job and even tries to “sell” you on the job or organization, this is a good sign that she/he wants to continue the interview and you’re under consideration.

## **Your Turn to Gather Information**

After the interview gathers all the information that s/he wants to know about you, it’s your turn to gather information from them. The interviewer may ask, “Do you have any questions for me?” If the interviewer doesn’t ask you this question, you should ask, “Would you mind if I ask a few questions of you?”

Knowing what to ask at this stage of the interview can help you look much better than your competition. That little advantage may be the edge you need to beat out the other qualified candidates and possibly even redeem yourself after some poor answers to some tough questions. This is your chance to shine. **Always** ask some intelligent questions. Usually, at this point, the interview is drawing to a close, and this will be what makes the final impression. You may wish to review something for clarification that the interviewer has already mentioned.

## **Possible things to ask the Interviewer**

1. Find out why the job is open; is it newly created or are you replacing someone?
2. To whom will you report? Will you get the opportunity to meet that person?
3. Where is the job located? What are the travel requirements, if any?
4. What type of orientation or training is required, and how long is it?
5. What would your first assignments be? What are the realistic chances for growth in the job?
6. What do you want [me] to have an accomplishment in the first 3 months after hire?
7. Is there a written job description? May I see it?
8. How regularly is performance evaluated? What model do evaluations follow?
9. What is the next step with the decision making process?

## **Closing the Interview**

- Summarize your skills and abilities, the reason you would be the best candidate for the job
- Say, “Thank you” and shake hands
- Ask for a business card
- Do not leave the building without knowing the next step

## **After the Interview Quality Review & Follow-up**

- As soon as possible review the interview process
- For what questions were you not prepared? Any unusual ones?

- Learn from your mistakes
- Send a thank you note (use the business card)
- Refresh Interviewer's memory
- Follow-up by email or phone at the appropriate time
- Keep communications open if the rapport is good