

PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW & JOB SEARCHING TIPS

By Enhanced Education Group.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. Research the Company and the Position

The more you know about the organization and the job for which you are applying, the more prepared you will appear (and feel) during the interview. The recruiter will be impressed by your interest and motivation. You will be able to confidently explain how you can contribute to the organization.

Find out as much key information as you can about the organization, its products, services, and customers. If possible, talk to current employees of the company.

You can locate information by checking the company's website.

Things to research can include the following (depending on your focus):

- ✓ General information about the organization, such as the location of the corporate office, number of plants/stores and their locations, and the names of the parent company and any subsidiaries.
- ✓ Company mission, environment and philosophy.
- ✓ Organizational structure, type of supervision, type of training programs.
- ✓ Philosophy, goals, mission statement, and image.
- ✓ Financial details; including sales volume, stock price, percent of annual growth in earnings per share, and recent profits.
- ✓ The competition in the industry and the organization's place in this industry.
- ✓ The products or services marketed by the organization, including recent media coverage.
- ✓ Career paths in your field.
- ✓ Recent news items regarding the company or industry.
- ✓ The interviewer's name and title.

2. Prepare for the Actual Interview

Tips:

- ✓ Know the position for which you are interviewing. Obtain a job description if possible.
- ✓ Ask for the interview schedule in advance, as well as the names and positions of those interviewing you.
- ✓ Consider your strengths and examples that will support your statements. Answers should be between 30 seconds and a minute and a half.

- ✓ Prepare a list of questions you want to ask the interviewer, but make sure they cannot be answered on the website.
- ✓ Rehearse your interview with a friend, or participate in a mock interview with Career Services.
- ✓ Prepare your materials before you leave for your interview. Bring several copies of your résumé, a list of your references, and your portfolio (if you have one prepared). Make sure all materials are up-to-date.
- ✓ Know the location of the interview. Drive to the interview site in advance of the actual interview to determine how long it will take to travel there and the best route. Remember, take traffic delays and parking into consideration.
- ✓ Find out if you will need parking money and make sure to bring it with you!

3. Preparation Exercises

- ✓ Describe five ideas, accomplishments, strengths, skills, or personal qualities you think would best sell you to an employer.
- ✓ Describe what you know about the organization and the position. Why are you interested?
- ✓ Describe your educational background. How is it relevant to your desired job?
- ✓ What is your employment background? How is your experience relevant?
- ✓ What skills and abilities have you used in previous positions that are relevant?
- ✓ What are your career goals? How do they relate to this organization?
- ✓ What are your personal skills and abilities? How do they relate to this job? Describe some specific examples of how you have used them.
- ✓ What are your weaknesses? What steps are you taking to improve them?
- ✓ What additional information do you want the recruiter to know about you?
- ✓ What questions do you want to ask the recruiter?
- ✓ Practice shaking hands.

4. Relax

- ✓ Get a good night's sleep the night before the interview.
- ✓ Don't over-prepare. Allow yourself some time to relax.
- ✓ Let your enthusiasm for the position and the organization show. After all, you chose to interview with this organization; let them know why you made that decision.

5. Dress for the Job

- ✓ Dress to your advantage.
- ✓ Dress to suit the interviewer.
- ✓ Dress for the position for which you are interviewing.
- ✓ Your colors and patterns should coordinate.
- ✓ Dress conservatively; consider the effect your choice of colors will have.
- ✓ Don't use too much perfume or aftershave.

- ✓ Your fingernails should be clean and properly cut.
- ✓ Your hair should be neat and combed.
- ✓ Check out your appearance in a mirror before entering the interview.
- ✓ Your clothes should be clean and pressed.
- ✓ Your shoes should be polished.
- ✓ Your jewelry and makeup should be sparse.
- ✓ Don't eat foods that will leave an odor on your breath before an interview.
- ✓ Wear clothes in which you feel comfortable and confident.
- ✓ Don't smoke or drink alcohol before the interview.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ Make sure you arrive at least five minutes early. This allows you to familiarize yourself with the company environment. How are people treating each other? Are they chained to their desks? Do they appear to enjoy what they are doing?
- ✓ Greet the interviewer by his or her prefix and last name (ex: "Hello, Mr. Nelson").
- ✓ Offer a firm handshake and a warm smile.
- ✓ Be confident, alert, and enthusiastic. Show self-confidence. Make eye contact with the interviewer and answer questions in a clear voice.
- ✓ Work to establish a rapport with the interviewer. Listen closely for cues on how you should act. Is he/she being formal or informal? How loudly is he/she speaking? What sort of information is he/she trying to solicit: general, professional, or personal? Try to speak with the same rhythm and tone of voice.
- ✓ Be specific, concrete, and detailed in your answers. The more accurate information you provide, the better the employer is able to get to know you.
- ✓ Remember to listen. Communication is a two-way street. If you are talking too much, you may miss cues concerning what the employer feels is important.
- ✓ Take time to reflect before answering a difficult question. If you are unsure how to answer a question, you might reply with another question. For example, if the recruiter asks what your salary expectations are, you might answer by saying, "What are you planning to pay your best candidate?"
- ✓ Answer questions as truthfully and as frankly as you can. The interviewer may steer the interview into difficult questions. Answer honestly, trying not to say more than necessary.
- ✓ Avoid criticizing past employers- even when you feel that the criticism is deserved.
- ✓ Do not lead with salary or benefit questions. If your main motivation is money it will turn off most interviewers. Convince them you can do the job and want the job before discussing money and benefits.
- ✓ Show that you want the job. Display initiative by discussing how your skills can benefit the organization. Give details related to how you helped past employers.
- ✓ You may want to ask about specific details about the position, such as functions, responsibilities, who you would work with, and who you would report to. • If going to lunch

with an employer, decline alcoholic beverages even if the recruiter orders a cocktail with his or her meal. If you are a smoker, don't smoke, even if the recruiter does.

- ✓ Ask questions about the interviewer and the company. You should be interviewing them as much as you are being interviewed. Is this the position you want? Is this an environment in which you want to work? Do your values and goals match?
- ✓ Avoid negative body language. The interviewer wants to see how you react under pressure. Try to avoid these signs of nervousness and tension:
 - o Frequently touching your mouth ,Faking a cough to think about the answer to a question, gnawing on your lip, Tight or forced smiles .Swinging your foot or leg , folding or crossing your arms o Slouching ,avoiding eye contact , licking at invisible bits of lint and Nervous laughter
- ✓ At the conclusion of your interview, ask when a hiring decision will be made, and thank the interviewer for his or her time, restating your interest in the position. If you are positive that you are not interested in the position, say so, but remain professional by thanking the interviewer for his or her time. If you are not sure, take some time to think about it before you tell the employer.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ Take notes on what you feel you could improve for your next interview.
- ✓ Write or type a thank-you letter to the interviewer(s) indicating your interest in the position and thanking him/her for his/her time. This should be mailed within 24 hours of your interview. Send a thank you letter even if you aren't interested. This professionalism will set you apart from most other job seekers.

Interview Tips and Strategies

- ✓ Establish natural, relaxed, personal rapport at the start of the interview. ("Chemistry" is the key to success)
- ✓ Maintain good eye contact and positive body language (smile, lean slightly forward, look interested).
- ✓ Find out as much as possible from the interviewer. Establish what he/she is looking for, and then integrate this information into your responses.
- ✓ Know as much as possible in advance about the position and the organization. Research the organization in the library, online, or through contacts.
- ✓ Have a clear idea of the key points you want to make which will convey a potential benefit to the employer - and then make them.
- ✓ Anticipate possible negatives and address them early in the interview.
- ✓ Deal directly with problems and attempt to turn them into possible advantages.
- ✓ If appropriate, bring examples of your work to demonstrate your accomplishments and talents related to the job.

- ✓ Discuss possible problems that might face the organization and suggest ways in which you might contribute to the solution.
- ✓ Be prepared to answer tough questions such as why you left your last job. Some possible answers to that question might be:
 - o Desire to have more responsibility
 - o Limited opportunity
 - o Changes in management/corporate restructuring/downsizing
- ✓ Never apologize, speak poorly of former employers, or bring up negative points that can be used against you.
- ✓ Watch for nonverbal cues (finger tapping, eyes wandering) to check how you are viewed. To recoup, change the subject or ask a question.
- ✓ At the closing, make sure that you ask when a decision will be made so that you are not stuck sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring.
- ✓ Immediately after the interview, write a “thank you” letter to everyone with whom you interviewed.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS DURING INTERVIEWS

***1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.**

This question is not an icebreaker. Sell yourself to the potential employer immediately by naming your greatest strength and giving an example of how you've used it in the past:

- ✓ What's your greatest strength?
- ✓ What have you achieved?
- ✓ What's your main motivation?
- ✓ What do you hope to do in the new job?

*** 2. Why are you applying for this job/at this company/organization?**

Show your interviewer what you know about the company and how its goals and values fit with your own.

- ✓ Tell the interviewer what you have researched about the company/organization and what contribution you wish to make to it.

3. What is your greatest strength?

Don't be shy. They don't want to know about your modesty. They want to know what makes you a great employee. When you talk about specific strengths, make sure you have stories that illustrate your claims:

- ✓ Explain your personal attributes

***4. Why should we hire you? How will you contribute to our company/organization?**

- ✓ Do not concentrate on a single strength but instead you can talk of a few
- ✓ **Consider the nature of the job.** Does it require someone with great time-management skills? The ability to multi-task? Choose skills that your potential employer will find attractive, (if you truly possess them).

5. Describe your working style.

- ✓ Be concise and to-the-point, and always mention that you focus on the bottom line e.g. "I take extra time and go above and beyond the call of duty to achieve those results."

***6. Tell me about a time when you had to solve a difficult problem.**

- ✓ **Remember PAR:** Problem, Action, Result

7. Tell me about a time when you exceeded expectations.

- ✓ Remember point 6

8. Tell me about a time when you assumed a leadership role.

- ✓ Make a good story based on PAR.

***9. Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of, and why?**

- ✓ Before you go into an interview, make sure you've really thought about your previous accomplishments.

10. What would your last employer/former coworkers say about you?

- ✓ Always mention what former employers would say about your outstanding work ethic.
- ✓ Beyond that, you can talk about your punctuality, verbal or written communication skills, creative talent, or perseverance—anything that would benefit the company.
- ✓ Never, ever mention any negative traits that might come to the mind of a previous boss or co-worker.

11. Tell me about your weaknesses.

- ✓ Be very careful not to make yourself look bad. When describing your weaknesses, make them as harmless as possible.

12. Are you a team player?

- ✓ Always tell a potential employer that you're a team player.
- ✓ If you work independently, say you like making contribution to a team.

13. What position do you prefer on a team project?

- ✓ If you enjoy taking a leadership position, go ahead and say so
- ✓ Show enthusiasm as working as part of a team.

14. How do you handle difficult coworkers?

- ✓ It's important not to fall into a trap here. Your interviewer might be trying to find out if you have trouble working with others. Therefore, it's best to tell him or her that you've been lucky enough to have very agreeable coworkers.

15. What irritates you about coworkers?

- ✓ Do not mention what drives you crazy, talk positively about learning from the differences among people.

16. Have you ever been asked to leave a position?

- ✓ You must be honest about this. If you were laid off due to circumstances that were beyond your control, tell the interviewer what they were. Then say something positive about what you did with your new free time.
- ✓ Never try to shift the blame onto somebody else, no matter how much you think it's deserved.

***17. Why did you leave your last job?**

- ✓ If you resigned from a past position, don't say anything negative about your duties, salary, boss, or coworkers. Instead, tell them that it was the right time to move on in pursuit of your goals

18. How long would you expect to work for us?

- ✓ It's crucial for an interviewer to find someone who intends to stay with the company for a long time. Tell him or her that you hope to pursue a career track within the company, and that you intend to become a longtime contributor.

19. Are you willing to put the interests of the organization ahead of your own?

- ✓ Your answer should be "Yes." This doesn't mean that you'll be putting the company before your family or your long-term goals. It means that you will work toward the good of the organization, whether or not your own ideas are used or promoted. It means that if you have an important deadline or project, you will do whatever it takes—even if that means clocking a reasonable amount of extra time—to get your work done.

20. Tell me about a problem you had with a supervisor.

- ✓ Beware of the trap and tell the interviewer what you do to maintain excellent relationships with your bosses.

21. What qualities do you look for in a boss?

- ✓ Don't say that you're looking for a good friend or confidant, and don't list particular personality traits. Instead, tell the interviewer about the kind of working relationship you prefer. If that means you like a fair amount of direction, go ahead and say so. If you prefer to be allowed to figure things out on your own, or if you have a particular communication style that works best for you, it's okay to say that, too.

22. Tell me about your ability to work under pressure/deadlines.

- ✓ If you're being asked this question, it probably means that your job will involve pressure or deadlines. So, hopefully you handle them just fine! When answering the question, be firm about your ability to work productively, regardless of the circumstances.

23. Are you willing to work overtime or on weekends?

- ✓ This is up to you. If it's impossible for you to work overtime or on weekends, you must let the interviewer know up front.

24. Are you willing to travel? How much?

Be absolutely honest about this. If you're not willing to travel, say so.

25. How do you learn from mistakes?

- ✓ Say that you view mistakes as an opportunity to grow as a person and to improve as an employee. Then consider how you actually set out to learn from those mistakes--perhaps you write about it in your journal? Maybe you practice doing something over and over until you know how to do it correctly by heart. Whatever your chosen method, tell the interviewer about it.

26. Which job have you enjoyed the most?

- ✓ Stay focused on the job duties itself, not on your coworkers or on the setting. For example, tell the interviewer that you loved working at a day camp because you enjoyed having a positive influence on kids; don't talk about how much fun you had with the other camp counselors or the fact that the camp was in a beautiful location.

27. Tell me about the most fun you have had on the job.

- ✓ Like in Question 26, your interviewer wants to hear what you like about working:

28. Did you enjoy your major area of study in school? What did you like about it?

- ✓ Say that you enjoyed your schooling very much and that you learned a great deal. Before your interview, think about a few specific things that you found truly exciting about your major area of study. Then be sure you can talk about them intelligently when your interviewer asks you to describe them.

29. How has your education prepared you for your chosen career?

- ✓ Outline the skills you learned that you believe will apply to the job you're applying for. Then talk about how your education made you into the kind of valuable employee you are today. Maybe you participated in a lot of team projects that trained you to be a leader. Or maybe your academic studies made you into a brilliant multi-tasker and manager of time. It's important to outline both the general work skills and the specific expertise that you gained from your education.

30. Why did you decide to go back to school/switch careers?

- ✓ Avoid making any negative comments about previous schooling or employment. It's best to say that you simply hadn't found your calling at a younger age. Then describe what triggered your change of heart; for example, you could talk about a book or a class that opened your eyes to a new, exciting, and more challenging line of work. Tell the interviewer that with greater experience and maturity, you know yourself better and can make more informed decisions about your appropriate career path.

If you decided to return to school for a more advanced degree in the same general area, don't say that you wanted to gain earning power. Instead, say that your line of work had become less challenging, and that you wished to pursue a more advanced career path that was only possible with more education.

31. Where do you see yourself in five years?

- ✓ Talk mainly about your career goals, and always make them work for the company:

"I see myself in a more senior position at this organization, taking on greater challenges and more responsibility."

32. What is more important to you: money or type of work?

- ✓ In an interview, you must always stress that you're excited to do the job, and not to earn the money. Even if you're chiefly interested in making a good living, your potential employers must believe that you will be committed to your work, so tell them that you are excited to begin (or continue on) a career path that you care about.

33. What motivates you to do a great job?

- ✓ You want to convey to the interviewer that you're very self-motivated. In other words, it's not money, rewards, or status that makes you work hard. It's the pleasure of knowing that you've done your best to create a magnificent product or to make your clients happy (for example).

34. Do you have any questions for me?

- ✓ You do! Ideally, you have 5-10 very thoughtful questions outlined well before the day of your interview. Don't ask every question; choose the three or four most relevant questions that were not answered during the interview.