

CAREER FORWARD

**NAILING THE
INTERVIEW**



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No matter how impressive your résumé is, a great interview is the key to landing your dream job.

Here's what you need to know!



NAILING THE INTERVIEW

Know yourself inside and out

- Be ready to verbally walk interviewers through your résumé. Interviewers typically expect you to give a clear and succinct overview of each section.
- Understand how your experience, skills, background and aspirations relate to the position. Interviewers want to understand how your accomplishments will translate into their company's environment, so be prepared to give examples.
- Play to your strengths. Identify areas where you can offer the most value.
- Don't ignore your shortcomings. Remember, no one is perfect. If you have a specific weakness, be honest and share the specific steps you are taking to improve. Describe a situation in which you put your improvement plan into action.
- Give examples. Be prepared to describe specific situations in which you made a real impact. Think of a time when your contributions made a real difference.
- Expand on your résumé; use the interview to explain the "why" and "how" behind your accomplishments, or share new accomplishments not highlighted on your résumé.
- Share your goals. Talk about your short- and long-term career goals. Interviewers want to know you're career-minded and not just looking for a job.

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Do your homework

Research the company, industry, and position. This shows that you're prepared and serious about the job. A company's website will often include information on the history of the organization as well as its vision, mission, and goals. If the company is publicly traded, its annual reports can provide an overview of its products, services, and finances.

- Explain how you can contribute. The question on every interviewer's mind is: "what can you do for us?" Give specific examples of how you can help the company meet its mission, goals, and objectives.
- Understand the organizational structure, and how this position fits into that structure. This will help you form relevant questions about your career path while demonstrating your interest in the job.
- Know the company's competition, and how the company differs from others. Demonstrate your interest in the industry and marketplace.
- Make your interest known. Tell the interviewer specifically why this particular position, company, and industry appeals to you.

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All the right questions

The interviewer will ask work- and behavior-based questions about your past employment, your current position and responsibilities, and your long-term career goals. Respond truthfully, and with an upbeat, confident tone.

Avoid negative answers and instead emphasize the positive. Focus on your professional accomplishments, and make your answers concise but informative. Be sure not to go off topic or discuss your personal life.

Note: Remember that all the questions in this section are only samples, and variations will occur in the interview. You should expect that at least three questions from each category would be asked during the interview process.

Below are some sample work-related questions:

- What are your long-term/short-term career goals?
- What are the most important qualities you look for in a company, position, and manager? Why are they important?
- Why are you seeking a change in employment?
- What would be your next position if you stayed with your current employer?
- Describe one of your greatest accomplishments in a previous position.
- Do you prefer a slow- or fast-paced environment?
- Would you rather be part of a group, or lead?
- How do you work under pressure?
- How would co-workers describe your strengths and weaknesses?
- What professional skills are you currently working to improve?
- Describe how others perceive you as a manager.
- Describe how you meet deadlines and goals.
- What are the keys to successful business relationships?
- What was your biggest challenge in a previous position?
- What is missing in your current role?

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Behavior-based questions

Employers frequently use behavior-based questions to gauge an employee's past behavior and future performance. All answers to behavior-based questions should follow this structure: first describe the situation, explain what you did to impact the situation, and then highlight the end results. Interviewers may not always be looking for a success story. If you're asked about a situation that went wrong, describe how you dealt with it, what you learned, and what steps you took to create a positive outcome.

Below are some sample behavior-based questions:

- Tell me about a situation in which you had to make a quick decision.
- Describe how you've led a cross-functional team. What were the results?
- Describe a situation with a difficult customer, and the outcome.
- Tell me about the best decision you made.
- How do you make sure you understand your customer's needs?
- Tell me about a time when you went the extra mile to support your team and explain how you did it.
- Describe a time when you were involved in a stressful situation, but still got the job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with conflict with a team member.
- Tell me about a time when you had to show leadership among your peers/team.

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Questions for the interviewer

It's just as important to ask questions as it is to answer them during a job interview. By asking informed questions, you show the interviewer that you have a strong, proactive interest in the company and the position. Following are some of the questions you could ask:

Company focused:

- How would you describe the culture?
- Where do you see the company among the competition?
- What's the management style?
- Who thrives in this type of work environment?
- What makes you want to work here?
- What are the pros and cons of the company?

Department focused:

- Where does this position fit in the organizational structure?
- What concerns are currently facing this department?
- Who would I be interacting with the most in this position, and what are those individuals like?
- What is the culture of the department, and what types of personalities work well within it?

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Position focused:

- Describe a typical day.
- What characteristics would the ideal candidate for this position possess?
- How is performance measured?
- What are the goals for this position?
- How does the position align with the priorities established for the organization as a whole?
- What is the success profile for the position and why?
- What areas of my background can I further clarify for you?
- How do you feel my experience and personality would fit in this position?
- Is there any additional information that I can provide to demonstrate that I am the ideal candidate for this position?
- What's the next step?

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Phoning it in

Before an in-person interview, you may be asked to complete a phone interview. Phone interviews are similar to in-person interviews, but they are also a unique opportunity that can give you an advantage prior to meeting an employer. Take the following suggestions into consideration to help you prepare for a phone interview.

- Print reference documents. During a phone interview, it's perfectly acceptable to have printed documents to refer to. Be sure to print your résumé, questions for the interviewer, and a list of your accomplishments. These documents will provide you with points of reference throughout the interview.
- Eliminate distractions. Make sure the environment in your home or office is clear of people and unnecessary noise.
- Show enthusiasm. The first 15 seconds of a phone interview are critical and the way you answer the phone is important. Speak clearly, distinctly, and with confidence.
- Establish a connection. Ask about the interviewer's experience with the company or mention something you have read about the company.
- Confirm information. At the close of the interview, be sure to confirm the interviewer's title, name spelling, and street or email address. Then, use this information to send a thank you note or email.

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Additional interview formats

In addition to telephone interviews, there are also other types of interview formats that have become increasingly popular and their use varies widely from company to company. Video interviews, panel interviews, and even group interviews should all be prepared for a little differently than the traditional one-on-one interview.

Video interviews

Make sure that the background projects a professional environment void of obvious distractions. Be sure that the camera is angled to provide the best view of you. Line up your computer screen with the camera as you talk to the interviewer. Try to limit sudden or nervous movements, which could be annoying to the interviewer. You should dress professionally, just as you would for an in-person interview, being mindful of colors that work well on video.

Panel interviews

Greet everyone on the interview panel when you walk in. If you must, write down each person's name and title so that you can address them personally throughout the interview. Engage with each interviewer throughout the interview and make sure that your comments and questions are relevant to each person in the room. Send individual thank you notes to each panel member after the interview.

Group interviews

A candidate's ability to collaborate and function in a team is often evaluated in this interview format. The interview may test multiple applicants at once via group exercises, exams, and scenarios to determine which applicants demonstrate leadership, creativity, confidence, and decisiveness in working towards a solution.

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Coming to a close

The last impression you make is just as important as the first. The end of the interview is your final chance to let the employer know that you're the best person for the job. Tell the interviewer that you feel positive about the position and about working for the company. Ask how you compare to other qualified candidates and whether you can share any additional information about yourself. Express appreciation for the opportunity to interview. Finally, thank the interviewer for their time and ask about next steps, including when you can expect to hear back, and who to contact for updates.

Additional considerations

Certain aspects of an interview may not have much to do with your qualifications, but will still speak volumes about the kind of employee you are. Consider the following tips to make a good impression from start to finish:

INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

- Don't be late. Factor in extra time for traffic and parking, and try to arrive about 10 minutes early.
- Don't use your cell phone. Turn it completely off, or leave it in your car.
- Leave food items at home. This includes coffee and gum. Bringing these items into an interview is considered unprofessional.
- Treat everyone you meet as if they were the interviewer. This shows your ability to respect everyone at the company.
- Don't be fooled by a casual setting. You're always interviewing, no matter whom you're talking to or where you are. Always stay professional!
- Don't read directly from your résumé. An interviewer will expect you to succinctly summarize your experience, without relying on your résumé for help.
- Bringing up money during an interview can send the wrong message. Wait to discuss salary and benefits until the employer brings it up.
- Reiterate your interest. Towards the end of the interview, remind the interviewer of your interest and ask about next steps.
- Say thank you. Show your appreciation for the opportunity, and tell the interviewer you look forward to speaking to them again.

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VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Use correct pronunciation. If an interviewer has a name that's difficult to pronounce, be sure to practice ahead of time. Or, ask for clarification at the beginning of the interview.
- Listen carefully. Allow the interviewer to finish speaking before you respond. And, don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.
- Respond concisely. Don't ramble or veer off topic.
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues. Be attuned to the interviewer's body language and expressions and adjust your responses accordingly. But never be tentative about sharing your skills and abilities.
- Avoid inappropriate language. Cursing or using slang can cause an interview to end quickly.
- Don't be negative. Never share negative information about previous employers or co-workers. Doing so communicates that you are more likely to complain than to try to fix problems.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Dress the part. Professional dress is always appropriate, whether you're interviewing at a large corporation or a small agency. Keep accessories, makeup, and cologne to a minimum.
- Take notes. Document important information that the interviewer shares. This demonstrates that you take the interview seriously.
- Give a firm handshake. It shows self-confidence.
- Maintain eye contact. A lack of eye contact can indicate insecurity.
- Be positive. Focus on using a positive tone of voice and facial expressions. Keep your voice strong, steady, and confident, and maintain a calm and composed appearance.
- Avoid overconfidence. Keep a careful balance between confidence and respect. Interviewers are looking for a team player, not a self-promoter.

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