

Effective Employment Interviewing

Review and follow these guidelines to increase your effectiveness in employment interviewing.

Step 1: Know the organization

If you want employers to take interest in you, show interest in *them* by demonstrating knowledge of the position you're interviewing for; the prospective employer; the employer's industry.

A few places to find this information:

- Employer websites
- Professional associations
- Annual reports
- Current employees
- Friends and family
- Magazines and newspapers

Step 2: Know yourself

What are your top skills and strengths? You may want to emphasize 3 or 4 of these points when responding to interview questions.

Examples:

- I have strong sales experience
- I am self-motivated
- I work well in teams

Illustrate each of your key points with a clear, relevant example. Also, be prepared to answer common interview questions, such as:

- Tell me about yourself
- Why did you choose to major in X?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your career ambitions?
- What motivates you?
- Why should we hire you?

Questions like these help interviewers assess your "fit" for the job and the organization (see more sample questions). The content of your responses shows how well you know yourself.

Step 3: Convey professionalism

Behaving professionally communicates that you're a serious applicant.

- Dress professionally and conservatively
- Arrive about 10 minutes early for an interview
- Be confident and approachable
- Smile, make eye contact, and use a firm handshake
- Be positive when describing your experiences

Step 4: Communicate with impact

A. The S/TAR method

Interviewers want to hear about specific experiences you have had. Structure your responses using the **S/TAR** method.

- **S/T** = **S**ituation / **T**ask (Briefly describe the context in which the behavior or action took place)
- **A** = **A**ction (Specifically explain the action you took to handle the situation)
- **R** = **R**esult (Most importantly, describe the result or impact of your action)

For example:

- Interviewer: "Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative."
- Job candidate: "Last spring, I decided I wanted a summer internship, and I knew it was up to me to make it happen (**S**ituation / **T**ask). So I contacted a hiring manager I had met earlier in the year, and I told him how I might contribute to the organization through an internship. We came up with an arrangement that worked for both of us (**A**ction). By the end of the summer, I had created a comprehensive procedures manual, which is now used by the entire organization. My supervisor said my work should save his department several hundred hours per year (**R**esult)."

B. Practice and prepare to answer questions

- Map out your answers to the most common interview questions.
- Practice saying your answers out loud.
- Practice making eye contact to convey confidence and respect.

C. Be prepared to ask questions

Also be prepared to ask questions, to build on what you've already learned about the position, the organization, and the industry. A few sample questions you might ask:

- How would you describe the ideal candidate for this position?
- What would be expected of this person during the first few months on the job?
- What are the daily tasks and responsibilities of this position?
- What opportunities for advancement (or development) exist in this position?
- What are the biggest challenges currently facing your organization (or industry)?
- Could you describe the interviewing process for this position? What is your expected time frame for making a hiring decision?

You may need to wait until the end of the session to ask your questions. Also note that asking about salary and benefits is generally considered to be out of place during a first interview.

Step 5: Finish strong

If you are interested in the organization, be sure to communicate your enthusiasm before you leave the interview. Ask for the interviewer's card so you can follow up. Thank the interviewer and project confidence as you shake hands to say goodbye. A strong closing leaves a good final impression.

Always send the interviewer a brief thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview. Use email when appropriate or when time is critical. If you do not hear from the organization within a reasonable amount of time, it is appropriate to call and ask about the status of the interviewing process.