



Career Mobility Office

Interviewing Tips & Techniques

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Interviewing Tips and Techniques

Being prepared for your job interview will certainly improve your chances of being selected for the job.

Here are a few things you can do to get prepared:

- **Do your homework**
 - Learn basic information about the organization
 - Find out what services the Agency or Bureau interviewing you does
 - Find out about the position you are interviewing for, including specific duties and requirements
- **Be on time**
 - Know the time and place of the interview and the name of the interviewer
 - Do a trial run before the interview to get an idea how long it will take to get where you are going
 - Arrive at least 15 minutes early to the interview to give yourself time to park and get inside
- Introduce yourself to the receptionist and/or secretary and tell them what you are there for
 - Be polite to everyone including office staff
- Anticipate interview questions and develop comfortable responses



Tips...

- Dress as a professional in your field.
- Don't bring a lot of baggage with you.
- Turn off beepers and cell phones.
- Don't bring in coffee or beverages.
- Don't smoke or chew gum.
- Don't speak badly of your current or former employer.
- Keep your nervous habits in check.
- SMILE.

The body of the interview:

- Answer questions honestly, clearly and appropriately
- Ask relevant questions and learn as much as possible about the position
- Keep on track and don't let the conversation wander
- The interviewer's goal is to discover your skills, work ethics and attitude about your job
- The interviewer has three major questions in mind:
 - Can you do the job?
 - If hired, will you do the job?
 - If hired, will you get along with the people already there?

- As the interviewee you need to:
 - Convince them that you are the candidate for the job;
 - Show how you feel about work ethics and attitude;
 - Show enthusiasm on why you want the job; and
 - Discuss your skills and accomplishments.



Tips...

- ◆ Bring extra copies of your resume.
- ◆ Make sure references are in order and that they have been notified that you are using them as a reference.

Closing of the interview:

- The interviewer will usually ask if there are any questions.
 - Ask questions about the job.
 - Don't ask about time off, flex hours, promotions or salary issues.

Some questions you may be asked:

- "Tell me a little about yourself."
 - Talk about your experience, qualifications, and accomplishments.
- "Tell me about your education or training."
 - Explain your education or training and tell how it helped prepare you for this job.
- "Why do you want to leave that job?"
 - Job stagnation, demotions due to down-sizing, career exploration, or simply having made a bad choice are all good reasons.
- "Why should I hire you?"
 - Talk about the skills you bring with you.

Write a Thank You letter:

- Tell the interviewer how much you enjoyed meeting him or her.
- Express your enthusiasm for the job.
- Reiterate a specific selling point.
- Establish your next point of contact.
- Send your letter out within 24 hours of the interview.

Answers to Tough Interview Questions

1. What are your strengths as an employee?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Review the description of the position for which you are interviewing. Clarify each specific job requirement in your mind. Now, match your strengths and accomplishments directly to the requirements of the job.
2. If you could change one thing about your personality just by snapping your fingers, what would it be and why?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Identify a weakness and put together a brief answer that indicates awareness and motivation. (Example: I had a hard time with procrastination when I was younger. But I learned the hard way that putting things off just makes matters worse or I end up falling behind even farther. I sometimes still have the urge to procrastinate but then I think of what will happen. I fight the urge and do whatever needs to be done.)
3. Describe your management philosophy.
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Most agencies want someone who can demonstrate a desire and ability to delegate, teach, and distribute work – and credit – fairly. In general, you probably want to come across as neither a dictator nor a pushover. A successful candidate should convey that he or she has the ability to succeed should opportunity present itself. But they should avoid giving the impression that they are fire-breathing workaholics ready to succeed no matter what (or whom) the cost. (Example: More than anything else, I think that management is getting things done through other people. The manager's job is to provide the resources and environment in which people can work effectively. I try to do this by creating teams, judging people solely on the basis of their performance, distributing work fairly, and empowering workers, to the extent possible, to make their own decisions. I've found that this inspires loyalty and encourages hard work.)
4. What were the most memorable accomplishments at your last job?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Focus on your most recent accomplishments – in your current position or the job you had just prior to this one. But make sure they are relevant to the position for which you are interviewing. It is also wise to think about why you were able to achieve these peaks in your job. (For example: I really stopped to listen to what my customers wanted, rather than just trying to sell them.)

5. What is the biggest failure you've had in your career? What steps have you taken to make sure something like that doesn't happen again?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Before you start spilling your guts, remember that the interviewer is not a priest. In this situation, it would be foolhardy to produce a detailed log of your every shortcoming, misstep, and misdeed. But it would be equally silly to pretend you're perfect and have never experienced failure in the course of your career, education, or life. So compromise. The best approach is to admit to one weakness or failure, and then talk about the steps you are taking (or have taken) to make sure that you'll never fail in that way again.

6. Tell me about the types of people you have trouble getting along with.
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Be careful of how you answer this question. If you say "none," the interviewer will assume you're being evasive. Stick with a short story that softens with humor the reasons someone disliked you. (Example: I was discussing this problem with my boss just the other day. He told me I'm too impatient with slow performers. He told me that the world is filled with 'C', rather than 'A' or 'B' people, and I expect them all to be great performers. So, I guess I do have trouble with mediocre and poor workers. I don't expect to ever accept poor work, but I am learning to be more patient.)

7. Are you an organized person?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Even if you firmly believe that a neat desk is the sign of a sick mind, talk in detail about the organizational skills that you have developed – time management, project management, prioritizing, delegation – and how those skills have made you more effective.

8. Describe the top of your desk.
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Even if your desk appears to be cluttered you should know what is in the clutter and how to quickly find it. Is your mind cluttered as well?

9. Do you manage time well?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Hopefully you can be truthful and say yes. Now is not the time to wail about your broken alarm clock, etc. (Example: I rarely miss a deadline. When circumstances beyond my control interfere, I make up the time lost as quickly as possible. OR I establish a To-Do list first thing in the morning. Then I add to it – and reprioritize tasks, if necessary – as the day goes on.)

10. How do you go about making important decisions?

a. What do they want to hear?

i. Think in terms of the interviewer's main concerns. Will you need to be analytical? Creative? Willing to call on the expertise of others? If you are bucking for a management position, you will also want to take this opportunity to convince the interviewer that your relationship skills have made you management material – or set you on the way to achieving that goal. You may be asked to about the last important decision you had to make, how you went about making it, and the results you achieved.)

11. Do you anticipate problems well or merely react to them?

a. What do they want to hear?

i. All managers panic from time to time. The best learn to protect themselves by anticipating problems that might lie around the bend. (Example: A manager had his staff provide reports on all positive – and negative – budget variances on a weekly basis. He is then able to share this information with his boss and with the other bureaus that he interacted with to avoid major problems.)

12. Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?

a. What do they want to hear?

i. Think about the position you are interviewing for? Every job situation forces us to get along with people we might not choose to socialize with. But we must get along with them and, quite often, for long stretches of time and under difficult circumstances. Acknowledging this shows strength. Talk about how you have managed to get along with a variety of other people.

13. How do you generally handle conflict?

a. What do they want to hear?

i. Answer this question positively. (Example: I really don't get angry with other people very often. I am usually able to work things out or anticipate problems before they occur. When conflicts can't be avoided, I don't back down. But I certainly do try to be reasonable.)

14. How do you motivate people?

a. What do they want to hear?

i. A good answer will include the words, "it depends on the person," then offer one or two concrete examples. A poor candidate will imply that all people are motivated by the same thing or can be motivated with the same approach, a kind of "one-size-fits-all" philosophy.

15. What does your supervisor tend to criticize most about your performance?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. This is another way of framing a series of questions you have probably already been asked; what is your greatest weakness? What was your greatest failure? What would your supervisor say about you? Consider discussing an evaluation from an earlier job, switching to what you did about it and claiming that your current supervisor would, therefore, not consider it a problem any longer.

16. Did you inaugurate new procedures in your previous position? Tell me about them.
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. You do not have to be a department head to answer this question. The interviewer is seeking industriousness, creativity, caring about the organization and its success. So this is the time to describe the changes or improvements you were responsible for making and identify how they helped the department.

17. Have you ever fired anyone? Why?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Even if you had a good reason, you know that firing someone is never pleasant. Let's say you fired someone for not meeting productivity goals. You might be thinking, "Boy, I'm glad I got rid of that bum. He was nothing but a wimp and whiner who never did a good day's work in all the time he was on the job." Go ahead and think that. But when you open your mouth, say something like this: "Yes I fired someone who continually fell short of his productivity goals. His shortcomings were documented and discussed with him over a period of months. But in that time he failed to show any real improvement. I had no choice. As a supervisor, I want everyone in my department to work out. I needed to face the fact that not everyone is equally dedicated to his or her job."

18. How do you "stay in the loop"?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. How do you keep yourself informed of what is going on in your bureau or department. How many meetings do you schedule or attend per week or month? Do you spend a lot of time asking your subordinates questions or do you wait for them to come to you with problems?

19. How do you deal with subordinates who are becoming part of the problem rather than part of the solution?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. The interviewer is trying to separate the real leaders from the "managers with a title" and to ascertain whether your particular style will mesh with the organizations.

20. See that picture frame on the wall? Sell it to me.
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Begin by asking a series of questions about the object and about the interviewer's particular needs. Listen to what they are saying. Then see the object through their eyes. Highlight the characteristics of the object relevant to their needs.
21. Why are you thinking of leaving your current job?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Do not appear negative or speak badly about your current employer. Refer to potential growth and how change can be positive. (Example: There is a great deal I enjoy about my current job, but my potential for growth in this area is limited.)
22. Where does your boss think you are now?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Do no lie. Do not take a sick day to go on an interview. (Example: I asked for a few hours of personal time today. OR I spoke with my boss letting him know that I had a job interview for a promotion. He is okay with it.)
23. How would your co-workers describe you?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Answer in the positive. Are you easy going, a good team player, responsible?
24. What do you feel an employer owes an employee?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. This is not an invitation to discuss the employee benefits package you would like to have. Don't get into legal responsibilities either. Keep your answer short and sweet. (Example: I think an employer owes its employees the opportunity to develop new skills and to be thoroughly trained in the job they are expected to perform.)
25. Your supervisor left an assignment in your in-box, then left for the week. You can't reach him and you don't fully understand the assignment. What would you do?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. The interviewer is attempting to gauge whether you have an appropriate respect for hierarchy and deadline demands. If there is truly no way to reach your boss or leave a message you would then need to approach your boss' supervisor. Of course, you would do this in a way that would not reflect badly on your boss by explaining that you and your boss simply missed the chance to discuss the assignment before he had to leave the office. You want to be sure that you understand the assignment, so you can start on it as soon as possible.

26. Your supervisor tells you to do something in a way you know is dead wrong. What do you do?

- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Tough question. Admit that it is okay to disagree but that you will follow your boss's instructions.

27. Do you have any questions?

- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. You should never answer this with a no. If you have asked questions along the way you would answer this with "I think you have answered all of my questions. I truly appreciate the time you have given me today."
 - ii. If you have not asked any questions, here are a few examples:
 1. Please tell me a little bit about the people with whom I will be working most closely.
 2. Tell me some of the particular (or preferred) skills that you want in the candidate for this position?
 3. What kind of training can I be expected to receive.
 4. Could you describe a typical day in this position?
 5. Tell me about one thing in your life you are proudest of.
- b. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Answer briefly but thoroughly. They are trying to get to know you.

28. What does success mean to you?

- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. You should offer a balanced answer to this question, citing personal as well as professional examples.

29. What types of people have trouble getting along with you?

- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. If you say "none", the interviewer will assume you are being evasive. Identify sometime of characteristic that you do not like in a person and then turn it around. For example, if you do not like people that are lazy, you could say, "People that put very little effort into doing their job do not get along with me because I work hard at my job."

30. If you could start your career over again, what would you do differently?

- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. This question is designed to get you to think on your feet. You can admit you may have had a few regrets but too few to mention. If you do want to mention a regret make sure you can showed that you have learned from it.

31. Tell me about the last time you failed to complete a project (or assignment) on time?

- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Be specific in your answer. Here's what happened, here's what I did, here's what I learned.

32. What do you do when work requirements on the job are slow?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. This question is designed to figure out how you think and act in reality. Be careful that what you say does not ruin the image you are trying to present.
33. On a typical day, tell me what you do in the first and last hour at work?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Checking for honesty and a good use of your time.
34. What can you tell me about yourself that will make me remember you?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Tell them something unique about yourself that will make the interviewer remember you.
35. How would you rate your writing skills in comparison to your verbal skills?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Discuss how both skills are important in the business world, and that while (one or the other) may be your strong suit, you are working to become strongly proficient at both speaking and writing.
36. You are a supervisor of a busy payroll office. Two of your employee just called in and will be out sick for the next two weeks. How do you deal with this unexpected event?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Discuss how you must immediately reprioritize your assignments and pitch in to get the job done.
37. Why should I hire you?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Summary of your skills relevant to the job's requirements, include accomplishments and skills that facilitated those accomplishments. Be sure of yourself and enthusiastic.
38. If we hire you for this job, how much time will you give yourself and the job before you can determine if this job is a good fit?
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. An employer wants to hear that you're going to give the job a fair try; most jobs get better as you become accustomed to the new work environment.
39. Tell me about your current job.
 - a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. List your duties and responsibilities. Talk about your accomplishments.

40. Can you take constructive criticism without feeling upset? Give an example.
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - b. When used correctly, constructive criticism is a tool which will allow you to do your job better. An employer wants to know that you are open to learning new things and that you don't get defensive or upset.
41. Define cooperation.
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Cooperation means different things to different people, so an employer could be looking for several different answers. They want to know if you can get along with others.
42. Was there ever a time where you had to deal with a difficult or argumentative person? How did you handle the situation?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Employers want to hear that you are able to stay cool in a tense situation; that you don't inflame the situation by arguing back. And, if the situation warrants, you know when to step away and get a supervisor.
43. Give an example of a time you went above and beyond the call of duty to get the job done.
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. That you can be counted on to pitch in and do your best when there is an important job to be done NOW.
44. What methods do you use to ensure that your work is error-free?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Your work represents not only you but your boss and your agency. Taking the time to ensure that you're putting your best effort forward shows that you are conscientious about the work you do.
45. What do you like most about your current job?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. They want to get to know you and what you enjoy about your job.
46. What would you change about your current job?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Don't bad-mouth your job, your co-workers or your supervisor; you don't know who the interviewer may know! Talk about changes that are positive and reflect your work ethics.
47. What motivates you to do a good job?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. "Money" is not a good answer. A good answer would be something like, "having responsibilities and being acknowledged when the job is done right."

48. Who are your heroes? Why?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Be careful about naming political or religious figures; you don't know the political or religious beliefs of the interviewer. Employers want to hear the positive traits you admire in others and how you strive to embody those traits.
49. What kind of training have you received in the last three years?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. That you have taken steps to expand your knowledge, especially with training directly related to your job. However, if your current employer does not allow you to attend training, say so politely, adding that if you were hired for this job, you would like to take any training that was offered to you.
50. Of the jobs you have held, which one have you enjoyed the most and why?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. They want to get to know you. Talk about your duties, challenges, responsibilities, accomplishments and the people you worked with.
51. Out of the jobs you have held, which one did you like the least and why?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Don't bad-mouth the job, your co-workers or your supervisor; you don't know who the interviewer may know! Talk about what you disliked but add a positive note. (Example: I think the workload could have been better distributed.)
52. What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Talk about a process or procedure that you initiated on your own that was adopted by your employer; or when you pitched in to help a co-worker on a big project without being asked or told; or when you came up with an idea that saved your employer time or money. Toot your horn!
53. Would you rather be in charge of a project or work as part of a team? Why?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Actually, an employer wants to hear that you can, and would, be capable of taking on either role.
54. Tell me about an improvement you independently made in your work process. How did this improvement help you or others?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Employers are looking for creativity, organizational skills and innovative thinking. If you modified a process in the office that streamlined the workflow in the office; if you merged two computer systems to create one; if you created a process that improved customer service, etc.

55. What was the biggest change you have ever faced at a job and how did you adapt?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Employers want to hear that you can deal with change and not let it disrupt the whole apple cart. How did you adapt to the change? They also want to see that you are open to new challenges or processes in your work environment.
56. Tell me about a project for which you were responsible, but needed the help of others to complete the project. What did you do?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is ask for help. Employers want to see if you are able to determine when a task is beyond your ability to do it alone; how you ask for help; and how you work with the newly formed team. They also want to see if you just let a project fail because you didn't ask for assistance.
57. Describe a time where you had what seemed like a million things going on at once. How did you prioritize your workload? Were you successful?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. You're never going to have only one thing to do at work, so being able to organize yourself and your priorities is essential. Give an example of how you were able to handle multiple tasks.
58. Tell me about a time where you were able to use your organizational skills to solve a problem.
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Perhaps your organizational skills alone did not solve a problem, but they may have helped to avoid a problem or assisted you in solving a problem.
59. Tell me about a situation where you and another person disagreed and resolved your disagreement. How did you reach that point?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. Employers want to hear that you are able to stay cool in a tense situation; that you don't inflame the situation by arguing back and that you were able to use logic and reason to reach a mutually agreeable resolution. And if you are unable to reach a mutually agreeable decision, then you would agree to consult a supervisor and abide by his/her decision.
60. Tell me about a time where you successfully dealt with handling multiple priorities.
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. This will show an employer that you can prioritize and delegate when necessary.
61. How many employers have you worked for in the past five years?
- a. What do they want to hear?
 - i. If you have worked for many (over 5) be prepared to explain why.

SAMPLE
QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. How would I be trained to do the job?

2. How long should it take me to get my feet on the ground and become productive?

3. Please describe a typical work day and the duties of my position.

4. How many people work in this department? _____

5. Who are the people I'd be working with, and what do they do?

6. If hired, would I report directly to you or someone else? _____

7. What can I say or do to convince you to offer me this job?

8. Is there traveling with this position? If so, what percent of the work week am I expected to travel? _____

LEGAL AND ILLEGAL PRE-EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

| | <u>LAWFUL</u> | <u>UNLAWFUL</u> |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Race or color | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What race/color are you? • Are you a minority? |
| Religion or Creed | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your religion? • To which parish/church do you belong? • What religious holidays do you observe? |
| National Origin | | What is your (or relatives) lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage or nationality? |
| Sex/Marital Status | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you male or female? • Are you married? • What are your living arrangements? |
| Relatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have relatives (other than a spouse) already employed by the company? • What are their names? | What are the names (addresses, ages, number or other information) of your relatives NOT employed by the company? |
| Children | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any children or plans to have children in the future? • Do you have the capacity to reproduce? • Do you advocate any form of birth control or family planning? • What are your child care arrangements? • How old are your children? |
| Disability | Can you perform the essential functions of this job? | Do you have any disability or disease not related to job performance? |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Citizenship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you authorized to work in the U.S.? • Can you verify that you are authorized to work in the United States under the United States immigration laws? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of what country are you a citizen? • Are you a naturalized or a native-born citizen? • When did you acquire citizenship? • Please produce naturalization papers or green card. • NOTE: verify citizenship or the right to work after they have decided to extend the job offer. |
| Language | What language do you speak and write fluently? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your native language? • How did you learn to read, write, or speak a foreign language? |
| Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please describe your academic, vocational or professional education and the public and private school you attended. • What are the dates of attendance? (to permit verification) | |
| Notice in Case of Emergency | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the names and addresses of people to be notified in case of accident or emergency? <p>NOTE: Okay to ask after hired.</p> |
| Military Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you served in the U. S. Armed Forces or in the National Guard? • Describe your experience. | Do you have any military experience? (Other than in the United States.) |
| Organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you belong to any organization which you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job? • Please explain. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you a member of any clubs, societies, or lodges? • Which ones? |

AFTER INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

INTERVIEW DATE: _____
COMPANY OR AGENCY: _____
INTERVIEWER: _____

1. Was I on time? _____
2. Was I calm in the waiting room? _____
3. Did I introduce myself? _____
4. Did I maintain eye contact? _____
5. Did I ask the proper questions? _____
6. Did I show the proper interest in the position? _____
7. Were there any areas or questions that seemed to be a problem? _____
 - a. If yes, what?

8. Have I sent my Thank You follow up letter? _____
 - a. Date sent: _____
9. How interested did the interviewer seem to be in hiring me? _____
10. Miscellaneous concerns:

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

1205 Center Street
Albany, NY 12003
November 13, 2000

Mr. Tad Jones:
Dept. of Civil Service
State Campus
Bldg. 1, Rm. 13A
Albany, NY 12239

Dear Mr. Jones:

I want to thank you again for giving me the opportunity to interview for the position of Secretary to the Assistant Director of Finance.

During the interview you asked if overtime during the month of August would be a problem. Again I wanted to let you know that I am willing to put in the time it takes to get the job done. I also have a variety of computer skills and enjoy putting them to the test.

Please feel free to call me if any additional questions come to mind regarding my qualifications. I am confident I can do the job.

Sincerely,

Karen Nelson
(Your Title)