

The Interview Stage

When it comes to interviews, there are three phases that require preparation: **before** the interview, **during** the interview, and **after** the interview. With these steps, you should familiarize yourself on how to prepare for your interview as well as what happens during an interview and after the fact.

Before the Interview

Research the company. 47% of hiring managers have eliminated candidates after an interview because they had little to no knowledge about the company. Gather a well-informed idea by researching their website, blog, social channels, and Wikipedia. Take to Glassdoor to see what former and current employees have said about the company, its leadership, and the position.

Don't forget to search the company online and see what turns up—anything from negative reviews, praise, funding, press announcements, and more can give you a better idea of what the organization is all about.

Research those interviewing you. You'll want to make sure you are a strong fit for the company's culture and the person who may potentially be your co-worker or manager. Based on your research and your email communications, you should (but won't always) have a clear idea if the person you are interviewing with is an HR recruiter versus a hiring manager, and you can adjust your approach to the interview accordingly.

Prepare creative and insightful questions.

Having questions ready to go is good and valuable to the employer; it shows an eagerness to know more about the role and how they would fit. By coming unprepared for the interview and without questions, you're telling the interviewer, "This position isn't important to me."

Memorize your personal pitch. Not only should you be prepared with strong questions, but you should be ready to share your personal pitch. This personal pitch should be full of relevant, recent experience that crafts an engaging story that tells your employment history.

No history? That's okay. This time can be used to tell the story of volunteer work, education, and desire to break into the role you're applying for. Ask about the skills and personal attributes important for success in the role and then highlight how you can be the right person for the job.

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Before the Interview

- Research the Company
- Research Those Interviewing You
- Prepare Questions
- Memorize Your Personal Pitch

During the Interview

- Dress the Part
- Turn Off Your Phone
- Arrive Early
- Bring Resumes
- Grab a Notebook and Pen
- Talk to Everyone
- Watch Posture
- Have a Strong Handshake
- Maintain Eye Contact
- Ask for a Business Card
- Request Next Steps

After the Interview

- Thank the Interviewer
- Follow-Up
- Be Prompt With Post-Interview Requests
- Ask for Feedback

During the Interview

Dress the part. It's always better to be overdressed than underdressed when it comes to an interview, but it's okay to ask the interviewer how you should dress if you're unsure.

Turn your phone off. There's nothing more distracting than a very audible ring or buzzing of a cell phone mid-interview. Make sure you turn off your phone before meeting with the people interviewing you.

Arrive five to ten minutes early. Arrive early for your interview, but not too early. Arriving more than 15 minutes early may make you look too eager and cause the interviewer to feel the need to rush through whatever they were doing to accommodate you earlier.

Bring extra resumes and items to take notes. Even though the employer likely already has your resume, always bring extra copies. Never assume that the interviewer has it on hand. Bring a pen and paper just in case you need to jot down notes.

Talk with others. Did you know that some interviewers intentionally run late to see how you interact with the secretary or gatekeeper? From the moment you enter the parking lot to the moment you leave, you should treat everyone as if they're the person interviewing you. It's a great time to get a gauge on the company and what others like about it as well.

Maintain eye contact. Strong eye contact is seen as more persuasive; dodging around the room with your eyes lacks confidence and trust.

Have confident posture and a strong handshake. Be mindful of *how* present yourself at every step of the process. Keep your back arched and lean forward slightly when you are seated for conversations. Sitting back in your chair or slouching shows a lack of interest. In the instance, you stand or walk during the interview, be careful about placing both hands on your hips. Some people take this gesture as a sign of dominance.

Ask for contact information. Once you have an interviewer's contact info, be sure to use it to follow-up with a thank you note.

Identify next steps. There's nothing worse than leaving an interview and not knowing when the hiring process will be complete. Ask when you can expect to hear back on any next steps, and if you pay close attention, how the interviewer responds could tell you a lot about how they felt the interview went. Be sure the interviewer knows you have a strong interest in the job. Summarize the key points about your background, experience, and soft skills the hiring manager should consider when making the final decision regarding a job offer.



Interview Questions

Throughout the course of the interview process, you'll have natural pauses where you'll be able to ask questions. However at the end, it's common practice for the interviewer to open the floor to you.

Don't ever say that you don't have any questions! It shows a lack of interest and enthusiasm for the position. Even if the interview process is thorough, there's always something that needs clarification, particularly when it involves the job description, salary, and benefits. Generally, at least in a large company, salary and benefits are discussed as part of the job offer and NOT in the initial interview. However, small businesses may provide these details up front. Also HR recruiters and hiring managers are no longer permitted to ask salary history during the interview stage.

Here are five question categories to consider:

Position Questions

- Is the position full-time or part-time?
- Is it also permanent, temporary, or contract work?
- How many hours?
- Days of the week?
- On-site, remote, or combination of both?
- Who will you report to?
- Will you be working with a team?
- Any applicable software or systems you'll be using?
- Are there opportunities for learning on the job (e.g. certification programs, online courses, etc.)?

Benefits Questions

- Can you tell me about your benefits package?
- Do you offer tuition reimbursement?
- Is there a health plan offered?
- When is the enrollment period?
- What is the time off policy?
- FYI: PTO is paid time off which rolls vacation and sick time together. Time off can also include company holiday. And every company has their own time off accrual system (e.g. 2 weeks during the first year).
- Does the company offer a retirement package (e.g. 401k)?

Travel Questions

- Is travel involved?
- If so, how far and how often?
- How does mileage and reimbursement work?

Company Culture Questions

- What is the company culture like?
- FYI: Company culture is the office environment, how employees interact with one another, etc. It can be professional, corporate, informal, and so on.

Pay Questions

Save any questions pertaining to pay until the very end of the interview. Also if it's an entry level position, you may want to reserve pay questions until the face-to-face second interview.

- What is the pay schedule (e.g. biweekly, once a month, 15th and 30th of the month)?
- Do you offer direct deposit or manual check?
- Is it salary or hourly?
- If salary, ask if comp time is available.
- If hourly, ask about their overtime policy.
- Are there annual reviews? How does compensation work (e.g. cost of living or performance-based raises)?

Abstract Interview Questions

Sometimes interviewers like to see how you react under pressure by throwing random or abstract questions your way. While there's no right or wrong answer (most of the time), it may influence the interviewer's opinion of you and how you'll fit into their company's culture. Here's a sampling of potential questions (or similar ones) you may encounter.

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- If you don't get this job, what's your backup plan?
- What do you think might be the most difficult aspect of this job?
- We finish the interview and you step outside the office and find a lottery ticket that ends up winning \$10 million. What would you do?

After the Interview

Say thank you. Preferably on the same day as your interview, drop the interviewer a note (and any others that took time from their day to speak with you) and thank them for their time. Make it personal by mentioning something you both discussed or left an impression on you.

A thank-you email is fine; a handwritten note, however, garners attention that an email cannot (and often lives on the interviewer's desk longer than your email).

Follow up. It's perfectly acceptable to follow-up if you haven't heard anything back, one way or another, after five business days. Be sure to take into account holidays or if the interviewer mentioned a specific timeframe to expect a response (e.g. a date two weeks from your interview or upon return from a planned absence from the office).

Be prompt with any requests. The interviewer may need additional information or request your availability for next steps or references. Respond promptly and remember, your response is an extension of the interview. Be complete and professional.

Request feedback. If the position is offered to a different candidate, it's okay to tactfully thank the interviewer and ask for feedback on what may have elevated you to that position. That said, don't be disappointed if they don't respond. Many HR teams have a policy to not respond to feedback requests



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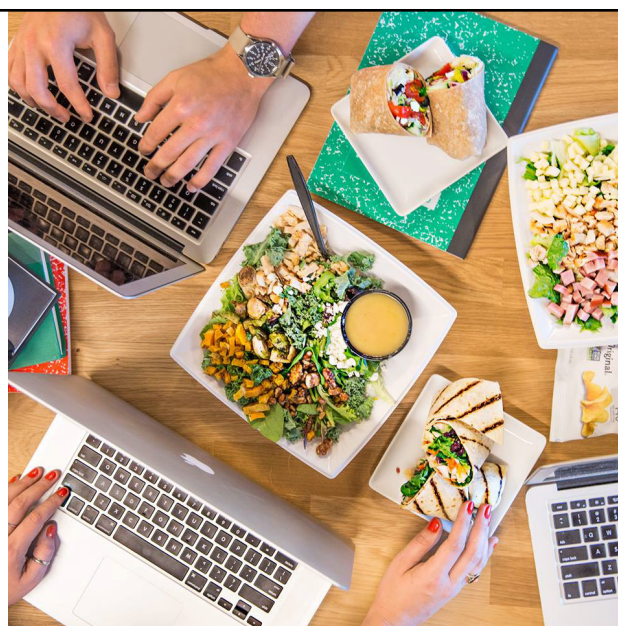
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Follow-Up Messages

Communication is key at all stages of your job search. Whether you're asking additional questions, inquiring about your application status or thanking a potential employer after an interview, how you craft your messages can have a huge impact on your job prospects.

Application Follow-Up Email

Waiting to hear back after submitting an application can be stressful, especially when you're applying to a job you really want. Luckily, you can always reach out to a potential employer with a polite follow-up email.

You should give the company enough time to review your information and wait at least three to five days after you submit the application to follow up. When writing an effective follow-up email, remember these key points:

- State which position you applied for.
- Briefly express your interest in the position and **how** your skills fit the position.
- Share your contact information in case they need to reach you.

Before you hit send, **be sure to proofread your email!** Check for any spelling and grammar mistakes. A sloppy email could cost you an interview invitation. If possible, have another person read over your message, too. They might catch errors you missed.

Post-Interview Thank-you Email

Always follow up after a job interview, no matter how well you think you did. Thank-you notes are polite and thoughtful gestures that can make you stand out from other candidates. Many potential employers consider whether or not you sent a thank-you note when making a hiring decision.

Be sure to send a thank-you note to each interviewer within 24 hours of the interview. Because your thank-you note might be the last time you contact a potential employer, it needs to make a lasting impression. In your thank-you note, make sure you:

- Thank the interviewer for their time.
- Mention a key takeaway from the interview.
- Reiterate your interest in the position and **how** your skills fit the position.
- Share your contact information in case they need to reach you for next steps.

Most people prefer sending thank-you emails, but depending on the company and industry, handwritten notes or thank-you cards are acceptable, too. Just remember that letters sent by post can take a few days to reach their destination.

Sample Follow-Up Emails

Application Follow-Up Email

Subject: Following up on [position title] application

Dear [hiring manager],

I recently applied for the role of [position name] at [company name] and wanted to confirm that my application was received. I believe my skills, specifically in [list examples], would be an ideal match for this position and the company as a whole.

Please let me know if there are any additional materials I need to submit. You can reach me directly at [your phone number] or [your email address]. I anticipate hearing back from you at your convenience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
[Your name]

Subject: [position title] Application Follow-Up

Dear [hiring manager],

Earlier last week, I submitted an application for [position title] at [company name], but I wanted to reach out as well. I'm very interested in working with the team at [company name].

As noted in my application, I believe my experience with [relevant skills] would be a suitable match for the role of [position name].

Please let me know if you would like any additional materials to supplement my application. You can reach me at [your phone number] or [your email address]. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
[Your name]

Post-Interview Thank-you Email

Subject: Thank you, [interviewer name]

Hello [interviewer name],

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. Learning more about [company name] was truly insightful, especially [something about the company that stood out to you].

I strongly believe my knowledge of [list of relevant skills] aligns with what your team is looking for. I've attached my resume and cover letter to demonstrate exactly why I'd be a great fit for [company name].

I look forward to hearing from you about the next steps in the hiring process.

Sincerely,
[Your name]

Subject: Thank you for your time today!

Dear [interviewer name],

It was a pleasure to visit [company name] today. I was impressed with [something specific about the company that stood out to you]. I'm excited to explore a potential [career, internship, etc.] with [department and/or team] in particular.

As I explained during the interview, I believe I'd be a great asset to your team, mainly because of my experience with [specific skills or relevant projects/jobs].

If you need more information about my background or qualifications, please reach out to me at [your phone number] or [your email address]. You can also find more samples of my work at [online portfolio URL].

Sincerely,
[Your name]

The Job Offer

The interview went great, you sent your thank-you note, and a couple of days later, the employer reaches out. Congratulations, they want to offer you the job!

Employers will email, fax, or mail you a formal job offer letter or packet. The offer typically will include information such as job title, salary, benefits, start date, and the deadline for a response.

Keep in mind, the offer letter isn't set in stone. Sometimes there's room for negotiation (more on that below). An offer can be voided at any time, unless you sign a contract that states otherwise. For instance, if you fail an employer mandated drug test, your job offer can be rescinded. In fact, most companies operate with a 90-day probation period. During this time period, you can be let go, so make sure you start off strong.

Can You Negotiate Terms?

It depends. If you're applying for an entry-level position, chances for negotiation are slim. After all, it's likely you're starting with little to no experience. However, if you're applying for a position for which you have some experience already, it doesn't hurt to make a counteroffer. But when you do, make sure to:

- Explain how your experience and skills warrant the salary and/or benefits you've requested.
- Provide local job market statistics to support your counter.

Here's how to negotiate:

Salary. Ask what the salary range is for the position first. By not disclosing your ideal number, you have more room to negotiate. For instance, if the range is between \$40,000 and \$50,000, and you say your requirement is \$42,000. It's likely they'll offer you \$40,000.

Benefits. Maybe there isn't room for salary movement now, but you can negotiate benefits. However, this depends on the size of the company. While it may be possible to negotiate benefits in a small business, benefits are not negotiable in larger companies.

Dear [name],

We are pleased to inform you that after careful consideration, Company XYZ would like to extend an **offer of employment** to you. This letter sets forth the terms of the offer, which if you accept, will govern your employment.

You will be employed with the **title** of "Sales Associate". In the role of Sales Associate, you will be expected to carry out the duties and responsibilities described in the enclosed job description which is periodically updated to reflect company needs.

Your **first day of work** will be Monday June 1, should you choose to accept the position. Your **work hours** will also be determined at that time with a maximum time commitment of 20 hours per week. As a Sales Associate, your **salary** will be \$10 per hour, paid on a weekly basis. Your first paycheck would be Monday June 8.

If these terms are agreeable to you, please **sign and date** the letter in the appropriate space at the bottom and **return it** to [Hiring Manager] by May 25.

We hope that you accept this offer and look forward to you coming on board.