

# Effective Employment Interviewing

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

## **Step 1: Know the Organization**

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If you want employers to take interest in you, show interest in *them* by demonstrating a knowledge of 1) the position for which you are interviewing, 2) the prospective employer, and 3) 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**

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What are your top skills or strengths? You may want to emphasize three or four of these points when responding to interview questions (e.g., "I have strong sales experience, I am self-motivated, and I work well in teams.") Be sure your key points address the employer's needs and interests.

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/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. The content of your responses shows how well you know yourself.

## **Step 3: Convey Professionalism**

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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

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Interviewers want to hear about *specific experiences* you have had. Structure your responses using the “**S/TAR**” method: **S**ituation/**T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult.

**S/T** – Briefly describe the context in which the behavior or action took place.

**A** – Specifically explain the action you took to handle the situation.

**R** – 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 (Situation/Task). So I contacted a hiring manager I had met earlier in the year, and I told him how I might contribute to his organization through an internship. We came up with an arrangement that worked for both of us (Action). 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 (Result).”

- 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.

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/benefits is generally considered to be out of place during a first interview.

## Step 5: Finish Strong

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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 and say goodbye. A strong closing leaves a good final impression.

Always send the interviewer a brief thank-you letter within twenty-four hours of the interview. Use e-mail 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.