

Interview Checklist

Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

You just scheduled an interview. Congratulations! All your hard work putting the finishing touches on your résumé, networking and job searching has finally paid off. Follow these interview tips and you're sure to nail the interview and be the winning candidate:

Be prepared.

This means more than merely making extra copies of your résumé. It means having researched the industry and company, as well as thought about how your skills match the responsibilities of the position, says recruiter and career coach Rick Nelles.

Dress to impress.

Your interview attire should be tastefully simple, clean and wrinkle-free. Forgo trendy for conservative when deciding what to wear.

Be on time.

Being on time for an interview really means arriving at least 15 minutes before your scheduled interview. Not only will your punctuality be noted, the extra time allows you to calm down, focus and review your résumé and notes you prepared for the interview.

Make eye contact.

Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake, warm smile and direct eye contact. Avoiding the gaze of the interviewer can make you appear inexperienced, unsure of yourself and untrustworthy.

Show your enthusiasm.

If you're locked in a dead heat for a job with other candidates, you need to find a way to stand out. "In a tight candidate race, the most enthusiastic almost always gets the job," says Martin Yate, career coach and author of several career advice books, including "Knock 'Em Dead -- The Ultimate Job Search Guide." Your enthusiasm for the job tells the recruiter you will be a highly-motivated employee.

Demonstrate that you're a team player.

Employers want a team worker who can take direction, Yate advises. No one wants to hire an unmanageable employee. They also are looking for someone who can galvanize a team to work toward a common goal. So give some examples of how you worked together with colleagues to tackle a large project or service an important client.

Sell yourself.

The interview is a sales pitch in a sense. Have a list of things you want to make sure the interviewer knows about you and be ready to bring specific topics up on your own if they are not adequately touched on in the interview.

Be honest.

You should never stretch the truth on your résumé or during the interview. Today's technology makes fact checking far reaching and lightning quick. Remember, companies are looking to fill a position, not hand out the Nobel Peace Prize. You don't have to be a Renaissance man (or woman), just the right person for the job.

Act professionally.

You would think this goes without saying, but candidates often need to be reminded not to chew gum, slouch or steer the conversation too far off work-related themes. Sit up straight and conduct yourself with a professional demeanor at all times.

Ask questions.

An interview is meant to be a fact-finding mission for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Don't be afraid to ask questions about the responsibilities of the job, clients or projects. In fact, it is to your detriment to be completely passive and reactive in an interview. If you do not engage the interviewer, you appear weak and ineffective.

Say "thank you."

Close the interview with another firm handshake, a "thank you" and a smile. Ask when they will be making their decision and if you should follow-up. Later, send a note or e-mail thanking the interviewer for the time spent and letting them know you are interested in the position and will contact them again soon.

Tough General Interview Questions

Tell me about you!

Keep your answer to one or two minutes; don't ramble. Use your resume summary as a base to start.

What do you know about our company?

Do your homework before the interview! Spend some time online or at the library researching the company. Find out as much as you can, including products, size, income, reputation, image, management talent, people, skills, history and philosophy. Project an informed interest; let the interviewer tell you about the company.

Why do you want to work for us?

Don't talk about what you want; first, talk about their needs: You would like to be part of a specific company project; you would like to solve a company problem; you can make a definite contribution to specific company goals.

What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't?

Relate past experiences that show you've had success in solving previous employer problem(s) that may be similar to those of the prospective employer.

What about the job offered do you find the most attractive? Least attractive?

List three or more attractive factors and only one minor unattractive factor.

Why should we hire you? *Because of your knowledge, experience, abilities and skills.*

What do you look for in a job?

An opportunity to use your skills, to perform and be recognized.

Please give me your definition of a (the position for which you are being interviewed).

Keep it brief -- give an actions- and results-oriented definition.

How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

Not long at all -- you expect only a brief period of adjustment to the learning curve.

How long would you stay with us?

As long as we both feel I'm contributing, achieving, growing, etc.

Behavioral Interview Questions

- ☺ Communication skills
 - * Tell me of a time when your active listening skills really paid off for you.
 - * Tell me about a time when you had to present complex information. How did you ensure that the other person understood?
 - * Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
 - * Tell me about a time when you had to use your written communication skills in order to get across an important point.
- ☺ Interpersonal skills
 - * What was your most challenging personal encounter with someone? How did you deal with that individual?
 - * Give me an example of where you mediated a conflict?
 - * When working on a team project, have you ever had an experience where there was strong disagreement among team members? What did you do?
 - * Tell me about a time when you had to be assertive.
- ☺ Initiative
 - * Give an example of where you pushed yourself to do more than the minimum.
 - * Tell me about projects you have initiated. What prompted you to begin them?
 - * Give an example of a situation that could not have happened successfully without you being there.
- ☺ Planning and organization
 - * How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give me an example.
 - * Give me an example of an important goal that you set in the past. Tell me about your success in reaching it?
 - * Describe a situation when you had many projects or assignments due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?
- ☺ Flexibility
 - * Describe a situation in which you were able to overcome a “personality conflict” in order to get results.
 - * Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- ☺ Leadership
 - * Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.
 - * Describe your leadership style and give me an example of a situation where you successfully led a group.
 - * Discuss situations where you have turned ideas into action.
 - * Tell me about a time when you had to lead people that did not want to be led.
- ☺ Decision-making
 - * Give an example of a time when you had to make a difficult decision.
 - * Describe a time when you had to defend your decision.
 - * Summarize a situation where you had to seek out relevant information, define key issues and determine the steps to take to get a desired result.

[Adapted from: <http://career.berkeley.edu/Interviewing/interviewingTypes.stm>]

INTERVIEWING THE INTERVIEWER

Toward the end of most job interviews, the interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask questions. You must ask a least one question; to do otherwise might signal the interviewer that you don't really have any interest in the job or the company. On the other hand, you should avoid asking questions where the answer is obvious or readily available -- or when the topic has already been thoroughly discussed in the interview. And try not to ask about salary and benefit issues until those subjects are raised by the employer. Given the fact that most questions you prepare to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview will have already been addressed in some manner, it is essential to have back up questions. Always try to be prepared with at least 10 solid questions, knowing that at least 5-7 of the ones you've prepared will be answered along the way.

Here are some suggestions:

- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
- What do you like most about the company? Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
- What are your company's future plans and goals?
- What is the single biggest issue facing your company right now?
- How is this department perceived within the organization?
- What are the company's values?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?
- In your opinion, what is the most challenging or critical aspect of this job?
- Are there any weaknesses in this department that you are working on improving?
- Is this a newly created position?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization? Of your department?
- What kind of supervision can I expect? How frequent? Who would I directly report to?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
- Can you discuss your take on the company's corporate culture?
- What opportunities for advancement are available from this position?
- Is there a formal process for advancement within the organization?
- What is the organization's policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
- Are lateral or rotational job moves available?
- Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?

The following are a few examples of thank you letters found on the career and job search advice website “Quintessential Careers”: <http://www.quintcareers.com/>

A Free General Thank You Letter Sample

Mr. Archie Weatherby
California Investments, Inc.
25 Sacramento Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mr. Weatherby,

Thank you for taking the time to discuss the insurance broker position at California Investments, Inc., with me. After meeting with you and observing the company's operations, I am further convinced that my background and skills coincide well with your needs.

I really appreciate that you took so much time to acquaint me with the company. It is no wonder that California Investments retains its employees for so long. I feel I could learn a great deal from you and would certainly enjoy working with you.

In addition to my qualifications and experience, I will bring excellent work habits and judgment to this position. With the countless demands on your time, I am sure that you require people who can be trusted to carry out their responsibilities with minimal supervision.

I look forward to hearing from you concerning your hiring decision. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Oakley

A Thank You Letter that Stresses Fit

Dr. Steven Page
Rolling Hills School Health Clinic
5 Main Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Dr. Page:

Thank you so much for taking the time to interview me today for the social worker position.

I felt a wonderful rapport not only with you, but with the whole Rolling Hills School Health Clinic staff. I am more convinced than ever that I will fit in beautifully as a member of the team and contribute my skills and talents for the benefit of schoolchildren in the Rolling Hills district.

I can make myself available for any further discussions of my qualifications that may be needed.

Again, I very much appreciate you and your staff taking so much time to talk with me about this exciting opportunity.

Sincerely,

John Oakley

Post-Interview Checklist

1. Did I properly prepare for this interview?
2. Did I spend enough time practicing?
3. Did I set and achieve my objective for this interview?
4. Did I call to confirm the interview and did I arrive on time?
5. Did I enter the office properly?
6. How could I have more effectively opened the interview?
7. Did I use the interviewer's name frequently?
8. Did I pronounce the interviewer's name properly? Spell it correctly?
9. Did I anticipate the questions sufficiently?
10. Did I discuss the benefits of my accomplishments?
11. Did I use reference letters and testimonials effectively?
12. How can I improve my skills in answering questions?
13. Was my presentation effective?
14. Did I adequately listen to the interviewer?
15. Did I effectively handle the objections?
16. Did I actively participate in the interview?
17. How should I follow up on this interview?
18. What examples of body language did I use?
19. Did I use eye communication, and how can I improve it?
20. What examples of body language did I recognize?
21. Did I obtain all the information I wanted?
22. What else can I do to improve my performance?
23. Would I accept this position if offered to me?
24. What is the commitment for the next step?