



Interviews: “Clean Up! Aisle 1!”

What to do after a bad interview.

That all-important interview for the job you were banking on went sideways. Stunned, your head pounds with “What went wrong?!” followed by “What do I do *now*?” Hard as it may be, start with two facts: 1) you can’t change the past; and 2) life goes on. Also, know that even pros have bad days and that “things happen.”

Assess. Don’t obsess.

First interview or not, it’s normal to be emotionally upended with feelings of disappointment, anger, self-doubt, embarrassment, and discouragement. That said, if you hope to salvage the situation or, at best, walk away stronger and wiser for next time, the following steps are critical to your career future.

ID the issues. You can’t fix something if you don’t know what to fix. Make a list of what you think went wrong while events are still fresh in your mind and your emotions are running high. Just write what comes into your head. After you calm down, review the possible causes for the poor outcome: Were you late? Did you fail the firm-handshake-eye-contact intro? Did you forget to mention relevant work or internship experience? Was it nerves or lack of focus that caused you to babble? Did you blank out on a common interview question or give a response inconsistent with your résumé? Some mistakes are indefensible: dressing inappropriately; fumbling because you didn’t research the company; answering your cell phone; lying. Be honest and objective with yourself—you want to *fix* your mistakes, not repeat them. At the same time, don’t beat yourself senseless with blame. Negativity becomes counter-productive, so also reflect on what you did well.

ID the solution. Next, enter beside each problem what you *should* have said or done. Did you need more lead time to arrive five minutes early or to listen more carefully to the questions? Jot down missed details. The exercise of thinking things through and seeing the answers in print will help you visualize and retain the information should the same scenario come up again. Further, determine if you need more interview practice or should schedule informational interviews to better understand the business. How you approach the problem will help determine how you handle things in the future.

Get back in the saddle.

A bad interview can be discouraging, but you need to keep going. No matter how badly you bombed, send a note thanking the interviewer graciously for their time. Use your follow up strategically to reiterate your qualifications, passion, and fit for the job. If appropriate, offer a *brief* explanation, and *not* an apology, for falling short. Perhaps a family crisis threw you off. If you missed a key industry development, express that you have since researched the matter for greater clarity. Use your references to vouch for your capabilities. Also, ask the interviewer for feedback. You may not get the job, but you’ll gain valuable insight and improve your future chances.

Feeling brave? Kindly request a second in-person or phone interview—but *only* if you feel you have something more to add that might overturn that poor first impression. Interviewers are human; most understand how stressful the process can be, especially for first-time job seekers. Your courage, determination, and sincerity might impress the recruiter enough to give you another chance. Just don’t come across as desperate or expect special treatment. Also, be prepared for rejection. Redos, if any, are on a case-by-case basis and are never guaranteed.

Each interview, good or bad, is a learning experience. Sometimes people just don’t click. Or, you were delayed by events beyond your control. What’s most important is that you take the lessons learned and apply them to your next interview. Keep practicing and accept every interview you’re offered to build expertise and confidence. Also, as bad as you may feel, realize that “this too shall pass” and that it’s only one interview out of perhaps many. So, get up, clean up, and restock your shelf with more opportunities. Let go and move on. Now that you know better, you’ll handle things differently the next time around.



i n a nutshell:

How you respond to and what you take away from a bad interview will help shape the next outcome:

- **Learn from your mistakes; avoid analysis paralysis**
- **Don’t burn bridges; take accountability**
- **Focus on the positives—your qualifications, enthusiasm, and fit—not the shortcoming**
- **Request a second chance only if you feel it will make a real difference—people are busy**
- **Ask for feedback, accept rejection; be gracious**
- **Don’t obsess, move on; focus on acing the next interview**

Some poor interviews *can* be saved. With nothing to lose, ask for a second shot. Your courage, confidence, and commitment just might win over a more lenient hiring manager.