

Interview to Win

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A job interview is an opportunity for an employer to learn more about your skills, qualifications, and whether you will be a good fit with the organization. It is also a chance for you to learn more about the employer, the company, and whether the position will be a good match with your career aspirations.

Preparation for an Interview

Preparation is key to a successful interview. Ensure you clearly convey to the employer why you are the most suitable candidate for the position. Do not assume the interviewer knows all your qualifications and accomplishments; you must articulate them clearly in your responses.

Step 1: Research the Company and Industry

Employers expect candidates to be informed about the company. Visit the company's website to understand their mandate, mission, products, services, and market. Stay updated on recent organizational activities, discussions, and industry insights through news sources and social media (X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn). Look up the interviewers on LinkedIn to find common connections and learn about their career backgrounds and interests. This preparation will help you answer questions like **“What do you know about this company?”** or **“Why do you want to work for this company?”**

Step 2: Review the Job Description and Understand the Requirements

Employers expect candidates to understand the job requirements and demonstrate how their skills and experiences align. Review your accomplishments statements from your resume and prepare additional examples of achievements from previous work, volunteer experiences, or academic studies that are relevant to the job requirements.

Step 3: Review Sample Interview Questions and Practice Your Answers

Planning and thinking through your answers in advance, and practicing your delivery, will boost your confidence and make you more comfortable during the interview. Refer below for information on different types of interview questions.

Step 4: Verify Interview Information

When arranging the interview date and time, ensure you verify the following information:

- Name (including correct pronunciation) and title of the interviewer(s)
- Location of the interview or the virtual platform you will be using (Zoom, Google Hangouts, Teams, or Skype)
- The amount of time allocated for the interview
- Whether there will be employment tests and the duration of these tests

Verifying this information will help you plan your time effectively and mentally prepare for the interview.

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What to Bring to an Interview

- Additional copies of your résumé and cover letter
- A pen and paper for taking notes
- Your portfolio and work samples, if applicable
- Your references, neatly typed on a single sheet of paper

Tips for Interview Success

- Dress for success; first impressions are formed in seconds, so ensure your clothing is neat and professional, even for virtual interviews
- Aim to arrive 10 minutes before the interview start time
- Have a firm handshake, and repeat the interviewer's name when introduced
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer throughout the interview
- Stay positive and avoid speaking negatively about past employers

Types of Interviews

Pre-screening or Telephone Interviews

Used to narrow down a large pool of candidates or when the interviewer is not local. While it may seem less formal, it is just as important as in-person interviews. Typically, the interviewer will ask you 3-5 questions to determine whether you meet the criteria for the position.

- Ensure your cellular phone is fully charged and has a strong signal
- Keep your résumé, cover letter, and a pen and paper in front of you
- Choose a quiet, distraction-free space
- Smile, speak clearly, and take your time with answers

Virtual Interviews

Commonly used when in-person meetings are not possible. These interviews are just as formal as in-person ones.

- Confirm the virtual platform (Zoom, Google Hangouts, Teams, Skype)
- Ensure your laptop/tablet is fully charged and test all related equipment (camera, microphone, headphones)
- Find a quiet, well-lit, professional space where you won't be interrupted
- Disable distractions like email alerts and software notifications
- Look into the camera to simulate direct eye contact

In-person Interviews

The most common type of interview is where the employer meets with a potential candidate in-person. These interviews can be informal or highly structured depending on the employer and industry.

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TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Introductory Questions

These allow you to describe yourself and your accomplishments related to the job. They assess your background, experience, and “organizational fit” and are open-ended, giving you a chance to sell yourself to the employer. Typical questions include:

- “Tell me about yourself.”
- “Why are you applying for this job?”

Behavioural Questions

Behavioural interview questions ask you to describe past situations or experiences, providing specific examples of how you handled them. These interviews operate on the premise that past behaviour predicts future behaviour. The goal is not to provide the “right” answer but to demonstrate how you handled past situations.

These questions typically start with phrases like:

- “Tell me about a time when...”
- “Describe an experience you had when...”
- “Give me an example of when you demonstrated the following skill...”

To answer effectively, use the **S.T.A.R.** technique:

- **Situation:** Describe a specific event or situation you were in. Include details like who, what, where, and when.
- **Task:** Explain the task you needed to complete, highlighting any specific challenges or constraints (e.g., deadlines, issues, costs).
- **Action:** Detail the specific actions you took to complete the task, emphasizing desirable traits the interviewer seeks.
- **Result:** Close with the results of your efforts. Quantify your results with figures if possible.

Situational Questions

In situational questions, the interviewer provides a hypothetical scenario and asks how you would respond. Think carefully about the underlying skills being assessed. For example, if the question involves meeting deadlines, describe your time management skills. If it involves an upset client, focus on your customer service skills.

Technical Questions

These questions assess the specific skills required for the job. They often involve hands-on tests or questions about your experience with particular equipment, software, processes, or procedures.

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Conclusion or Wrap-Up

Interviews usually end with the interviewer asking if you have any questions. Use this opportunity to show further interest in the job. Prepare two or three well-thought-out questions about the company or position, such as:

- “What are the next steps? When should I expect to hear back?”
- “Can you tell me about the team I would be working with?”
- “Who would I be directly reporting to?”
- “What would be the most significant way I could contribute to your team?”
- “What is a typical day/week like in this role?”

Other Screening Tools

Employers may use additional screening tools to assess potential candidates, such as:

- Security Clearance Check
- Background Check
- Police Check
- Credit Check
- Drug Test
- Language Testing

After the Interview

Reflect on your performance and consider which questions you answered well and which could have used more detail. Sending a thank-you letter via email to the lead interviewer within 24 hours is highly recommended. If you agreed to provide additional information or work samples, do so as soon as possible.

Difficult Interview Questions

Be prepared for challenging questions employers may ask during the interview, such as:

- What is your target salary? What do you feel this position should pay?

Conduct research to establish a salary range using resources like:

- Job Bank: www.jobbank.gc.ca
- PayScale: www.payscale.com
- Indeed: www.indeed.com
- Glassdoor: www.glassdoor.com

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Unlawful Questions

The Law in Ontario prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of:

- Citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex or pregnancy, gender identity, gender expression, family status (such as children), marital status, sexual orientation, and receipt of public assistance, are all illegal.

Employer questions must relate to the job for which you are applying. The **Ontario Human Rights Commission** protects job seekers against unlawful questions.

What can you do?

- Ask the interviewer to clarify the meaning of the question
- Ask the interviewer in what circumstances does the question apply to the job
- May politely decline to answer