

Interview Preparation

The interview is a conversation between you and a prospective employer. It is an opportunity for you to showcase what you can do for a prospective employer and it also gives you an opportunity to assess whether your qualifications align with the position and company. The following are things you should do to prepare for a successful interview.

Step 1: Analyze the Position

- Review the job description and highlight the duties and qualifications of the position
- Review occupational information and/or conduct informational interviews on the position
- Visit O*NET or Glassdoor for occupational information and utilize LinkedIn for informational interviews
- Do not get discouraged if you do not meet all qualifications, employers rarely find applicants in all areas

Step 2: Know the Employer

- Research and learn about the employer's mission, services and/or products, organizational structure, training program, and future prospects
- Obtain research from the following sources:
 - Employers website
 - Article searches (check out Google news)
 - Annual Reports (visit Gleeson library for databases)
 - Attend company info sessions or professional events posted on LinkedIn, Eventbrite or Meetup
- Think about 2 or 3 reasons why you want to work for this employer

Step 3: Review Your Qualifications

Know your experience: work, internships, volunteer, class projects, coursework, student activities, interests & hobbies. Identify the skills and areas of knowledge developed in these areas and be prepared to say how this experience prepared you to contribute to an organization.

- What are 2 or 3 soft skills you have to offer (i.e., organization, leadership, communication)?
- What are 2 or 3 hard skills you have to offer (i.e., computer and languages)?
- What are 2 or 3 adaptive skills you have to increase your value as an employee (i.e., dependability, creativity, etc.)?

Step 4: Prepare Questions

Typically, near the end of an interview the prospective employer will ask you if you have questions. As a general rule, questions about salary and benefits are best left until a job offer has been extended. Be sure to avoid asking questions you can find on the job description and ask questions to demonstrate your interest in working for their company. Possible questions to ask:

- What are the best aspects of working in this group/organization?

- How would you compare your organization with your major competitors?
- What are your plans in terms of product lines, services, new branches, etc.?
- What are some typical first-year assignments? What is the career path for my position?
- How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?

Step 5: Practice, Practice, Practice

- Practice your responses to interview questions to feel more at ease and confident
- See Sample Interview Questions for practice questions
- Schedule a mock interview with a Career Coach
- Ask a friend or family member to help you practice and give you feedback

S.T.A.R. Method

The S.T.A.R. method is based on the idea that the best predictor of future behavior (i.e., how you will perform on the job) is past performance (i.e., how you have already performed in similar situations).

As a result, a prospective employer will ask you behavioral interview questions about your past professional experiences – including work, volunteer, extracurricular, academic – to gauge how you will perform.

Interviewers want examples as specific as possible, so try to avoid vague generalities or listing achievements.

S – Situation: Describe the context of the situation – group project or work scenario

Video: Answer interview questions using STAR Method.

T – Task: Describe the task and your specific role – goal, problem to be solved, improvement

A – Action: Describe the actions you took – planning and implementing to reach the goal, communicating to team members to solve a program

R – Result: Describe the results of your action – impact, influence, positive change



Things to Keep in Mind

- It's highly recommended to think of S.T.A.R. method answers to a variety of behavioral interview questions prior to the interview. It's challenging to think of these detailed answers on the spot.

- Consider writing out the answers to help commit the examples to memory.
- Highlight scenarios that have a positive result because of your action (not the action of someone else).

S.T.A.R. in Action

Behavioral Question: When working on a team project, describe a time when one person was not doing their share of the work. What did you do?

Situation: As a new manager at the Bay Area Non-Profit Inc., we had scheduled a meeting before the fourth-quarter to outline our marketing campaign for the next year.

Task: The Senior Manager gave us one month prep time to come to the meeting with at least 3 marketing ideas. The night before the meeting another colleague texted me to say they hadn't prepared any ideas and asked if I could share mine.

Action: I choose to text them and ask if we could have a phone call that evening. During the call instead of beginning the conversation by sharing my ideas, I used my active listening skills to learn why they hadn't completed the prep work and empathized with them regarding their extenuating circumstances. I then began a short brainstorming conversation with them about other marketing ideas.

Result: By the end of the call, they had come up with three of their own unique ideas for the meeting. I utilized my communication and interpersonal skills to simultaneously solve a conflict with a colleague and ensure the goal of our department was met by having us both prepared with marketing ideas.

Video Interviews

Many employers will conduct interviews virtually using Zoom or a similar video conferencing tool. These interviews can be anywhere from 15-60 minutes. Here are some best practices for phone and video interviews:

- **Test your equipment**

To successfully conduct a video interview, you must test your equipment to make sure all your technology is working properly. This is an important step to avoid technical difficulties like inadequate internet connection or your webcam or audio not working.

- **Set-up your camera angle**

You want to set up your camera angle at eye level or slightly above to create a notion of eye contact.

- **Dress professionally**

A virtual interview is the same as an in-person interview and requires that you dress professionally.



TIP! Learn more about what to wear to an interview, [What to Wear to an Interview: Professional, Business Casual and Smart Casual](#), with Ingrid Nilsen as part of her Youtube video series with Indeed.com.

- **Look into the camera**

It is important to know where the camera is on your screen so you look directly at the camera, giving the impression of eye contact, and not at your image or other people on the screen.

- **Create a professional background**

You want to pay attention to your background and try to find a place in your home where it's interesting but uncluttered and professional. Think about some of the following to accomplish a professional background: well-lit space, absence of disruptive wall decorations or paintings, or a neutral virtual background.

- **Be cognizant of outside noise**

Make sure you are not too close or far away from the microphone to capture the best sound. Also, think about background noise, like shutting doors, barking dogs, or the landscaper plowing leaves, while you are interviewing.

SOURCE: First Hands article, ["8 Best Practices for Video Conferencing Etiquette"](#)

Interview Follow Up

Writing a thank you letter after a job interview is very important! For many employers, a thank you email is still part of the interview process. The best practice for any job interview is to always have one ready!

Post-Interview Thank You Email Tips

- Send a thank you email within 24 hours of the interview
 - If you do not have their email, plan to ask for it during the interview
- Always have a subject in the subject line
- Acknowledge or highlight something from the interview
- Thank the interviewer for their time and express your interest in the role.
- Interview follow up: If you do not hear back after one week, it is appropriate to send a follow up reminder to check-in with the recruiter or hiring manager.

Post-Interview Thank You Email Template

Subject: *Thank you for your time!*

Hi _____,

Thank you for today's interview and conversation. I enjoyed learning more about the role as a ____ (insert role)____ at ____ (company name)____. It was great to learn (or discuss) __ (something unique from the interview) .

I hope you were able to see my enthusiasm about the position during the interview. I know the skills, experience & passion I bring will make a great addition to your team and company. I am looking forward to hearing from you about next steps.

If you have any questions or need additional information from me, you can reach out to me here or by calling (insert phone number).

*Sincerely,
Your Name*



TIP! *General Interview Advice*

- *Dress appropriately for the company you are interviewing with. If you are not sure, ask the employer.*
- *Arrive 5-20 minutes early and engage professionally with every person leading up to the interview.*
- *Offer a firm handshake at the beginning and the end of the interview.*
- *Smile and be friendly, employers appreciate enthusiasm!*
- *Sit comfortably (back straight, leaning slightly forward), don't fidget your hands or swivel in your chair.*
- *Turn your cell phone off before you enter the interview.*

Video: How to prepare for a virtual job interview.



Job Negotiation

If you are offered a position, you might have the option to negotiate your salary. However, some salaries are not negotiable. Do not bring up the topic of salary, benefits and sick or vacation time in an interview or before you are offered the position - wait for the interviewer to address these topics first.

Salary Negotiation Do's

- **Research** the market rate for the position and geographic area. This will ensure you know what is fair and won't unknowingly accept a low salary. Start with salary.com or payscale.com.
- **Know your strategy.** In addition to being objective, it's important to be persuasive and strategic when negotiating. Avoid discussing salary or negotiating until you have been offered the job. Specifically know your:
 - **Target Salary**— Your worth based on objective, market wage data. Your target salary is the "anchor" at the bottom of the range, and the top of the range should not exceed 20% more than the target salary.
 - **Bolstering Range**— that you use to negotiate with an employer.
 - **Resistance Point**— the lowest salary you are willing to accept.
 - **Take-home Pay**— the net pay you receive after deductions such as taxes and benefits
- **Try to get a potential employer to name a number first.** The negotiation should be based on a fair salary given your experience and qualifications, and the responsibilities of the job.
- **Practice!** Negotiation skills will not improve without practice. This will help you navigate those trickier parts of negotiating. With each practice session, you can improve your abilities to be objective, persuasive, and strategic. The more you practice with others, the more assistance you are given with positive and constructive feedback to improve your verbal and body language. Practice with your roommates, friends, or career service practitioners to hone your skills.
- **Show up with confidence.** Communicate to the employer that you are serious about your career and want the best for yourself and your family (if applicable).
- **Recognize a fair offer when you see one.** If the offer falls within the competitive market rate and is reflective of your level of experience, realize that some offers are reasonable and leave little need to negotiate.

Negotiation Starters

- "Thank you for meeting to discuss the details of your offer."
- "According to my research, a fair salary range for people doing this job in this area is from \$_____ to \$_____."
- "Given my previous experience doing _____, I believe this is a fair salary range for the position."

When Asked About Salary History/Expectations

- Since 2017 California law has prohibited employers from asking job applicants for "salary history information."
- Under this legislation, California employers must provide "applicants" with the "pay scale" for the position upon "reasonable request." A reasonable request is defined as a request made after the applicant has completed the initial interview.

If an Employer Proposes a Starting Salary

- “Do you have any flexibility on the salary number?”
- “Thank you for the offer. Based on my research with comparable roles in this area, I was thinking of something in the range of \$_____.”
- “Based on my prior experience and familiarity with this role, I believe that an additional \$_____ would be fair.”