

From the Editors of
California Job Journal

Acquiring Your Next Interview

*Your Complete Guide to Mastering
this Critical Job-search Step:*

Analyzing the Interviewer

Perfecting the First Impression

Giving the Right Answers

Handling Special Situations

Much more...

This guide was created to provide you with an understanding of the role of the interview in the job-search process and the knowledge to present yourself in a manner that establishes a positive impression in the mind of prospective employers.

Using This Guide

If you choose to view the guide using Adobe Acrobat Reader, you may take advantage of Hyperlinks. Simply click on any [blue words](#) to either access a related section of the book or to take you to a related website.

You may also print out this guide on a standard printer using letter size (8½ x 11 inch) paper.

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Contents

Employers Want You	5
An Interview is	5
Your Chance to Shine	5
Understanding Your Interviewer	6
<i>First Impressions Count</i>	7
Getting to Know You	7
<i>Quantify Your Qualities</i>	8
Prove You're the One to Hire	8
What Employers Look For	9
Integrity	10
Likability	10
Stability	10
Adaptability	10
Common Sense	11
Compatability	11
Interview Formats	12
Preliminary Interviews	12
<i>Telephone Interviews</i>	12
The Formal Interview	12
<i>Behavioral Interviews</i>	13
<i>Panel Interviews</i>	13
<i>Stress Interviews</i>	14
<i>Dining Interviews</i>	14
On-the-Spot Interviews	15
Informational Interviews	15
Prepare to Impress	18
Plan for the Process	18
Know Yourself.....	19
Uncover Opportunities	20
<i>The Internet</i>	20
<i>Company-produced Materials</i>	20
<i>Job Information Lines</i>	20
<i>Detailed Job Descriptions</i>	20
<i>Articles</i>	21
<i>Library Research</i>	21
<i>Informational Interviews</i>	21
<i>The Interviewer</i>	21
Being Well-Prepared	21

Questions & Answers	22
Use Your Research	22
Anticipate Questions	22
<i>Education</i>	24
<i>Work Experience</i>	24
<i>Career Goals/Personal</i>	24
Ask Some Questions of Your Own	25
<i>Questioning Etiquette</i>	25
Live, in Person	27
Psyching Yourself Up	27
What to Wear	28
<i>Basic Rules for Men</i>	28
<i>Basic Rules for Women</i>	29
Bring the Right Stuff	30
<i>The Employment Application</i>	30
Pre-employment Testing	31
Interview Etiquette	32
Tailor Your Message	33
Closing: Ask for the Job	35
Special Situations	36
If You've Made a Mistake	36
<i>Get Off to a Good Start</i>	36
<i>Keep a Clear Head</i>	36
<i>Tough Questions, Bad Answers</i>	37
Unprofessional Interviewers	38
Handling Illegal Questions	39
<i>Answer the Question</i>	39
<i>Don't Answer the Question</i>	39
<i>What's Behind the Question?</i>	39
<i>Common Questions</i>	39
Make Them Remember You	42
Giving Thanks	42
Follow-up Calls	44
Second & Third Interviews	46
Evaluating a Job Offer	47
Negotiating the Terms	47
10 Tips for Great Interviews	49

Employers Want You

An Interview is . . .

. . . a standard part of the hiring process, because it's the quickest way for an employer to "get to know you" as a job applicant.

. . . your unique opportunity to have the employer's undivided attention. This is the time to persuasively communicate your strengths and demonstrate your potential value to the company.

. . . a *mutual* evaluation, where an employer can explore your skills and qualifications, and where you can get a better idea if the company and job are right for you.

More formally, an interview is a conversation in which two or more people can question, consult, or evaluate one another. It is, very simply, a two-way exchange on a subject of mutual interest.

Interviews may be used for a variety of reasons. Reporters conduct interviews with public officials, business executives, and movie stars. Marketing experts interview consumers in hopes of developing a more successful product. Even a first date can be considered an interview of sorts. But by far, the job interview is the most common and perhaps the most misunderstood — and feared — of all interviews types.

Your Chance to Shine

Most employment decisions are based on information obtained in job interviews. It is during the interview process that an

employer determines whether you meet the job specifications, possess the personal characteristics necessary to get along with coworkers, and project the image desired by the company. How you present yourself in the first interview is often more important than your experience and qualifications.

Two dominant themes prevail in most interviews. Interviewers want to see if you: 1) have the right attitude and 2) possess certain personal characteristics — in addition to qualifying skills — that will enable you to succeed in the job. While much of the interview will be devoted to discussing your employment background, the meeting will also be used to explore your communication skills and personality. The employer will evaluate your attitude toward work, perhaps through your comments about previous employment. You will also be asked questions designed to determine your attitude toward former superiors and coworkers.

Interviewers will attempt to learn what motivates you, what your short- and long-term goals are, and how you plan to reach them. Part of the interview may be structured to evaluate how you would react to unusual problems or stressful situations.

Your primary objective in the interview is to convince the employer that you are right for the job. Therefore, strive to make a good first impression. From the moment you meet, expect that everything about you is being recorded in

This is the time to persuasively communicate your strengths and demonstrate your potential value to the company.

Your primary objective in the interview is to convince the employer that you are right for the job.

Your second objective in the interview is to determine if this is the right employment opportunity for you.

the mind of the interviewer, including your handshake, attire, demeanor, and everything you say. Interviewing involves both verbal and nonverbal communication, and to an experienced interviewer, your body language can be just as telling as your verbal presentation.

Your second objective in the interview is to determine if this is the right employment opportunity for *you*. Although you should come to the interview having already researched the company and the position, it is impossible to know everything before you sit down with the interviewer. Asking the appropriate questions at the proper time will help you learn more about the company, as well as your prospective employer's goals for the position, the department, and the organization as a whole.

As you gather more details about the company and the position, consider your own compatibility with the job and the company's goals. You must be honest with yourself about your needs and values as well as your capabilities for performing the duties and responsibilities of the job. Once you accept a position, you become a part of all that the company represents. The company has a right to expect you to reflect its image positively and professionally.

Understanding Your Interviewer

It is essential to understand the mind-set of the person sitting across the desk from you in an interview. When you know what a prospective employers is looking

for and what goals he has in mind, you will be more effective in giving him what he wants. Ultimately, understanding the employer's perspective will make it much easier to find a company whose goals align with yours, and therefore enable you to perform well in the interview process.

Of course, the reason an employer has called you in for a face-to-face meeting is that they think you look promising and they want to talk to you further about your ability to do the job, and see how you communicate your skills.

They are not out to trip you up. On the contrary, their time is valuable and they want to either confirm or dismiss their initial impression of you — that you would be a valuable asset to their organization.

It may surprise you to learn that most employers put as much into preparing for the interview as you do. They take time going over the questions they plan to ask

Embrace Change

The average American has been in his/her job for four years . . . a worker starting out in today's market will have five separate careers and twelve job changes in their lifetime . . . ten years from now, half of the population will be in jobs not yet invented. In this economy, job hunting is a continuous process. You must remain marketable and keep learning. Focus on what you can control. Plan to be the best at whatever you do. Invest in yourself. Look for ways to update your skills so you remain competitive.

Excerpted from "Overcoming Obstacles in Your Job Search," by Helen M. Scully. To view entire text, click on Article Archive at JobJournal.com.

to determine their relevance to the job. They pay close attention to their appearance and body language. They are concerned that the messages they give you are clear, credible, and consistent.

Simply put, they already like you based on your resume and they want you to like them! After all, if they should determine that you are the right person for the job, the last thing they would want is for you to turn around and decide you don't want to work for them.

First Impressions Count

The old adage 'time is money' certainly applies to the recruitment process. Companies cannot afford to take the time to interview every applicant that comes their way. Most hiring managers have deadlines to meet, meetings to attend, employees to supervise, reports to review, etc., etc., and they must fit the recruiting process in with their day-to-day responsibilities. Their time is precious, and interviews are granted only upon careful consideration.

Employers would like to think that their hiring selections are all based on logical and accurate assessments of candidates, but the truth of the matter is that due to time constraints and basic human nature, the employment decision is often intuitive and emotional.

Interviewers can usually tell within the first few minutes of the meeting if you are likely to meet the criteria of what they're looking for. Studies have shown that the majority of an interviewer's impression is experienced before the candidate has uttered a single

word. It is not because they regard appearance as more important than substance. They are just so accustomed to meeting and quickly evaluating others that such judgments happen spontaneously and without conscious thought.

Unquestionably, your success in impressing the interviewer hinges on how well you present yourself within the first few minutes. Your appearance and attitude are a major part of the first impression. When you meet, the interviewer may very well be thinking, "Does this candidate look and act like the kind of person I would want to work with?"

At first glance, a sophisticated interviewer will glean a wealth of information simply from how you dress. Your attire can be perceived as an indication of your style, attitude, confidence, creativity, and even your level of aggressiveness. As a form of nonverbal communication, your appearance may be viewed as a strength or a weakness. It is up to you to make sure it is an asset.

Getting to Know You

An interview is not so much about your qualifications (the resume clarifies much of that) as it is about you as a human being. After all, people hire people. The interviewer will be listening to how you communicate your attributes, the way you convey your abilities, and whether you express enthusiasm about working for the company. The importance of good communication skills cannot be overemphasized, because most hiring decisions are based on what a candidate says during an interview.

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What you communicate to the employer will influence how he or she relates to you — both in the interview, and possibly even on the job if you are hired. Developing a professional rapport with the interviewer will set the tone for a solid working relationship.

The candidate most likely to be hired is the one deemed manageable, professional, a team player, and compatible with the job and the organizational philosophy.

Quantify Your Qualities

Interviewers don't want to hear you talk only about the responsibilities of your last position; that tells them nothing about how you actually handled the work. They want to hear about accomplishments, special assignments, promotions, awards, or other indications that you did your job well.

Quantify your accomplishments in previous positions. Express your successes in terms of money (sales volume, revenue increases), time, production levels, percentage of market share, etc. For example: "For the past two years, I have received XYZ Company's annual 'Golden Lasso' award for bringing in the most new accounts. In the last 12 months I exceeded my goals by an average of 35 percent, securing 62 new accounts worth over \$115,000 in annual revenue."

Or, a job seeker may say, "My greatest strength is my organizational skills. Last year, I reorganized billing procedures for the accounting department. The streamlined process resulted in a time savings

for the department of about 20 percent." When interviewers hear you discuss your previous job on these terms, they will know that you are the type of employee whose efforts truly contribute to making an organization better.

Prove You're the One to Hire

Employers engage in the interview process with the hope of finding the best qualified candidate as quickly as possible. You're there because the company's evaluation of your resume and/or application has indicated you could be the right person for the job.

But finding the right fit for a particular position can be a grueling process — for everyone involved. You might wonder, "If an employer really wants to hire me, why are interviews so stressful?"

While not all interviewers are skilled in making candidates feel comfortable in an interview, the perceived adversarial relationship that occasionally develops between interviewer and applicant is often a result of an unprepared or overly defensive candidate.

Take advantage of the fact that interviewers really *do* want to hire you. Do not disappoint them by coming unprepared and not articulating your qualifications well enough to convince them that you are indeed the one for the job. When you are in the hot seat, remember that the employer is hoping *you* are the right person for the job. This is your opportunity to prove to the company that they were right about you!

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What Employers Look For

Have you considered what an employer may want out of a new hire? By looking at the process through a hiring manager's eyes, you'll gain valuable insight into what drives a hiring decision. Employ this perspective when interviewing, and throughout the entire job-search process, and you may gain a winning edge.

Consider a hypothetical example. Jeff, a personnel manager, puts an ad in the local paper for an accountant, listing the minimum qualifications required. He receives 120 resumes over a two-week period. He spends about thirty seconds scanning each resume to quickly determine whether the individual has the basic skills and experience, as listed in the ad. About 60 are rejected immediately.

Now he is down to 60, but he only

plans to interview about ten candidates. Who will he reject? This is when Jeff's job starts to get tough.

He's under a great deal of pressure to hire the right person. Jeff's raises and promotions are based on his ability to hire people who will be productive for years to come. He's already spent hundreds, maybe even thousands advertising the position. Department heads will ultimately judge him on his ability to pick the right person — and let his boss know if he doesn't. The company may invest thousands training the new hire, and really doesn't want to find they've wasted it on a person that fails to pass muster. Or worse, the new hire may gum up the works through incompetence (undetected in the hiring process) that costs the company a fortune. Every day, Jeff reads news accounts of someone who used extremely bad judgement: sexual harassment, embezzlement, industrial accidents, corporate sabotage, business blunders that cost millions. For each story, he knows there is a hiring manager with knots in his stomach, ruing the day he ever hired that troublemaker. It's a wonder he sleeps at night.

How does Jeff whittle the pile of 60 resumes down to ten? And by the same measure, how will he select the ideal candidate from the ten he interviews?

Jeff begins by looking for a set of telling traits that every ideal employee has, no matter the position. They include:

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Who Gets Laid Off, Even in Good Times:

Kennedy's Career Strategist, a bimonthly newsletter, polled HR experts to create a composite of the worker most likely to be laid off even in prosperous times. Pinkslip-prone workers tended to resist technological advances; were often "disconnected" emotionally from work; were doomsayers about the company; were often disliked by peers and subordinates; and often had a major work screw-up in their past. "If you are politically disconnected or in political trouble with your boss and/or the grapevine, you'd better mend fences or think about moving — even if your company has just completed a record quarter," the *Strategist* concludes.

Employees who simply aren't liked will become isolated, disenchanted with their jobs, and may ultimately quit — or have to be let go.

Integrity

Employees with integrity have a moral compass that quietly guides them through the day in making those tiny decisions of right and wrong. They do the right thing even when there may not be a tangible payoff — putting in a few extra hours for the good of the organization, helping out a coworker without expecting anything in return, or knowing when those little distractions — water-cooler chit chats, personal e-mails and calls — get in the way of the job. People with integrity quickly gain their supervisor's trust and are often rewarded with increased latitude in their jobs. When interviewing candidates, Jeff will ask questions about information already listed on resumes. Inconsistent answers could mean a candidate is lying — obviously raising concerns about integrity.

Likability

Even in the most institutional of jobs, people skills play a role. Employees who simply aren't liked will become isolated, disenchanted with their jobs, and may ultimately quit — or have to be let go. They are less likely to be team players, which may cause animosity among others around them. They may have poor communication skills that could cause mixed messages resulting in bad business moves. These scenarios — and countless others — could adversely affect the bottom line. The interview is the ideal venue for assessing a candidate's likability.

Stability

Jeff will review a candidate's employment history to help determine stability. Stable employees can be expected to stick with an employer for a number of years, and be clear and predictable in their work. But many factors could affect that steadiness, causing the individual to quit. Common examples include family considerations such as a spouse's career or child care issues. (Jeff may try to ask questions to determine if these factors may influence a candidate's stability, however direct questioning about a person's marital status or plans to start a family are illegal.)

Instability can also come from within: Some people are simply unhappy wherever they work and tend to bounce from job to job often. Other forms of instability are more lethal — the effects of domestic violence or drug and alcohol abuse can spill over into the workplace. Tardiness, absenteeism, and serious problems on the job often ensue.

Adaptability

With today's constant fluctuations in the business cycle, employees with adaptability can survive layoffs, and thrive during the good times. While major change often negatively affects morale, employees who easily accept it and learn new skills or routines will experience less stress than those who are more set in their ways. Jeff, like hiring managers in other small companies, is particularly fond of workers with adaptability, as job

Stable employees can be expected to stick with an employer for a number of years, and be clear and predictable in their work.

shifts are more common in these organizations. He also recognizes that no matter how well a person does in a job, if they are deemed as unable to accept change, they won't get promoted.

Common Sense

Common sense is more noticeable for its absence than its presence. Employees who lack it miss the "big picture," and make errors when prioritizing projects, managing time or making smart decisions. Jeff looks for clues for the lack of common sense when evaluating job candidates. Are resumes error-free? Does the candidate arrive for the interview on time and dress properly? Do they treat support staffers such as the receptionist with courtesy? Are they gracious and professional throughout the meeting? These seemingly minor issues go a long way towards determining common sense.

Compatibility

Every organization has a personality, and it influences everything from the corporate mission to the amount of overtime people are expected to put in. While Jeff doesn't expect candidates to match the corporate culture exactly, he knows that those on a completely different plane will either eventually quit or be cut loose. He looks at the "Objectives" section of a resume to find out if the candidate's goals line up with what his company needs. During the interview, he asks questions regarding personal goals and working style to help determine a candidate's fit with the organization.

The Selection Process

Jeff — and just about every other person responsible for making hiring decisions — will look for these traits throughout the evaluation process and spend a great deal of effort determining whether the remaining candidates possess these qualities. He reviews the remaining resumes for indications of the traits, rejects some for frequent job changes, others for sloppiness, and so on, until the pile is down to a manageable 20. He then conducts brief phone interviews and notes that a few have already found new jobs, some are unfriendly, while others are revealed to have lied on their resume. After rejecting those, he ends up with 10 he meets with face-to-face. Jeff's interview process includes skill and personality testing, which spotlights candidates who may not fit with the corporate culture. While he doesn't get the perfect person (she may not even exist!), he eventually hires Jill, a young woman that demonstrates she possesses more of the quality and compatibility traits than any other candidate. Jeff sleeps soundly that night.

Take a close look at how you might fare in Jeff's recruitment process, paying particular attention to the areas you might be deficient in. While you can't change who you are, you can put your best foot forward during the interview by presenting yourself in a way that minimizes the negatives traits and highlights the strong ones. And then exhibit these qualities every day once you are hired. If you do, your career will go far.

While you can't change who you are, you can "put your best foot forward" in presenting yourself in a way that minimizes these negatives and highlights the strong ones.

Common sense is more noticeable for its absence than its presence.

Interview Formats

The importance of doing well in the preliminary interview should be obvious.

Job interviews can occur in many settings and circumstances, each requiring a different type of preparation. With the exception of the informational interview, the main goal of the interviewer is to size you up to determine if you should continue to the next level of screening. And that means *your* goal is to present yourself as an applicant worthy of closer inspection and, eventually, as a candidate worthy of a job offer.

Preliminary Interviews

The purpose of the preliminary screening interview is to review your qualifications and see if they hold up against the requirements of the job. Usually brief (from 15 minutes to an hour long), it is designed to compare the quality of your experience and background with the needs of the company.

This type of interview is often conducted after the resume has been screened as “acceptable” but there are still a great number of applicants who meet the basic qualifications for the position. The person performing the interview is usually from the personnel department or the department with the vacancy. She may not be the same person who screened your resume, so you may have to start fresh with her by making a second good “first impression.”

The importance of doing well in this preliminary interview should be obvious. It is the first major hurdle on the way to serious consideration for employment.

Telephone Interviews

Not all preliminary interviews are conducted in person. Many companies complete the initial screening process by telephone in order to save time that might be wasted on formal meetings with unqualified candidates. Phone interviews enable employers to limit in-person interviews to only the most-qualified applicants.

Take telephone interviews seriously. Find a quiet place to talk, away from distractions such as kids or TV. Be prepared to answer questions with the same thoroughness you would use in a face-to-face interview. Be sure to present yourself in the best possible manner; the same enthusiasm you would show in an in-person interview must come through over the phone. Smile and be positive; even though the interviewer won’t be able to see you, he or she will form a mental image of your expression from the sound and tone of your voice.

Video conferencing is sometimes used in lieu of telephone screening or in-person interviews, especially in cases of long-distance recruitment. If you are invited to participate in a video-conferencing interview, treat it as you would an in-person interview. And, be prepared to speak with more than one interviewer during the session.

The Formal Interview

Otherwise known as the traditional interview, this is the employment

By the time you reach this stage you’ve undoubtedly made a favorable impression.

selection process used most by employers. By the time you reach this stage you've undoubtedly made a favorable impression on the hiring manager. It may have been your resume, or the way you responded to preliminary questions in a telephone interview. It's likely that you have already met the minimum requirements of the position, and the company wants to meet you so they can get a sense of your personality and what additional attributes you might bring to the job. In some cases, the hiring manager has already selected you as a finalist, and the interview is needed to confirm that you are an excellent potential hire for the job.

Behavioral Interviews

In addition to the standard fare of interview questions, you may be presented with a difficult situation or hypothetical scenario and asked how you would resolve the problem. Situational questions like these are often asked in *behavioral* interviews, where hiring managers attempt to evaluate your thinking style and problem-solving capabilities. Difficulties answering situational questions usually arise when the applicant is unprepared or unsure about the intent of an interviewer's question. Trying to respond with the "right" answer rather than with honesty can give the impression that something is being hidden, and the interviewer may get the feeling that the candidate is fabricating responses or masking his true nature. Admitting to a lack of knowledge makes a better impression than trying to

make up an answer. It's best simply to be yourself and allow your knowledge and experience to guide you in your approach to answering these kinds of questions.

Situational questions in interviews can be distressing, but candidates should never complain about the process or argue with the interviewer. Losing control will only demonstrate a lack of self-confidence in your abilities and an inability to keep cool under pressure — and the opportunity for the job could be lost.

Panel Interviews

The interviewer may ask you to meet with representatives from several departments together or separately as a way to get additional feedback and opinions on your qualifications. You may undergo a series of interviews with each member of a hiring team, or you may be evaluated by several managers at once in a *panel* interview. Sometimes, employers will place you at the head of a long table as a way of testing your ability to deal with stress and intimidation. More often, however, panel interviews are simply used as an efficient means of having you meet with several people whose input will be important in the final hiring decision.

Interviewers may be very organized and coordinated in their evaluation of you, or they might fire questions at you spontaneously and chaotically, even interrupting each other. You may not always have a chance to complete your responses, and you might even find yourself scrambling to keep up with the

Trying to respond with the "right" answer rather than the truth can give the impression that you're hiding something.

Losing control will only demonstrate a lack of self-confidence in your abilities.

discussion as interviewers quickly shift from topic to topic. This kind of rapid-fire approach in itself may be intended to test your composure when you're in the hot seat.

After the formal interview session, each interviewer will consult with the hiring manager. Any one of their impressions could make or break your candidacy for the position. Therefore, it is important to do your best to positively influence *each* member of the hiring team or panel.

Stress Interviews

The stress interview is a deliberate technique used by interviewers to see how applicants react to unexpected pressure. Employers are looking for candidates who can maintain their composure and think on their feet. This is particularly important for tough occupations like law enforcement, nursing and emergency services, and other public-safety related jobs. In its mildest form, such an interview might involve a tough situational question as described above. More complex stress interviews, in which candidates are intentionally put in awkward situations, are important to know about too, even though they are less common.

Stress interviews involve testing candidates in very indirect ways, without asking specific questions. For instance, you may be invited to sit in a chair that is unconventional for an interview setting, such as a rocking chair or a low lounge chair. How you sit in the chair — whether you shift and squirm, rock or

remain still — will be observed. Or, you could be offered coffee or water — in a leaky cup. In extreme cases, you might be placed in the middle of a staged “urgent” situation.

It's impossible to prepare for this type of interview, other than to expect the unexpected. While you can't anticipate the form a stress interview will take, you should be ready to handle surprises in a professional manner. Exhibiting outward calm and taking positive steps to resolve the situation, no matter how stressed you are, will enhance your chances of passing such a test.

Dining Interviews

In addition to screening for knowledge of the job, employers may attempt to assess your level of professional polish while gaining insight into your personality traits. What better way to achieve this than with a more relaxed meeting, such as over a meal? Don't be surprised, then, if an interviewer invites you to lunch or dinner.

As you might guess, this method of screening is often used to determine how polished your people skills are and how you might handle yourself with prospective clients.

An interviewee who drinks too much, badgers the waitress, makes crass or derogatory remarks to restaurant employees, or exhibits poor table manners can expect to receive a rejection letter. As the dining interview is often the final part of the screening process, it is important to be at your best and follow the interviewer's cues throughout the meal.

Employers may attempt to assess your level of professional polish. What better way than over a more relaxed meeting, such a meal?

How you sit in the chair — whether you shift and squirm, rock or remain still — will be observed.

Ten Nevers of Lunch/Dinner Interviews:

1. Never order alcoholic beverages.
2. Never obsess over what to order. Doing so is a sign of indecisiveness.
3. Never overemphasize the food. You are there to learn more about the job and the people you hope to be working with, not to critique the restaurant.
4. Never treat restaurant personnel rudely or display excessive friendliness toward them (such as calling a server “honey,” “sweetie,” or “buddy”).
5. Never smoke during the meal, even if it is legal to do so.
6. Never display poor table manners (i.e., blowing nose in napkin, slurping food, talking with your mouth full). To make it easier on yourself, avoid ordering messy foods like ribs, shellfish in the shell, or chicken wings.
7. Never overindulge in anything, such as taking too much bread or insisting on a doggie bag.
8. Never treat the employer as a familiar friend. Remember, you are still being evaluated.
9. Never season food without first tasting it. The employer may see this as an indication that you lack professional judgment skills because you do not examine a situation before acting.
10. Never forget why you’re there.

On-the-Spot Interviews

Remember that every encounter with a prospective employer — even if you’re a walk-in candidate picking up an application — is a potential interview. Your chance of having such an interview is

good if you’re trying to get an entry-level job or if the position is in a service field such as retail or food service. If you’re a first-time job seeker applying in person at the local fast-food restaurant, you may be evaluated beginning the moment you walk in the door. Whether it’s the shift supervisor or store manager who gives you an application to fill out, they are already sizing you up to determine if you might be a good employee.

As a walk-in candidate you may be asked to do more than simply fill out the application to demonstrate your interest in the job. The hiring manager might want you to sit down and chat a few minutes right then and there. It goes without saying that you should be dressed neatly, well-groomed (especially for a job in an eating establishment), and prepared to talk a little about yourself and your availability to work. If you’re in school, have your class schedule handy in case the employer wants to discuss possible shifts that you could work.

Creative hiring managers might even ask you to prove your motivation to work for them, such as by memorizing some menu or store items and pricing before returning with your completed application. Such strategies are simply an employer’s way of ensuring that you’re responsible, capable, and that you’ll stick around for a while if he or she puts the time into training you.

Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are meetings arranged by jobseekers and career-changers to learn more about a particular

Employers want to ensure that you’re responsible, reliable, and that you’ll stick around for a while.

industry or occupation. They are *not* job interviews; the primary purpose of these meetings is to collect information, not to discuss employment with the company. To set up an informational interview,

there need not be any job opening nor even any interest in working for a particular company. These meetings should be used to discover helpful job-search information and expand your

Recipe for a Successful Informational Interview

How do you go about conducting informational interviews?

First, find a knowledgeable person who is now doing what you want to do. Phone her and introduce yourself as someone interested in the field, and invite her to lunch or coffee to discuss the industry.

Example: *Hello Ms. Smith, my name is John Duncan. I understand that you are the public relations manager for XYZ Company. I've been thinking about getting into this field, and I am looking for someone who can give me good information about the industry from the inside. Would it be possible for me to buy you lunch to discuss or share ideas on this subject? When would be a good time for you?*

Always give your contact the choice of when and where to meet — an informational session should be at the professional's convenience, not yours. If they are unable to talk with you, see if they could suggest someone else for you to contact.

Ask the interviewee for no more than 45 minutes. Keeping your interview brief and to the point will demonstrate

professionalism and an appreciation for the value of their time. Your goal is to get information that will help you confirm your professional goals and your interest in the field.

Don't be reluctant to contact key people for information. Your request for advice will most likely be viewed as nonthreatening and flattering to the information giver. Their insights could mean the difference between conducting an informed job search and suffering the consequences of looking for work with blinders on. There's also the possibility that an informational interview could be with someone who may, at a later date, consider you for a job.

The most important part of informational interviewing is being prepared to ask the right questions. Come to the meeting only after researching the industry and learning as much as you can about the profession. Some of the questions you might ask are:

- What kinds of background or experience transition best into this field?
- What are some of the unique advantages and disadvantages of being in this career?

- Do you see the industry as being in a period of growth or decline? Why?
- What are the requirements to qualify for a (position title) job in your company?

Questions should be open-ended (i.e. questions that elicit an explanation). Inquiries that only generate a yes or no answer will not provide you with very much information.

Be a good listener, but make sure you move the conversation along and do not get stuck on any one question. Similarly, do not allow yourself to go off on any tangents in the discussion. Completing your informational interview in a timely manner (and if the meeting is over coffee or lunch, paying for your guest) is a simple courtesy to the person who is volunteering his or her time to assist you.

Before you leave the interview, mention that you are available and request that if the person hears of any job opportunities for someone with your interests and abilities, to please let you know. Thank the person for his or her time and send a thank-you note within 48 hours of completing the interview.

Informational interviews are a great way to clear up career questions and build a network of contacts.

network. In these meetings, you are seeking to:

- Learn about industry trends and required skills for the career you are considering.
- Develop your one-on-one interviewing skills.
- Gain new contacts for your job-search network.
- Keep in touch with the industry so you will be aware of important developments and possible job leads.

Informational interviews are a great way to clear up career questions and build a network of contacts in the industry — contacts that can help you tap into the

“hidden” market of unannounced and unadvertised jobs. The more you know about your field of interest before you go on “real” job interviews, the more successful you will be.

While there is an implied understanding that it is not in any way a real job interview, realize that while you’re getting information from them, they’re getting information on you: Your skills, experience and career goals. Now that they know you, they may feel more comfortable either giving you names of people they know, or passing your name on to their contacts. This is networking at its basic level, and the best way to get the job that fits your career goals.

Prepare to Impress

Preparation is the key to getting a job. If you feel that you are truly prepared for the interview, you are less likely to be tripped up by feelings of nervousness and uncertainty that foil the efforts of many applicants.

A good interview has much of the same rhythm and flow as a good conversation. To ensure the best chances of making a positive connection with the interviewer, your preparation should be on both informational and emotional levels. In other words, you must acquire information about the position and the company, develop and practice a strategy to use that information to your advantage, and then psych yourself up so you will be able to present yourself as the perfect candidate for the job.

Plan for the Process

Successfully making a job transition requires careful planning, and the sooner you begin preparing for the job-search and interview process, the better. Ideally, you began thinking about your next step *before* leaving your current position. But if you have already left your job, a few hours of preparation will get your job hunt on track.

The first step in the planning process is to conduct a self-assessment and determine how best to meet your present and future goals. Analyze your skills and your ambitions. The more you know about yourself, the more likely you are to make wise decisions on your way toward realizing your goals.

The next step is to create a file of pertinent information and copies of documents that you will need to conduct a successful job search: letters of commendation, performance evaluations, licenses, diplomas, naturalization or work eligibility papers, recommendation letters, and samples of your work. Make it a habit to update this file on a regular basis, even if you are happily employed.

Update your resume. It will be one of your most important tools in selling your skills and abilities to employers. If possible, share your new resume with a respected friend or colleague who will feel comfortable in offering suggestions to you. Feedback from a person who is accustomed to reviewing resumes can help avoid costly mistakes or errors.

Focus on developing and maintaining a network of people in your industry. They can help you stay informed and advance your job search. Solicit their advice and let them know what kind of job opportunities you are seeking. One of these contacts may even be able to open a back door to your next job.

Prepare a list of target companies that are most likely to meet your needs and enable you to achieve your goals.

Next, contact the individuals you plan to use for references. In most interview situations or on applications, you'll be asked for personal referrals. It's best to list other professionals — preferably people who have worked with you at some point and can vouch for your work ethic. If your experience is limited and

The more you know about yourself, the more likely you are to make wise decisions on your way toward realizing your goals.

A good interview has much of the same rhythm and flow as a good conversation.

Be sure to maintain good relationships with company personnel while in your current position.

you have only personal references, select those who have known you many years and can confirm your good character. Be sure to contact these people in advance and obtain permission to use their names. Tell them you will be seeking new employment and alert them to the possibility that they will be contacted by prospective employers. Confirm their current address and telephone information, and carry a list of these personal and business references with you to the interview.

You should also verify that previous employers will give you positive references upon inquiries from future prospective employers. If you're on good terms with former bosses, you can simply call and ask. Or, you might enlist the services of an employment investigations firm. If previous employers require a written release from you in order to give out a reference, be sure the company has your completed form on file before you embark on your job search.

Finally, be sure to maintain good relationships with company personnel while in your current position. Keep a good rapport with your boss, supervisor, and co-workers — once you have announced your departure, ask them if they will provide you with good references. Make a dignified and graceful exit, making sure you see all unfinished projects through to completion and/or arrange for an orderly transfer of responsibilities to your successor. The company you are leaving is likely to play an important role in your upcoming job search. Be careful not to burn any bridges.

If less-than-ideal circumstances prevail and you cannot leave your present job on good terms, then leave as quietly as possible. Give appropriate notice within the expected time period, and leave on the date agreed upon.

Know Yourself

The best way to begin assessing your own background is by developing a summary of your qualifications, from academic achievements to professional experience. Obviously, your resume would be a good source, but it is only a starting point. There is far more about you than can fit on a sheet or two of paper. Everything counts here, including internships, volunteer work, and community activities. Reviewing your background will also help you compile the data that will most

How well do you *really* know yourself?

EDUCATION/TRAINING BACKGROUND

- Institutions attended
- Majors, minors
- Diplomas, degrees, honors received
- Licenses, certificates
- Special relevant courses completed
- Memberships in special organizations or clubs
- Continuing education courses
- Self-study activities

WORK HISTORY, RELATED EXPERIENCE

- Job titles (including internships, volunteer work, school and community activities)
- Description of duties
- Accomplishments and achievements
- Awards or special recognitions
- How each job or activity relates to your career goals

likely be asked for in a written application and/or the interview itself.

Additionally, take inventory of all the skills you have developed throughout your career, including computer experience, clerical, sales, customer service, public speaking, technical, management, and other skills.

After compiling your background information, relate as much of it as possible to the positions you are seeking. A thorough review will help clarify how your background applies to your target jobs.

Uncover Opportunities

When gearing up to pursue any new job, learn as much as possible about the organization and the position. By doing some background research, you will appear more knowledgeable and be better able to plan how you should present yourself in the interview. You will have a clearer understanding of which areas of your education and experience you should emphasize and which areas might not be as relevant.

Specific areas to research include the company's products, services, size, mission, financial condition, recent accomplishments, competition, marketing and advertising strategies, etc. General information about the company may be obtained from a variety of sources:

The Internet

The Internet offers an infinite source of business and job market information because it is being updated continuously — even as you read this. If you know the names of the companies you're interested

in, you can search for information and/or job listings posted by them. Either type in the employer's name directly, or use a search engine such as [Google](#), [Alta Vista](#) or [Yahoo](#), or multi-search sites such as [Lycos](#), [Metacrawler](#) and [Dogpile](#). Also check database directories like Dun's Market Identifiers USA, Hoover's and Business Database Plus. Career-related websites and even electronic job banks can be useful to learn more about specific companies as well as broaden your understanding of the industry in general. [Career Builder](#), [Monster](#), [Spheron](#), and [Hotjobs](#) are some sites to check out.

Company-produced Materials

To get a better feel for the company's philosophy, its products, and its reputation, read everything you can that the company publishes about itself: current advertisements, product literature, or promotional materials. Be sure to fully explore the company website; deep within you may find valuable information such as investor information or projects still in the planning stages. Although the organization's newsletters, sales summaries, and annual financial reports aren't always available to the general public, you might be able to get some of these materials if you know someone who works for the company. Or, simply try calling their human resources or public relations office.

Job Information Lines

If you are researching a large company, they may offer a public call-in line with recorded employment information.

Read everything you can that the company publishes about itself.

Take inventory of all the skills you have developed throughout your career.

Even a brief meeting with one of the company's employees could yield volumes of useful information

Detailed Job Descriptions

The help-wanted section of your newspaper will have both display and classified advertising with descriptions of job opportunities. Or you might try calling the company to see if you could stop by and pick up a detailed description of the position, its duties, and its requirements.

Articles

Newspaper, magazine, and trade publication articles about the organization may shed some light on their goals or upcoming employment needs.

Library Research

Go to the local public library and do a little sleuthing. Use the Internet, computerized databases, or the Readers' Guide to Periodicals to seek out articles that might mention the company and its activities. Also, try searching for the latest information specific to the industry.

Informational Interviews

Even a brief meeting with one of the company's employees could yield volumes of useful information about the job, the organization and the corporate culture. Is this the right company for you? Will you fit in? You might also gain valuable insights from speaking with someone at another company who has a job similar to the one you're seeking. For more on [informational interviews](#), see that section in the chapter, "Interview Formats."

The Interviewer

What should you do if the information you have gathered thus far doesn't tell you much? One last information source

not to be overlooked is the interviewer (who, unfortunately, is not usually available as a pre-interview resource). Of course, this person knows more than anyone else about what he or she is looking for in an employee. With this in mind, try early on in the meeting to get the interviewer to discuss what he or she wants and what the job actually requires. If the employer mentions a facet of the job that you were unaware of, ask about it — then illustrate how well you could perform that job duty.

Being Well Prepared

Doing your research beforehand will give you a psychological edge in the meeting, even if you never work the information you learned into the conversation. When you are thoroughly prepared, you will be relaxed and confident, allowing you to more effectively communicate your intentions and expectations to the interviewer. You'll be able to focus on your employment goals as you convince the interviewer that your experience fits the company's needs. Employers want people who are focused and who can clearly state their goals.

The confidence instilled by being well prepared has other benefits as well. You may feel relaxed enough to put the interviewer at ease with relevant "small talk" which helps to move the conversation along and makes the meeting run smoothly. Being on top of your game relieves tension and stress. You will feel as though you have more control over the interview process. You will be able to replace awkward silences with intelligent questions. You become more interesting and more engaging. Your unique personality can shine through, helping to set you apart from other candidates.

Being on top of your game relieves tension and stress. You will feel as though you have more control over the interview process.

Questions & Answers

The heart of an interview is the questions — the ones you answer as well as those you ask. While you can't anticipate every question an you might be asked during an interview, you can plan for those most likely to be asked, as well as formulate strategies for answering unanticipated queries.

Use Your Research

In the previous chapter, You learned the importance of doing research prior to an interview. Once in the meeting, let the employer know you've done your homework. Your in-depth research enables you to ask more relevant and interesting questions, and helps you determine the true nature of the interviewer's questions and therefore craft your answers accordingly.

For example, let's say your research led you to a trade magazine article that

mentioned sales statistics for the company you're courting and several of its competitors. And, in an informational interview with a company employee, you learned that the firm is hoping to hire a manager who can help improve the sagging sales of a certain product line.

Armed with this information, you can plan some of your interview responses and inquiries so that the employer will recognize you as a knowledgeable, outstanding candidate. In this case, you would be certain to discuss how your sales and marketing background will help the company meet its goals. The idea is to focus the interview discussion on the reasons why you are a great candidate.

Always gear your statements to meeting the employer's needs. That means identifying how your skills fit the company's needs and then conveying this information in a manner that leaves the employer with no doubt that you are the best person for the job.

Your in-depth research enables you to ask more relevant and interesting questions.

HANDLING TOUGH QUESTIONS

Why should I hire you?

Market yourself. Talk about your achievements, awards and promotions, but don't take credit for things you don't deserve or claim experience you don't have. Show how you can help the employer make more money by improving efficiency, reducing costs, increasing sales or solving problems. Present your skills and experience in a direct, confident way. Show your portfolio, which can include concrete examples of your work.

Excerpted from "In the Eye of the Interview" by Carole Kanchier. To view entire text, click on Article Archive at JobJournal.com.

Anticipate Questions

By anticipating likely questions, you will be better prepared with answers that reflect your strengths and minimize your weaknesses.

Even if you have little work experience, you can expect to be asked questions about how your background, education, and interests will relate to the job. Reviewing your skills and accomplishments and analyzing how they are suitable to the job you seek will make it much easier to answer questions effectively.

When answering interview questions, some general rules to remember are:

- Always answer honestly.
- Stick to the topic.
- Do not volunteer information unrelated to the question.
- Always steer the conversation toward your background and qualifications.
- Emphasize what you can do for the company, not what the company can do for you.
- Never speak negatively about your former employer.
- Do not make the interviewer think you are desperate for just any job.

HANDLING TOUGH QUESTIONS

What Are Your Strengths & Weaknesses?

One of the interviewer's primary goals is to identify your strengths and weaknesses.

In asking about your weaknesses, the interviewer is trying to determine whether your shortcomings will interfere with your ability to get the job done. Of course, you should not bring up any weaknesses unless he presses you to do so.

Learn to recognize questions and inquiries that are geared toward revealing weaknesses. Rarely will a sophisticated interviewer come right out and say, "So, tell me about your greatest weakness." On the contrary, good interviewers will probe more subtly by asking about job duties you didn't like or projects you've had difficulty with.

How can you acknowledge weaknesses without sabotaging your candidacy for the job? One approach is to try to identify a weakness that is really a strength — a so-called "quality problem." You might explain that you like to do a good job and you are actually something of a perfectionist, and consequently, you are not always as patient with others as you could be. For a position where attention to detail takes precedence over close teamwork, this approach would likely be effective.

Another avenue would be to cite a weakness that is not really relevant to the job in question. For example, a salesperson might say, "I've never been very good with my hands or complex math — that's why I chose a career in sales. I feel it takes advantage of my strengths in communication

and customer service." This strategy can work brilliantly, especially when it provides the opportunity to reiterate key skills and strengths you know the employer is seeking.

Of course, savvy interviewers know jobseekers will anticipate and prepare for such questions. They even expect to hear well-rehearsed responses. To get a more "honest," spontaneous response, they may press you further and ask you to cite an additional weakness, or one that is more closely related to the work in question.

Again, you can prepare for this. You might focus on a weakness that would indeed compromise your ability to do an exceptional job, and then clarify what you've done to address that underdeveloped skill. The sales candidate might reply: "My greatest weakness has always been an inability to comfortably address large groups of people, but I completed a public speaking course last fall and since then, I have felt much better about it and my sales have reflected it."

Interviewers will listen carefully to your responses in an effort to hear "between the lines" and glean additional insights to your true character. Your ability to come off as genuine is almost as important as your accomplishments.

In asking about your *strengths*, interviewers are not only trying to see how your skills will apply to the job (and how you will fit into the work environment), they're also paying attention to how you present your accomplishments as well as how you view yourself.

Developing responses in anticipation of likely questions will enable you to put the best possible spin on your answers.

To prepare for the interview, rehearse your answers to these typical questions:

Education

- Describe your educational background.
- Why did you attend _____ University (College or School)?
- Why did you major in _____?
- What leadership positions did you hold?
- What courses did you like best? Least? Why?
- What was the hardest part of your college years?
- Do you plan to further your education?

Work Experience

- What were your major achievements in each of your past jobs?
- Have you ever been fired? If so, why?
- Which job did you enjoy most? Why?
- What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- Can you work under pressure? Describe a stressful situation and how you handled it.
- What major problems have you encountered and how have you dealt with them?
- Why have you changed jobs so frequently?
- Why are you leaving your present position?
- Describe a typical workday at your last job.

Career Goals/Personal

- What is your career objective?
- If hired, how long will you stay with our company?
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- What do you hope to be doing five years from now?
- Why do you want to make a career change?
- What would be an ideal job for you?
- How would you feel about relocating, traveling, working overtime, or spending weekends in the office?
- How would you improve our operations?
- What other jobs and companies are you considering?
- When would you be ready to begin work?

HANDLING TOUGH QUESTIONS

Why do you want this job?

Employers want someone who's motivated to do a particular kind of job with their company because this usually ensures long-term commitment. They don't want someone who is seeking any job anywhere.

Know why you're a good match for the position. Show how your interests, skills, accomplishments, special training, credentials, goals and other qualities relate to the position. Explain why you want to work for this company. Know its mission.

Excerpted from "In the Eye of the Interview" by Carole Kanchier. To view entire text, click on Article Archive at JobJournal.com.

HANDLING TOUGH QUESTIONS

What salary do you expect?

Never discuss salary until you're offered the position. Once you expose your expectations, you're less efficient at negotiating your value. If salary comes up, say: "Because I'm really interested in the job, my salary would be negotiable."

Many candidates are dismissed prematurely because they state an excessively low or high salary. Defer the question politely. Then, when the timing is right, maneuver the interviewer into revealing the starting salary.

Research going salary ranges for similar positions in comparable organizations. Think in terms of a broad salary range. Begin with their probable range and end a bit above your salary expectations.

Never refuse a job or salary offer on the spot. Think about it. Instead of rejecting a given salary, say: "That's lower than I had in mind, but since I want this position I'll accept this. When will there be a performance review with a salary increase?"

Excerpted from "In the Eye of the Interview" by Carole Kanchier. To view entire text, click on Article Archive at JobJournal.com.

Developing responses in anticipation of likely questions will enable you to put the best possible spin on your answers. But you should avoid the appearance of giving a canned response, even if the question is one you've already thought about.

Practice until you can deliver your responses smoothly and positively, tying in all relevant aspects of your background where appropriate. Preparation and practice are key to feeling confident. And confidence will enable you to interview successfully.

Ask Some Questions of Your Own

Most jobseekers fail to realize how much they are judged by the questions they ask, and don't think about queries they'd like to pose. But candidates who prepare a mental list of queries prior to the interview have a competitive edge.

Asking questions shows you are interested and that you care, and showcases your communication skills. And of course, should you be offered the job, the answers can help you decide whether or not to accept it.

Questioning Etiquette

There are appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask during an interview. Here are some guidelines.

- You may ask questions about growth and advancement opportunities within the company, but be careful you don't give the impression that you're really interested in a position other than the one you're applying for. In preliminary interviews, especially, hiring managers will be sensitive to queries about promotions or career transitions within the organization, since their goal is to successfully fill the current job with a candidate who will stay in that position for some time.
- Do not inquire about salary, vacation, or trivialities such as dress code or length of the lunch break. Questions of this nature give the interviewer the impression that the jobseeker is more

Do not inquire about salary, vacation, or trivialities such as dress code or length of the lunch break.

You may ask about the company's priorities and future plans.

interested in benefits than in benefiting the company. Let the interviewer broach these subjects first.

- You may ask about the company's priorities and future plans. Questions of this nature give you an opportunity to express your interest in developing a long-term relationship with the organization, as well as show how you might help the company reach its goals.
- Do not ask questions about a company's problem areas, unless you relate it to your future career goals. For instance, avoid talk about the company's problems in a recent takeover, bankruptcy, or stock rating unless it can be presented in a positive manner or can be related to your career goal and desire to stay with the company over a long period.
- You may ask questions about training opportunities, the frequency of performance evaluations, and reporting relationships.
- Do not ask inappropriate questions about obscure facts that no one in the

company can answer at the time of the interview, such as "How many french fries did the company sell last year worldwide?" Some applicants mistakenly think that they'll make a better impression by asking such questions. If the interviewer is unable to answer your trivia question, it may be embarrassing and cause him or her to think less of you as a job candidate.

- You may ask (however delicately) questions about problem areas associated with the position you are seeking. This line of question demonstrates that you are serious about the position, and you are reasonable enough to acknowledge that no job is without its liabilities. The answer will help you gauge if this is a growth position or a job with a history of problems. Questions you might ask include, "What happened to the person who previously held the position?" "How long was that person in the job?" "What have been the toughest challenges of the position?" "What are your expectations for this position?"

Do not ask questions about a company's problem areas, unless you relate it to your future career goals.

Live, in Person

Psyching Yourself Up

Congratulations! You've got an interview. You will soon find yourself face-to-face with an individual or group of people you've never met before. As this is your first meeting, you'll want to make the best possible impression. You realize that this impression could mean the difference between a great job offer and a standard rejection letter. The pressure makes you nervous, and your nervousness grows into anxiety that threatens to jeopardize your performance at the interview. What can you do to relieve this anxiety?

Psyching yourself up for the interview involves several steps. First, try to think of the interview as an interesting experience rather than a traumatic ordeal. Here are other ways you can take some of the fear out of upcoming interviews:

- Remember that you are already a winner — you have won the interview. Think of this experience as the next step in an already successful journey.
- Realize that at least half the interview will be focused on you — and you know yourself better than anyone!
- Interviewers are nervous, too. Don't forget that the person across the desk from you is also filled with anticipation, hoping you will like the company.
- Look forward to learning from the interview and the interviewer. This is

not only an opportunity to determine whether or not the job is right for you, it's a chance to discover something new about yourself and your career goals.

- Think positive! Good things happen to positive people. Expect that this will be a positive experience and that some good result will come from the interview. Believe you have just as much of an opportunity to get the job as any other applicant. The employer would not be interviewing you if you did not possess the basic qualifications for the job.

Do your homework and research the company; this will boost your confidence level and give you something to talk about in the meeting. The more research you do, the more prepared you will feel

Think
positive!
Good things
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positive
people.

Getting There

One of the worst possible ways to start an interview is to arrive late, so make getting to the interview part of your preparation:

- Be sure you know how to get to the interview and how long the trip will take. If possible, make a dry run to the interview site. You may discover heavy traffic, parking difficulties, or an office complex with hundreds of suites.
- Put gas in your car the day beforehand. If you have to stop on the way or worry about whether you have enough gas to get there, your level of anxiety will increase and you will not be your most relaxed.
- Allow yourself more than enough time to make the trip.

The more questions you practice, the better your presentation will be

the day of the interview. For more information on researching an employer, see “Uncovering Opportunities” in the chapter, “Prepare to Impress.”

Finally, visualize yourself responding to the questions you will most likely be asked. Eliminating the unknown or unfamiliar will help to relieve stress and anxiety. The more questions you practice, the better your presentation will be and the stronger impression you will make during the interview.

What to Wear

Appearance is the first thing you communicate to others; before you ever open your mouth, your outward image has already spoken volumes. The interviewer may draw certain conclusions about your experience and competence — just by evaluating your general appearance.

Why does appearance matter so much, particularly if you are interviewing for a job that isn’t in the public eye? Consider what a dishevelled appearance might convey:

- That wrinkled shirt suggests you don’t plan ahead (*Didn’t he allow time to iron?*)

- Those scuffed shoes may mean you lack organizational skills (*Does she just toss them all into a big pile at home?*)
- That snag in your tie could indicate you lack attention to detail (*How could he not notice that?*)
- A coffee stain on your jacket hints that you might be clumsy or sloppy (*She has trouble hitting her mouth!*)

These are all traits that are important in any job. So whether you are interviewing for a position as a CEO or a construction worker, your appearance says a lot about your attributes. The interviewer may interpret from your attire something about your personality and style as well, so everything should be in style and well-coordinated.

Both men and women should invest in quality apparel for interviews. Buy the best you can afford. Stretch your dollar by shopping at good discount stores or by purchasing high-quality apparel on sale.

This is not to say that an incompetent but well-dressed person will get the job. Rather, a qualified person who dresses professionally will have an edge over otherwise qualified applicants who dress inappropriately.

Basic Rules for Men

Except for some blue-collar jobs (such as those in skilled trades), basic attire for men applying for professional positions is a suit and tie. Usually a taupe, navy, or gray suit is appropriate — standard neutral colors. Steer away from very dark brown or black. These colors convey authority and are sometimes overpower-

Before you ever open your mouth, your outward image has already spoken volumes.

The Scent of a Jobseeker

Be careful of the statement you make to the interviewer’s olfactory sense as well. While it’s acceptable to use a tiny dab of perfume or cologne for accent (and maybe to cover up any “nervousness” you may feel), an extra splash may be an assault to the nose of the interviewer, especially if he or she is allergic to such fragrances. They may cut the meeting short just to get away from you!

ing to the interviewer.

Select a suit that is relatively conservative and current in style. Choose appropriate accessories that coordinate well with the suit. Be sure your shoes are shined. When a nice suit is paired with unshined shoes, the interviewer will almost always notice the latter.

A less formal dress code is in effect for men who are interviewing for blue-collar jobs. Because the interviewer will be less concerned about the formality of your attire, you needn't go to the trouble of dressing in a suit (particularly if it makes you uncomfortable). But do not assume that you don't have to dress up at all for the interview simply because you won't have to worry about your appearance on the job. Just like your white-collar counterparts, the clothes you choose will make a big statement about you.

By all means, you should avoid three items of clothing in particular: t-shirts, jeans, and tennis shoes. A more impressive outfit might include a simple button-down oxford shirt, chino-style pants, smart-looking shoes, and possibly a casual tie.

No matter what kind of job you are applying for, you should pay attention to more than just your clothing. Remove earrings and wear clothes that cover up tattoos; you never know how an interviewer will feel about them. Your hair should be neatly trimmed and styled. Even for jobs in which longer hair is acceptable, it can only help your image if you keep the cut relatively tame. Do not overlook your fingernails — make sure they are clean and trimmed.

Long before your first interview, decide on one or two outfits that you like. Then set aside the entire ensemble in a special place in your closet to be used for interviewing only. (Don't be late because you couldn't find two matching socks or misplaced your favorite tie.)

Suggestive Clothing

For years one young jobseeker swore by her strategy to always wear a leggy skirt and her sexiest black nylons for job interviews and performance evaluations. She honestly had no idea what message she was conveying (especially in the situation of salary reviews!) and she always assumed the interviewer would be a man. One day, she interviewed with a woman . . . who didn't appreciate her exhibitionism.

Basic Rules for Women

Women should convey confidence and competence during an interview. While slacks may be appropriate in some instances, the traditional skirt suit is still preferred. Never wear shorts or short skirts, no matter how unconventional the environment seems. Also steer clear of long dangling earrings, flashy clothes, and after-five or leisure clothing. Your appearance should convey that you are there for one reason only: to interview and to talk about your qualifications.

Wear conservative shoes with closed toes. Remember that frills and ruffles tend to undermine a woman's credibility and her image as a serious professional.

The most widely accepted business outfit for women is a skirted suit or blazer and skirt. It used to be that navy

Your appearance should convey that you are there for one reason only: to interview and to talk about your qualifications.

was the only recommended color, but now it is perfectly acceptable to wear other muted, conservative colors that are flattering to your skin tone. Fabrics should be 100-percent natural fibers, such as silk, cotton, wool, and wool blends — not only because they wear well and drape nicely, but because they are breathable, making them cool and comfortable to wear even when you're in the hot seat.

If you are applying for a blue-collar job such as a factory line employee, construction worker, or stock clerk, you can adhere to less formal guidelines for dress. A neatly pressed dress, a coordinated blouse and skirt, or a nice pants-and-shirt combination would be acceptable attire.

Bring the Right Stuff

Be prepared to provide all information and present appropriate documentation at the first interview. It demonstrates

that you're organized, professional, and ready to work.

An interview might happen any time, often unexpectedly, during the job search. On some occasions employers make the hiring decision on the day of the interview (or, you may find yourself being interviewed on the spot at a job fair or career day). While this is not a common occurrence, the employer's decision to hire you can be facilitated if all the documents you submit are complete and correct.

The Employment Application

Many companies will request that you fill out an employment application prior to meeting with your interviewer, so plan to arrive a few minutes early to complete this task. This is where a master copy will come in handy — especially when trying to remember specific dates of employment, details of responsibilities, and wages earned in prior positions. You

Do not attach your resume to the application form in lieu of filling it out completely as requested.

Bring to Each Interview

Carry with you a briefcase or portfolio containing the following items:

- A black or blue pen and a pad for taking notes during the interview.
- A pencil with eraser.
- A bottle of white correction fluid (to fix errors on the application).
- Four or five copies of your resume.
- A list of professional references and phone numbers.
- A completed master employment application (available at stationery stores) with information on previous jobs, dates of employment, and salary history.
- Proof of citizenship or eligibility to work in the U.S.
- Military information, such as your DD214, if applicable.
- Driver's license or identification card.
- Social Security number.
- Proof of professional certification, graduation, or license.
- If necessary, proof of skill proficiency such as typing or shorthand.
- Samples of your work, if appropriate.

can buy generic employment applications at any office supply store and create a master application. If you've taken the time in advance to prepare all this information in clear, concise statements, all you will have to do is copy your work onto the company's individual application form.

Do not attach your resume to the application form in lieu of filling it out

termination. Even after you are hired, your signed application will remain in your personnel file throughout your tenure with the company.

Pre-employment Testing

Pre-employment testing is another element of the interview process that should be anticipated. Usually conducted in your first meeting with the company, skills testing is being utilized more and more by managers to verify applicants' technical qualifications. If you're applying for a job working with computer systems, you might be tested on your knowledge of operating environments, programming languages, networking, hardware repair, or software applications. Applicants for jobs in marketing or publishing may find themselves taking a writing and spelling exam. Candidates for manufacturing assembly positions could be asked to complete tasks designed to test their spacial-visual abilities. Such exams may be in written, verbal, or in the form of hands-on tasks.

In some cases, as with many public-sector jobs, testing is a preliminary requirement for placement on a list of qualified candidates. State and local governments schedule group testing throughout the year for particular types of jobs, and those who pass the exams are ranked and placed in an applicant pool for future use. When positions become available (it can take from several weeks to over a year to get hired by government agencies), candidates from this applicant pool are notified and invited to interview. If you have applied

Skills testing is being utilized more and more by managers to verify applicants' technical qualifications.

The Hiring Time Frame

Try to find out what the screening process will be (whether testing and/or multiple interviews will be involved) and the time frame in which the organization plans to make a hire. The sooner you know what to expect in the recruitment process, the better you can plan a successful strategy to impress a prospective employer every step of the way.

completely as requested. Even though your resume might provide much of the same information requested on the application, it will not include other important details characteristic of a standard form, such as Social Security number, work-eligibility status, and work availability. Filling out the company's application legibly and completely is also important because the form itself, once signed by you, serves as an affidavit of your statements made in it.

The end of the application will require your signature acknowledging that the application does not constitute an employment contract, and that any misrepresentations or false statements on your part are considered cause for

for such a job and you are called from the list, don't be surprised if the interview day involves further testing.

It's important to recognize that testing is merely an employer's way of verifying that you've represented yourself accurately and you're fully qualified to do the job. While there are jobseekers who deliberately overstate their qualifications, some applicants simply miscommunicate their skills to employers. Don't be put off by skills testing. Instead, look at it as an opportunity to demonstrate your qualifications and reassure the hiring manager that he's done a good job in choosing to interview you as a viable candidate.

Whenever possible, you should prepare for these tests as if they were a part of the interview. Be sure you are well rested, arrive at the testing site early, and read the instructions carefully. Ask questions if you are uncertain about

the test procedures or how the results will be used.

Interview Etiquette

Don't let your positive first impression be undermined by an error in etiquette. Here are 20 tips on proper interview behavior.

1. Don't arrive too early. Five to 15 minutes before the interview is acceptable.
2. Never take a spouse, friend, pet, or your children along with you to the interview. Employers are likely to see these as signs of poor judgment and low self-confidence.
3. Keep track of people's names. Know who scheduled you for the interview, and note the name of the interviewer's assistant.
4. Give a firm handshake. This will give the impression you are a friendly, decisive person.
5. Even if the interviewer offers, do not smoke.
6. Do not chew gum or eat.
7. Be able to indicate who told you about the position or where you saw the job announcement.
8. Listen carefully to the interviewer without interrupting.
9. Maintain good eye contact, but don't stare.
10. Present your points, but do not dominate the conversation. A good

A firm handshake will give the impression you are a friendly, decisive person.

Boss Bashing

Company loyalty may be practically nonexistent, but headhunters say they are repelled by candidates who disparage an employer, boss, or co-workers. You may hate the place top to bottom, the products and services may be pond scum, but saying so - to anyone - is a bad idea.

Hirers wonder what character flaws keep you there if you think the organization is so terrible. Giving up on the job, but not leaving, is near the top of headhunters' short list of traits that will eliminate a candidate even if he or she has star potential.

Excerpted from "Don't Break These Interview Taboos," by Marilyn Moats Kennedy. To view entire text, click on Article Archive at JobJournal.com.

Perfecting your pitch is an art, based on listening as well as talking.

- rule is to talk about 40 to 50 percent of the time.
11. Try not to sound too rehearsed. Be authentic. Be willing to show vulnerability and acknowledge weaknesses.
 12. Avoid using “impressive” words if you are not accustomed to using them or if you are not sure of their meaning.
 13. Do not use slang.
 14. Refrain from speaking of inappropriate topics, cracking jokes, and making sexist or racial remarks. Discussing sensitive issues such as politics could be dangerous if you and the interviewer have opposing views.
 15. Watch your body language. Do not nervously tap your fingers, fiddle with your pen, or “bounce” your leg. Don’t slouch or slump in your seat.
 16. Don’t brag or boast about achievements. Just state your accomplishments simply and factually.
 17. Never air grievances about current or former employers.
 18. Don’t get too personal, even if you already know an interviewer. Remain professional throughout the meeting.
 19. When asked if you have any questions, do not inquire about salary or benefits. Let the employer bring up these subjects. An exception would

be if you are certain this is your sole interview. Then tactfully address these topics to acquire information on compensation and benefits before you leave the interview. If, after the interview, the company offers you the position, you will have had a chance to evaluate how the compensation range measures up to the job responsibilities described.

20. If you want the job, follow up after the interview. Send a brief note thanking the interviewer and reiterating your strong points and interest in the position. For more information on thank-you correspondence, see the chapter titled, “[Make Them Remember You.](#)”

Tailor Your Message

Tailoring your interview responses to meet the job requirements will help

Make the Sale

Like it or not, conducting a job search is much like conducting a sales campaign.

‘Salespeople already have a basic belief in themselves,’ says sales guru and author Jeffrey Gitomer. ‘Salespeople are dogmatic and persistent, and tend to take *no* not as *no* but as *not yet*.’ Good salespeople also tend to be self-starters. They are more assertive, more punctual and present a more confident demeanor . . . It’s important to play the numbers. If a salesperson is successful with one in ten calls, he knows he must make 100 calls to have ten successes. The job search can also be a numbers game.”

Excerpted from “Sell Yourself Like a Pro,” by Rich Heintz. For complete text, click on Article Archive at JobJournal.com.

address concerns an employer has about any applicant (e.g. Are you motivated? Can I work with you? Are you easy to manage? Do you really want the job? Will you fit in?) While you should never deliver a monologue, your “pitch” is what sets you apart from other applicants. If you can meet the employer’s needs and convey that you are concerned with the company’s priorities, the interviewer is likely to consider you a good match for the job. Perfecting your pitch is an art, based on listening as well as talking.

The interview is a two-way conversation. However, too much talking on your part will interfere with your ability to pick up on signals from the interviewer. Good listening will help you focus your discussion on the organization’s needs. When you are asked a question, avoid responding immediately. Pause for a moment, make sure you understand what has been asked, request clarification if needed, and then respond.

Your response should be directed toward fulfilling what you sense the employer needs. If you lack sufficient information, relate your answer to the job description you have seen. If you have not seen the job description, ask the interviewer for more information; then build your answer around what you know the company is looking for.

For example, the employer may pursue a line of questioning such as, “Have you ever missed an important deadline? Do you enjoy a fast-paced working environment? Can you think quickly on your feet?” In this situation, you would recognize the

root of the interviewer’s concern as your ability to perform under pressure. By picking up on that cue, you can direct your responses toward proving your ability to perform in stressful situations. Demonstrate these abilities by citing specific instances from past experience.

Candid responses, enthusiastically presented, will help you state your case in an appealing, believable manner.

Just as skilled speakers constantly tailor their remarks during a speech to “fit” their audience, so must interviewees tailor themselves to fit the specifics of the job. Be prepared to use a variety of examples from your own background and from your research on the company to convince the interviewer that you have the skills to excel at the job.

During the interview, look for ways to gain the confidence of the interviewer. This, however, can be a balancing act. Speak the unique language of the job where appropriate, but watch out for the egotistical sound of using too many buzzwords. You might compare and contrast your style with the work of key people who are easily recognizable in your field. But, do not resort to blatant name-dropping.

Always gear your statements to meeting the employer’s needs. That means identifying how your skills fit the company’s needs and then conveying this information in a manner that leaves the employer with no doubt that you are the best person for the job. You should project an image that says you are someone who will fit in.

Clearly emphasizing your interest in the job is actually very easy.

Too much talking on your part will interfere with your ability to pick up on signals from the interviewer.

Employers
look for
people who
want to work
and are
enthusiastic
about the job
they have
to offer.

Closing: Ask for the Job

Very few people are confident and direct enough to ask for what they want. Most people feel that it's impolite to come right out and ask for the job. Yet interviewees who don't take that final step often leave the interview wondering if they will be seriously considered because they never told the employer, "I want the job." Clearly emphasizing your interest in the job is actually very easy.

As the interview comes to a close, ask the employer if there is anything else he or she would like to know about your qualifications. If the employer is satisfied with the information you've presented, then summarize how your experience and background qualifies you for the position, and then "close the sale" by asking for the job. Choose one of the following phrases or come up with your own way of saying you are indeed interested in the position.

- Thank you for the interview; I would really like to have this job.
- I think I would be a good asset to your company.
- I look forward to the opportunity to

do my very best for your company.

- I am very excited about becoming a part of your organization. I look forward to hearing from you again.
- This sounds like an interesting job that complements my skills and career goals. I hope you agree.

If possible, find out who the decision maker will be. When the hiring process involves only one interview, the decision maker will likely be the person you've been speaking with. Confirm the hiring time line, and explain that you will follow up if you do not hear from them in that time frame. If the interviewer has told you that the company expects to complete the interview process and reach a decision in one week, for instance, tell him you will anticipate his phone call or follow up shortly thereafter. Take some initiative in the hiring process.

Employers look for people who want to work and are enthusiastic about the job they have to offer. If asking for the job feels awkward to you, rehearse at home with someone playing the part of the employer. With practice, asking for the job will become second nature.

Special Situations

If You've Made a Mistake

Interviews don't always go smoothly, but even the most awkward encounters can often be salvaged. All it takes is a cool head and the ability to recognize when an interview has taken a turn for the worse. It helps to be aware of the most common interview problems and how you can avoid them or solve them on the spot.

Get Off to a Good Start

What happens if your interview gets off to a bad start? Perhaps you arrived late, got the interviewer's name wrong, or forgot to bring required documents. An interview can get started on a bad note with something as silly as spilling coffee on the interviewer's desk.

If it is obvious that you got off to a bad start, correcting it immediately will win you points with the interviewer. Ignoring it or over-apologizing (with embarrassment), on the other hand, may cause the interviewer to focus even more on the problem. Your goal is to move beyond your mistake and on to a better interview. If you allow yourself to dwell on what happened, your discomfort will undermine your ability to interview successfully. Don't be discouraged; you *can* recover from awkward blunders and regain control of the interview.

If you have arrived late, apologize, even the interviewer seems not to have noticed (rest assured, he has). Provide a brief, acceptable reason for your tardiness. Some interviewers consider lateness as grounds for dropping a

candidate from consideration. If you must plead your case, state that you recognize the value of the employer's time. If the interviewer is not responding well, you may want to assert that you believe you are an excellent candidate for the job, that you normally don't exhibit this kind of behavior, and that you wish continued consideration as a candidate for the position.

Keep a Clear Head

Self-induced stress is a major cause of poor interview performance, as it interferes with jobseekers' ability to think clearly. You can be your own worst enemy when you're stressed out, especially if your reaction to the evaluation process is so extreme that you're unable to focus on the interview.

There's no doubt an interview can make you feel like prospective employers are more interested in uncovering your deficiencies than in hearing about your strengths. But letting your fears get the best of you only adds unnecessary pressure during this critical face-to-face meeting, and the end result can be devastating.

While you can't call a "time out" in the middle of the interview, you can learn to push negative thoughts or worries out of your conscious mind.

Focus your thoughts on images that foster a sense of control. At the very least, before each interview (and whenever necessary during the interview) take a deep breath and collect your thoughts.

You can be your own worst enemy when you're stressed out.

If you got off to a bad start, correcting it immediately will win you points.

There are measures you can take to avoid giving erroneous responses.

Remind yourself that you are confident, competent, and qualified for the job, and remember why the interviewer is spending time with you in the first place: He's hoping that you are the right candidate for the job.

Tough Questions, Bad Answers

There are measures you can take to avoid giving erroneous responses. Let's say the employer has asked you a question that you're unsure how to answer. You can have it clarified (and buy yourself some time) by asking a question about the question. ("Are you more interested in hearing about my experience in my most recent job or throughout my career?") This might help you determine the motivation of the interviewer and will certainly give you more time to develop a thoughtful response.

If appropriate, ask why the subject of the question interests the employer. Perhaps the interviewer is making sure that you do not have the same shortcomings as the person the company just terminated. By asking, you've given yourself an opportunity to respond directly with an answer that allays the employer's concerns and demonstrates how you can fulfill the company's needs.

If in the process of interviewing, you feel that you've "blown it" by responding to a question incompletely or inappropriately, don't be afraid to return to the question. First, clarify the question by restating it. ("Earlier, you asked me a question about . . .") Explain that, after considering the subject, you have a few more comments to add. Then address

the topic with a better-prepared response.

You may be uncomfortable with the idea of returning to a difficult question. But remember, if your first answer was as bad as you think, then you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The employer will respect you for recognizing the need for improvement and will appreciate your desire to strengthen your position by giving the question the attention it deserves.

Don't Get Struck Out By Curve Balls

Some interviewers love to throw curve balls — questions or tasks designed less to test your skills than to test your character or personality: How do you handle stress? Can you think on your feet? Do you see the glass as half empty, or half full? Lee Bishop, executive director of Stark County (Ohio) Community Action Agency's Families in Partnership program, admits to his own favorite curve ball. "If you could go back in time and spend one year with anybody of historical importance, who would that person be?" he asks all prospective employees. Of course they have to elaborate.

"I'm finding out what your values are, the things that you admire, the things that you respect, the things that you want to find out more about," he explains.

Bishop has to find out in 45 minutes if he and his employees can work with these people.

In response to his historical-figure question, Abraham Lincoln, Jesus, Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson are frequent nominees. "The one that frosted me was a guy who said he wanted to spend a year with (Vladimir) Lenin," recalls Bishop, a Vietnam veteran with a low tolerance for communists. "He thought that he was a wonderful guy!"

Excerpted from "Will You be Ready When the Interviewer Throws a Curve Ball?" by A.J. Renner, Copley News Service. To view entire text, click on Article Archive at JobJournal.com.

Unprofessional Interviewers

Interviewers themselves can contribute to a bad interview by directing the discussion away from the topic of the specific job opening. Sometimes this happens because the employer wishes to be helpful and establish a friendly rapport with the interviewee. Rather than interviewing you, the employer may begin *advising* you. This could be an indicator that the interviewer does not take you seriously as a viable candidate for the position, and you are wasting your time. Watch for such a shift in the interview.

If an interview should start turning into an advice session, you must find a way to get the conversation back on the job opening — unless you have identified that the position is not for you after all, and you would prefer to simply gather information and feedback from the interviewer for your overall job search.

To get the discussion back on track, tell the interviewer, “I want you to know that I appreciate your advice, but I was hoping today’s interview would focus more on how my experience and skills relate to your job opening.”

Interviewers may also go astray by getting into in-depth friendly conversation about a hobby you both share, old “war stories” of the business, or some other digressive topic. If you think the interview is getting sidetracked, first you should evaluate whether there could be a job-related point to the lengthy conversation. Perhaps the interviewer wants to tell you a long story about how the way

things used to be at the company in order to get your opinion on the changes. Maybe he or she wants to hear more about your involvement in rock climbing to learn what motivates you to be so tenacious.

If you have determined that the interviewer simply has an irritating gift of gab and is wasting time that you would rather spend making a case for your candidacy, you can quickly and easily redirect the course of conversation — without offending. Try something like this: “Yes, I have enjoyed the sport of rock climbing for nearly four years now. And the one thing I’ve noticed about the sport is that it clears my head and enables me to work out management-related decisions. For example, I solved a unique personnel problem while climbing in Yosemite. The problem involved . . . ” As simply as that, you’ve refocused the conversation back onto you and your management experience.

If you are unable to redirect the interviewer back to the discussion of your qualifications for the job, it’s best to go with the flow and sit through the gab session. No matter how unprofessional this interviewer might be, never patronize him or otherwise let your displeasure show. Remember, he is still the key to your moving on in the selection process.

Learn to use your focusing skills to keep yourself on track, too. Whether the interviewer engages you in an unrelated tangent or you are the instigator, you must learn to recognize when the discussion has gone astray. Don’t wait until the interviewer reminds *you* to get back on track.

You can quickly and easily redirect the course of conversation — without offending.

Rather than interviewing you, the employer may begin *advising* you.

Handling Illegal Questions

Sometimes employers ask questions that are either improper or outright illegal. Many don't realize their inquiries are inappropriate, while others may knowingly ask illegal questions to obtain information they feel is of legitimate concern. Whatever the reason behind such an inquiry, handling illegal questions takes tact and finesse. There are three ways you can respond.

Answer the Question

You can answer the question as asked. If you're comfortable divulging the information and there is no way the answer could jeopardize your chances for employment, it is probably best to respond directly. Doing so will not draw any attention to the employer's inappropriateness in asking the question, and it may even give you some points with the employer. However, if responding in this manner makes you uncomfortable, it will show — and your discomfort may detract from your ability to interview with confidence.

Don't Answer the Question

You can refuse to answer on the grounds that the question is illegal. This response is certainly justifiable, but if you fail to answer the questions posed by the employer, illegal or not, you may decrease your chances of getting the job. Perhaps the most tactful way to refuse to answer is to not actually refuse, but counter by asking the employer a question about his or her need to know.

For example, the interviewer may ask, "Do you own a home or rent an apartment?" You might respond with, "Could you explain how this relates to the job?"

Some employers will drop the question once they realize it is impertinent; others may offer an explanation for their desire to know.

What's Behind the Question?

The best approach to answering an illegal question is to address the concern you perceive to be behind the question, without answering the actual question. If you can respond in terms of your skills and abilities, you will minimize the chance that you will be asked other illegal questions.

Say the employer asks, "Do you have your own place or do you live with your parents?" You might respond with, "My current living arrangements will present no obstacles to my successful performance of this job." Remember, your interview goals are to showcase your qualifications, demonstrate how well you will fit into the company's structure, and express your enthusiasm for the job. The best response to an inappropriate question, therefore, avoids a direct answer while achieving one or more of your goals.

Common Questions

Following are suggestions for handling illegal or inappropriate questions:

Q: *Have you ever been arrested?*

A: I am sure there is nothing in my background or work history that would cause me to violate any trust

The best response to an inappropriate question avoids a direct answer while achieving your goals.

Handling illegal questions takes tact and finesse.

Everyone has a different idea of what subjects are taboo, offensive, politically incorrect, or just downright rude.

that this job requires. (It is illegal for employers to ask if you've ever been arrested, but they *can* ask if you have ever been convicted of a crime.)

Q: In your last medical exam, were there any physical problems?

A: If the job requires a pre-employment physical exam of all new employees, I will be happy to arrange for one. (Employers can only ask you if you are physically able to perform the job for which you are applying. They may *not* ask about your general health.)

Q: Are you a citizen?

A: I can provide documentation proving I am eligible to work in the U.S. (While employers cannot ask directly about an applicant's citizenship, they are *required* to acquire proof of work eligibility from every new hire.)

Q: You sure are attractive. Have you ever modeled before?

A: I've never modeled, although I feel my professional, businesslike attire and appearance would be an asset in the position of front-desk receptionist. (This question may not be outright illegal, but it would probably be considered inappropriate. It could even be considered sexual harassment if it were posed in a seductive or suggestive manner.)

Most interviewers are responsible professionals and are well-trained in which questions are illegal. Higher-level executives who may be somewhat

removed from the interviewing process are sometimes less aware of what constitutes an inappropriate question, even though they are probably aware of illegal subjects. So, you could more likely be asked an inappropriate question by a higher-level executive who has considerable influence over the hiring decision.

It is, of course, impossible to define exactly what is "appropriate" for interview conversation. Everyone has a different idea of what subjects are taboo, offensive, politically incorrect, or just downright rude. Since the "gray area" of what is and is not appropriate is so broad, it is likely that you will find yourself fielding some inappropriate questions occasionally.

Anticipating such questions will give you the competitive edge. If you do not prepare for them, you may get flustered, lose your cool, and perhaps lose your shot at landing the job. Here are a few examples of topics that many would consider to be inappropriate:

- Questions about other family members living with you or about caring for an elderly parent
- Comments on your physique or attractiveness
- Asking whether you've ever compromised ethical standards to get the job done
- Inquiries concerning your political views or affiliations

Even if you are comfortable discussing some of these gray-area topics, remember

In the end, you have a right to refuse to answer illegal or inappropriate inquiries.

that abstract discussions about politics, religion, race relations, or your views on world events are out of place and could lead to misunderstandings or unnecessary conflict between you and the employer.

In the end, you have a right to refuse to answer illegal or inappropriate

inquiries. But because an employer may have a legitimate reason for asking such questions, it is up to you to learn how to respond professionally. By focusing your responses on addressing valid concerns, you can overcome awkward situations in a professional and non-confrontational manner.

Make Them Remember You

Giving Thanks

Sending a follow-up note after the interview is simply basic business etiquette. It shows you are conscientious and professional, and could be the deciding factor between you and an equally qualified candidate. Even if you are rejected, thank the employer for his or her time and consideration. Your appreciation and professionalism will make a good impression and may lead to future opportunities.

A poorly written follow-up letter, however, can actually hurt your chances. When you write a thank-you note, the message should be genuine. Employers are not impressed by stiff “form letters” that could have been written by any applicant to any employer.

To personalize the note, you may want to mention something discussed during the interview. Use this opportunity to enhance the interviewer’s memory of you. The letter can remind the manager of your enthusiasm and your strongest qualifications.

It can also communicate new information that was not discussed during the interview. And perhaps most importantly, it should convey your continued interest in the job.

See the sample for how a detailed follow-up letter might be worded. Lengthy follow-up letters, such as this, should always be typewritten. A much briefer note, however, can be handwritten (as long as the handwriting is neat).

A thank-you letter can remind the manager of your enthusiasm and your strongest qualifications.

Mr. John Smith
XYZ Company
123 Main St
Big City, State
12345

January 12, 2004

Dear Mr. Smith:

I enjoyed meeting with you and discussing the immediate and long-term needs of XYZ Company. As you suggested, my experience in product development and marketing would be a nice fit with your department’s requirements. I am certain that I can help your company meet this year’s ambitious production objectives and set even higher goals for next year.

Your marketing department, its supervisory staff, and its efficiency impressed me — and I would welcome an opportunity to become a member of the management team at XYZ. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please expect a call from me next week, as I will be interested in hearing your hiring decision.

Sincerely,
Jack Jobseeker

Although typed notes are the most customary way of following up after an interview, you may wish to go with the more individualized appearance of a handwritten note.

Those in favor of the handwritten note point out that it can be written immediately after the interview and dropped in the mail that same day. Handwritten notes are also considered less formal and more personal.

Arguments against handwritten notes maintain that an immediate response

does not enable applicants to add more information that could strengthen their presentation. If handwriting, grammar, or spelling are not some of your stronger traits, a rushed handwritten response could hurt your chances of getting the job.

A brief thank-you note may be sent on a small sheet of quality stationery or on the inside of either a blank all-purpose card or a blank thank-you card. Whatever you use, remember that the purpose of the note is to leave the employer with a favorable impression. Don't blow it by using cheap paper.

The following is an example of a short thank-you note:

Dear Mr. Smith

Thank you very much for discussing with me the career possibilities with XYZ Company. I just want to restate my interest in joining XYZ and to let you know I'm looking forward to hearing from you regarding your hiring decision. If I have not been notified by next week, I will call to follow up.

*Sincerely,
Jack Jobseeker*

One more option is to e-mail your appreciation for the interview. This option is best if you know the hiring decision will be made quickly, before a letter could arrive via "snail-mail." It also suggests to the employer you make things happen *now* — and use current technology to do it. Depending on the employer (those in the technology field, for

example), this may be a particularly appealing trait. If you interacted with a great number of people during your interview that you would like to thank, e-mail would be a good way to do it.

However, while more and more jobseekers are sending thank-you's electronically, most employers don't feel e-mail is the ideal way to express appreciation. Consider the implied message a traditional letter sends to the employer: This candidate wants this job enough to put forth the effort to write and send a letter. The convenience and ease of e-mailing waters that message down considerably.

Another consideration is that the hiring process is rather paper-intensive. For each candidate, there may be a resume, cover-letter, application, test results, and interview notes. Unless the file is printed out and attached to that bundle, an e-mailed thank-you may never be seen by the final decision maker.

You can minimize the negative elements of e-mailed thank-you notes by following these guidelines:

- Compose a formal letter. The common practice of forsaking punctuation and proper grammar for speed is not acceptable in e-mailed thank-you's (or in any job-hunting correspondence, for that matter).
- Send it out the same day. Otherwise, you'll lose the sense of immediacy inherent with e-mail.

In fact, regardless of the type of follow-

Most employers don't feel e-mail is the ideal way to express appreciation.

Intimidated
by the
thought of
making a
follow-up
call? You're
not alone.

up correspondence you send, do not procrastinate. Send it as soon as possible after the interview. Your personal touch and extra effort may be the deciding factor in your candidacy.

Follow-up Calls

If you close the letter by mentioning you will be calling to inquire about the employer's decision, then be sure to call. If the employer has not made a decision by the first phone call, ask for the best time to call back. Don't be a pest, but be persistent and let the employer know you are interested.

On the average, about six weeks elapse between the time applicants make initial contact with an employer and when they receive a final answer. Because of this time span, it's important to make follow-up phone calls to be sure your letter reached the right person on time. Studies that track follow-ups have shown that 20 percent of correspondence gets lost in transit, is sidetracked by office assistants, or sits in the mail room for prolonged periods. Another third often goes to the wrong person, who may or may not take the time to reroute mail. These problems can be circumvented with a follow-up phone call.

Intimidated by the thought of making a follow-up call? You're not alone. But don't be one of the many applicants who never call back and wind up missing the opportunity to remind the employer of their skills, enthusiasm, and availability for the job. Telephone follow-up coupled with written correspondence is an

effective and widely accepted means of staying on the employer's radar.

Before calling, consider exactly what you will say. Following are tips for making follow-up calls:

1. Know why you are calling. (Most likely, it is to determine the status of the job.)
2. Know whom you are calling (and the correct pronunciation of their name).
3. Be prepared to review how your qualifications match the employer's needs. (You may want to restate the contents of your thank-you letter).
4. Always get the names (and titles, if possible) of the people you talk to for future reference.
5. Maintain control of the follow-up process, always calling back when you say you will. Do not wait for the company to contact you.

For example:

"Red Robin Investors, this is Ryan Mitters."

"Hello Mr. Mitters, this is John Daily."

"Oh, yes, from last week's interview, right?"

"Yes. I wanted to call and personally thank you for taking the time last week to meet with me, discuss your firm's goals, and give me a brief tour of your facilities."

"No problem; just doing my job. But we haven't really made a decision yet."

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“That’s okay — While I have you on the line, I’d like to confirm my interest in joining Red Robin Investors, and let you know the job responsibilities are very appealing to me. As we discussed in my interview, my experience in building loyal clientele and managing large investment portfolios would be a good fit with your company’s needs.”

“Uh-huh. Yes, I remember.”

“Perhaps I could give you another call later on this week to hear about your hiring decision?”

“Actually, why don’t you wait until next

Monday to call? We should make the decision by then.”

“Thank you, I will call you on Monday.”

Immediately after the call, jot down the date of your call and the names of key people contacted (i.e. secretary, personnel director, hiring manager, etc.). If you are uncomfortable with the way you handled your follow-up approach, practice it until you’re more confident.

During this follow-up period, don’t let up on your job search. Continue to line up interviews and investigate alternate job opportunities. If you were unsuccessful in getting the job, ask for feedback to

During this follow-up period, don’t let up on your job search.

Accepting Rejection

Rejection is inherent in the job-search process. You will experience interviews in which you are certain before the meeting is even over that you are not the best candidate for the position, or the job just doesn’t look like it will suit you after all. In these cases, treat the interview as a learning exercise. Reflect on how the meeting went wrong and decide how you would better handle the situation next time.

In other cases, you will feel good about how the interview went — and you may even feel sure you’ll be offered the job — but instead you’ll receive a rejection letter.

Companies make hiring decisions based on the best candidate to meet

the needs of the company, considering their circumstances at the time. Skills, qualifications, and ability to perform well in the position are all important factors, as are personal disposition and style. Employers are not just looking for someone who can do the job, they want to be sure their new hire will fit into the organizational culture and work well with other employees.

Don’t take rejection personally or hold a grudge against companies that do not extend a job offer to you. Even after you’ve found a position, you may encounter representatives of those organizations — you might even see the person who interviewed you — at a business function. Be sure to maintain a sense of

professionalism and acknowledge them with due respect. You may find yourself working with them in the future!

While you should always strive to do your best in each interview, your efforts are not likely to result in a job offer every time. Still, do not underestimate the value of the experience gained with each encounter. Interviewing regularly throughout your job search will give you practice, polish, and even help you clarify and articulate your goals for the kind of position and organization you want to work in.

Interviewing is a sales job, and as any sales professional will tell you, every “no” means you’re that much closer to a “yes”!

evaluate your qualifications and interviewing skills. By inviting constructive criticism, you will improve your performance in the next interview.

Second & Third Interviews

Multiple interviews are common, and each one has a different purpose. For the employer, multiple interviews help to

confirm that you are capable of performing all the duties and responsibilities required, as well as determine if you are the right fit for the job — and indeed the best of the top candidates.

Interviewing applicants more than once is time-consuming for employers, but they consider it time well spent to find the right job candidate. And if you've made it this far, you can be assured that the employer *wants* you to be the right candidate for the job. They are just as interested in successfully filling the position as you are in being hired.

Make multiple interviews work to your advantage by utilizing information gained from the first meeting to help you in subsequent interviews. Ask as many questions as possible in the first interview to gather details about the job and company which you can refer to later on.

The first interview might be with a staff member who has good judgment and can screen candidates. Second and third interviews are often with different people, usually with department managers and company decision makers. Don't assume that one interviewer passed on all details of your work history and background to the next interviewer. Always seek to make a lasting impression in each and every interview.

It is important to know who makes the final decision on hiring. In small companies, the hiring authority is often the second interviewer. In larger companies, interviews with the hiring authority may be delayed until the third or fourth interview.

Make multiple interviews work to your advantage by utilizing information gained from the first meeting to help you in subsequent interviews.

Pre-Employment Testing and Drug Screening

Even after receiving a job offer, you may be asked to undergo additional testing. Different types of tests are designed to measure general aptitude, specific skill levels, physical abilities, health status, or other areas that may be important to certain occupations or employers.

Some pre-employment testing can be complex and specifically related to the application process. Other tests are designed to uncover personality traits or a drug history that could be problematic for the company.

There is a growing concern that drug abuse constitutes a significant problem in the workplace, often contributing to poor job performance and lowered productivity, increased accidents and injuries, violations of security, theft of company property, and in some cases illegal activity on the job.

Employers are required by law to provide a safe workplace for their employees — and an employer is liable for the acts of his employees while on duty, and possibly even off duty.

Many employers are adjusting policies regarding testing for drug use. With appropriate restrictions, an employer may screen a prospective employee for the presence of drugs (including alcohol) that may affect his or her ability to perform work in a safe manner. Drug testing can be an effective tool that serves to protect you and the employer from potential workplace problems.

If you are excited about the company's purpose and goals, your job performance will reflect it.

Whatever the process, you should ask questions, take notes, and prepare for each meeting in order to interview at your best every step of the way.

Evaluating a Job Offer

What should you look for when evaluating a job offer?

The first factor to consider is an honest assessment of your value system. How compatible are you with the organization you're considering? The world of work offers a variety of environments within which to make your professional contributions. You could work in public service for a government agency. Or, you could work in the private sector, in a small enterprise, a nonprofit, or a large corporation. Each of these environments can offer a different experience and work culture.

If you are attracted to the potential stability and structure of a well-established firm, you might do well in a large company. On the other hand, if you have an adventurous, entrepreneurial streak, you'll probably feel at home in a dynamic start-up or other small company. Consider the products or services offered by your potential new employer, too. If you are excited about the company's purpose and goals, your job performance will reflect it.

To help determine whether you fit well with a particular employer, define what you want in a job. Because what you prefer and what the job involves can be very different, it is important to clearly define your objectives. A portion of this definition should be assessing your

own personality. Questions you might ask yourself include:

1. Do I like to work independently or as part of a team?
2. Do I enjoy working in a constantly changing environment, or do I prefer a more regular routine?
3. Do I seek perfection or efficiency in my work?
4. Do I like to be in charge?
5. Do I need autonomy and decision-making freedom?
6. Am I confident enough to learn on the job, or would I be more comfortable in a company training program?

Knowing yourself thoroughly and understanding what you want from a job will enable you to make a good decision based on your fit with the company. You can then tailor your interview questions to explore the job's compatibility with your personal preferences.

Remember all the research you did before applying to the company? Now you need to review what you learned and combine it with the insights and intuitions you've picked up over the course of the interview process. In the end, only you can determine what will fulfill your needs.

Negotiating the Terms

As you conduct research throughout your job-search campaign, consider how it applies to the end of the journey — the job negotiation. Of particular importance, you need to know your

In the end, only you can determine what will fulfill your needs.

worth before you begin interviewing. Entering this critical stage without a good sense of your value to an employer's could hurt you in two ways. If you don't recognize an offer that is low, you might be leaving considerable earnings potential on the table. At the same time, you shouldn't negotiate unless you are in a good position to do so. You must be able to recognize a fair and reasonable offer and avoid tainting the new relationship by driving too hard a bargain.

To prepare, try to get a sense of the range the company is willing to pay. You should also be familiar with the industry standard for jobs in the same category. You can obtain this information from the Internet, classified ads, informational interviews, others in the same field, employment agencies, or in reference books such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, available at your local library.

Enter the negotiation process with confidence. Remember, you have valuable skills and talents and you can make an excellent contribution to the company. Negotiations will be pointless if you project signals that you do not feel worthy of the job. Allowing your self-image to take a beating will leave you underpaid and undervalued after the negotiations are over.

The ability to "get what you want" requires confidence. Employers trust employees who look out for their own interests, because they feel if you can do that for yourself then you will probably

know how to look out for their interests as well.

If you have been unemployed for a long period of time, you might think you can't afford to negotiate. The truth is that you can't afford *not* to, regardless of your circumstances. Many people believe that putting a low price on their skills will help them get the job. This is rarely the case if the salary is open for negotiation. Unless a specific wage or salary is clearly stated in a job announcement or other recruiting materials, the employer usually expects you to negotiate — and if you do not, they may conclude that you don't think you are worth much.

Almost any expert in negotiating will tell you that it's best to "let the other guy quote first." You may be thinking that you want an annual salary of \$48,000 to \$50,000. But if you let the company make the first move, they may extend an offer of \$53,000. Think of the bargaining power (and salary) you have just gained by not stating your expectation too quickly! One drawback may be that a company might make you an offer so low that it is difficult for you to make a reasonable counteroffer. If you've done your homework, your knowledge of the company's pay standards, along with your research on local market salaries, will be effective tools in your effort to raise the offer.

Almost every salary is negotiable — even government jobs have variable salary ranges. You may not win every time you negotiate, but you will lose every time you don't.

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10 Tips for Great Interviews

- 1. Do your homework.** Know about the company, its products and services. Be prepared to talk about how your skills and qualifications will serve the organization's goals.
- 2. Be professional.** Be sure your appearance is neat and clean. Arrive on time and demonstrate good manners and courtesy to everyone you interact with.
- 3. Be aware of nonverbal cues.** Body language and eye contact can be just as important as what you say in an interview.
- 4. Talk about yourself.** Society often teaches us this is impolite, but it's expected in an interview. Be prepared to recount accomplishments and state your goals, as well as why you are suited to the job.
- 5. Be yourself.** Answer questions honestly. Responding only with what you think the interviewer wants to hear can make you sound superficial.
- 6. Emphasize what you can do for the company.** Do not ask about salary or benefits. Rather, let the interviewer bring up these topics. It's okay to inquire about advancement opportunities, however.
- 7. Be positive.** Keep an optimistic, can-do attitude. Never speak negatively about former employers or co-workers.
- 8. Ask questions.** Asking intelligent questions of your own demonstrates interest in the company and enthusiasm for the prospective job.
- 9. Ask for the job.** Many candidates are passed over for positions not because they were unqualified, but because the interviewer was not confident in their interest in the job.
- 10. Follow up.** Always send a thank-you note after an interview. Find out what the hiring time-line is and try to gauge your status in the process.

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