



Interviewing Techniques

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Introduction

This guide was designed by the Human Resource Association of the Midlands (HRAM), to build awareness and increase your effectiveness while searching for the perfect job.

HRAM is a nonprofit organization, established in 1948 and is located in Omaha, Nebraska. It is dedicated to the advancement of human resource professionals and serves the Omaha, Council Bluffs, and surrounding areas. Our membership consists of over 1000 members in the Omaha vicinity. HRAM promotes a comprehensive understanding in the field of human resource management by providing a forum for the education and professional interaction of its members. HRAM is a local affiliate of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the leading voice of the human resource profession, which provides a wealth of services and programs to broaden your skills and make you more valuable to your organization.

THE INTERVIEW

Congratulations! Your hard work, research and resume have paid off. The purpose of an interview is to allow the interviewer an opportunity to gather additional information about you. Interviews are conducted to learn about an individual's job skills, behavioral traits, ability to solve problems, organizational skills, and attitudes. Remember that the employer will determine if you are the best-qualified candidate and how well you will fit into the organization.

Preparing for an Interview

In order to make a favorable impression, you must give some serious thought and be well-prepared to give organized and concise information in the following areas:

- ◆ Training, education and experience.
- ◆ Personal traits, values, interests, and skills as they relate to what you can contribute to the position.
- ◆ Accomplishments, awards and acknowledgments of personal excellence that would be desirable to the employer.
- ◆ Your career goals and action plans.
- ◆ Articulate questions and working knowledge of the position for which you are applying.

You may be required to provide past personal and employment history. This information is necessary to complete the application documentation. Some tips in completing this process are:

- ◆ Use black ink.
- ◆ Read all instructions before you begin to fill out the application.
- ◆ Check directions carefully. Does the application ask you to “print” or does it ask you to “write?” It is important to follow these instructions.
- ◆ Give honest and complete answers to all questions. (Employers do check.)
- ◆ DO NOT LEAVE BLANK SPACES. Do not write, “See Resume.” If the question does not apply to you, write “NA” for not applicable.
- ◆ Depending on the company’s practices, a paper application may be required at the time of the interview. For more information, see the “Resume Tips” handbook).
- ◆ SPELLING MUST BE CORRECT. Be very careful and be sure you know how to spell the words connected to your type of work. IF YOU CAN DO IT, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO SPELL IT!
- ◆ List the specific positions or occupational area for which you applying. Generally speaking, employers react negatively to “anything” when written in the space reserved for the name of a job or occupation.
- ◆ Salary should usually be discussed in a personal interview with your employer. For this reason, it is probably best to write “OPEN” in the space that requests the salary you expect to earn. If you put down too high of a salary, you might decrease your chances for a personal interview and a job. If required to state an amount, list a salary range.
- ◆ PRACTICE, PRACTICE, and PRACTICE! Practice filling out a number of different kinds of applications from various companies or employers. This way, you will become familiar with the information required, improve your penmanship and increase your neatness and accuracy.
- ◆ Let the employer know about special training and experiences.
- ◆ DO NOT SELL YOURSELF SHORT!

To ensure your information is accurate and up-to-date, a good rule of thumb is to prepare a history folder of all your personal and employment data and carry it with you. This will assist you in remembering important dates, places and job responsibilities.

Steps in Preparation

1. Do your homework and familiarize yourself with the employer before your interview. Get as much information on the company as possible. Check libraries for recent newspapers and periodicals.

- ◆ Formal (Sources are located in the library.)
 - Website
 - Annual Reports
 - *Dunn and Bradstreet's Million Dollar Directory*
 - *Moody's Manuals*
 - *Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors and Executives*
 - *Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers*

- ◆ Informal
 - Network with employees of the company or peers in the field.
 - Call marketing, sales and public relations departments.
Ask questions about the business.

2. Prepare your list of questions for the interviewer.
3. Know the points about yourself you wish to state.
4. Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses prior to the interview.
5. Keep this particular question in mind throughout the interview—"Why would someone want to hire me for this job?"
6. Be prepared to explain your motivation.
7. Stress accomplishments and achievements.
8. To be fully prepared and ready for your interview, consider the following steps:
 - ◆ Know the name of the individual conducting the interview.
 - ◆ Call the day before to confirm the time, length, address, and location of the interview.
 - ◆ Drive to the location of the interview. This will help determine the route and the amount of time it will take to get there. Look for adequate parking. You may even consider going inside the building to familiarize yourself with the layout and know exactly where you need to go on the specified date.
 - ◆ If you can, obtain a job description. Focus in on how your background, training and talents make you a prime candidate for the job.
 - ◆ Get a good night's sleep.

What to Wear

The matter of dress is important. Remember that first impressions are lasting impressions. Dress your best. This is a business interview and your appearance should reflect it as such. Always use common sense when dressing for the job. Here are some suggestions:

Be neat and clean.	Wear a conservative, well-tailored suit.
Be color-coordinated. hairstyle.	Have conservative jewelry and
Clean fingernails	Shined shoes
Fresh breath	Minimal makeup and perfume

Credible Outfits*

Women

- A medium-range blue suit
- A navy blue suit
- A medium-range gray suit
- A deep maroon suit
- A deep rust suit
- A beige suit
- A camel suit
- A tan suit
- A black suit

Men

- A dark gray suit
- A light gray suit
- A light blue suit
- A dark blue suit
- A black suit
- Pinstriped suits in dark blue or gray

* The term "suit" refers to a coordinating jacket and pants or a coordinating jacket and skirt.

While You are Waiting

Plan to arrive 15 minutes early. These precious minutes will give you the opportunity to relax, collect your thoughts and help you to focus on greeting the interviewer. Remember to be courteous with everyone with whom you have contact. At this point, you don't know who is who, and snubbing someone could prove to be disastrous. Don't overlook the receptionist. If given the opportunity, take advantage of engaging in casual conversation with the receptionist. Usually they are informally gathering information about you and are a direct link to the interviewer.

Attitude

Your attitude speaks louder than your skill level and determines whether or not

you will be successful during the interview process. Personal frustrations and setbacks in your job can affect your voice and demeanor. Avoid all signs of arrogance, abrasiveness, or lack of interest. Use phrases like “seeking more opportunity” rather than “no room for advancement.” Boost your self-confidence and avoid nervousness by being well-prepared. Concentrate on all of your skills and abilities before you get to the interview. Avoid discriminatory or negative remarks. Be polite. Be positive (even if you have to fake it).

Body Language

Greet the interviewer with a firm, confident handshake and make good eye contact. Sit up straight, look attentive and do not cross your arms or legs. Typically, the interviewer is observing your body language to determine your level of interest. After all, the majority of the time, our nonverbal language conveys more meaning than our verbal language.

Getting an Offer

If an offer is made during the interview, never accept or reject it outright. Ask for time to think it over, to consider the salary and the specific details of the offer. Always respond positively. If you let them know you want the job, it will be a lot easier to negotiate items like salary, later.

When the Interview is Over

Ask if there are any reservations about your ability to do the job. Deal with these now. Ask what the next step is in the interview process. If you like the job and want an offer, now is the time to tell them. Do not assume they will know if you want the job or not.

Top 5 Ways to Flunk Your Job Interview

(The incidents listed are true stories.)

1. Prop your feet on the interviewer’s desk and ask for a Coke!
2. Wear a large, gold ring through your nostril.
3. After lunch with the Senior V.P., ask the waiter for a doggie bag.
4. Arrive 30 minutes late, and drag in 12 family members, including your grandparents and children, and even the maid, all of whom lobby frantically on your behalf.

5. Scoot your chair up to the interviewer's desk and begin thumbing through her in-basket.

Follow Up After the Interview

1. Take the time to reflect on what occurred during the interview and if you would change anything.
2. Make notes and respond to any requests.
3. Immediately following the interview, write a brief note thanking the interviewer for his or her time. Briefly restate why you are qualified for the job.
4. If you have not heard some type of a response within one week of the interview, follow up with a phone call.
5. If you are not interested in the organization, let them know.
6. If you are offered the position, write out the pros and cons of the position to assess your final decision on whether or not to accept an offer.
7. Do not be afraid to ask the company for additional, needed information, before accepting an offer.
8. Once you accept an offer, you have made a commitment. It is unprofessional to accept one offer and then reject it for another.
9. Send a written acceptance to the company or they may have you sign a formal contract.
10. Contact other employers and inform them that you're accepting another position. This keeps you in good standing if a future position with the company occurs.
11. Write thank you notes to your references.
12. Update your resume immediately after you are hired. Constantly update your resume before you forget dates, activities and responsibilities.

Timely follow-ups show you are motivated, professional and really appreciate the interest and assistance of others. Follow-up also allows others another opportunity to get to know you. Follow-up can be done in several different ways:

- ◆ Personal note
- ◆ Personal note and resume
- ◆ Printed 3"x5" card with your qualifications (resume highlights)
- ◆ Telephone call
- ◆ E-mail

The interview process is a key step toward your goal of being selected for the best position. Keep in mind, the employer will be checking you out to see if you are the best-qualified candidate for the position and to determine if you will fit in with the team.

Sample Thank You Letter

January 1, 2010

1650 Chestnut Avenue
Overland Park, KS 68212
(213) 555-1212

Mr. Edward J. Sullivan
XYZ Recruiting Firm
222 North 183rd Street
Ralston, NC 11144

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

Thank you very much for today's interview. It was interesting to compare our recent Asian travel adventures.

I have a very positive feeling about the prospect of joining the dynamic and diverse firm of XYZ Recruiting. I believe my experience and background in recruiting will enable me to make the transition into your recruiting department with ease.

Should you have any additional questions, feel free to call me. I look forward to our 2:00 p.m. meeting next Tuesday. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Will Robinson

The following letters should include a salutation and complimentary closing like the first example.

Acceptance Letter Following a Job Offer

I can't tell you how excited I was to receive your invitation to join the Management Training Program at the Let's Make a Deal Corporation.

The day you suggested, Monday, January 4th, sounds like a perfect start date. I will report to Ms. Boss, at 8:30 a.m., in the second floor conference room.

Thank you for all of your assistance. You are giving me an exceptional learning opportunity and I look forward to making a significant contribution at Let's Make a Deal.

Letter of Withdrawal During Job Search

I am writing to inform you that I am withdrawing my application for the Project Manager position we discussed last week. As I indicated, I have a strong interest in relocating to the East Coast and have been exploring several career opportunities in that area. I have just accepted an offer in New York.

Let me express my sincere appreciation for the time and interest you showed me. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about ABC Company. Thank you again for your consideration.

Letter Declining Job Offer

Thank you for offering me the position of Training Manager with your organization. I appreciate your confidence in my ability to handle the many challenges of this position.

This would, indeed, be a challenging opportunity. It would make good use of my education and experience, while allowing me to enhance and strengthen my overall skills and qualifications. However, after careful consideration, I have decided to pursue other options that will more closely match my long-range career goals.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration. It was a pleasure meeting you and learning more about your organization and development strategies.

When You Do Not Get the Job

I am disappointed that I was not selected for the position at United Bank Service. However, I must say it was a pleasure to meet you and I thank you for all the time you spent with me discussing career opportunities in banking.

I would appreciate it very much if you would contact me, should you hear of any positions that become available. Again, many thanks for your interest.

Tips for Effective Interviewing

DO	DON'T
Show maturity, confidence, tact, openness, motivation, flexibility, innovation, humor, desire to grow, effective communication skills, and problem-solving skills.	Be unprepared. Lack of preparation is the most common applicant fault mentioned by employers. Study employer information several days before the interview. DO NOT cram 10-15 minutes before. It won't work!
Attend free interview workshops.	Take the interview for practice.
Conduct a self-assessment.	Expect to be perfect.
Appropriately complete application forms.	Be vague.
When asked about your weaknesses, stress them as a strength.	Be passive or overly aggressive.
Know points you want to make.	Be fearful.
Find out what is expected; do they videotape interviews?	Wear sunglasses or outerwear into the interview room.
Bring appropriate letters of references or position-specific project information.	Read or pick up objects on the interviewer's desk.
Expect the unexpected. An interviewer may do all the talking or they may let you.	Look at your watch a lot.
Project leadership abilities and personal accomplishments.	Smoke.
Develop an action vocabulary.	Chew gum.
Be prepared to think on your feet.	Use slang, poor grammar or poor diction.
Be naturally pleasant and be yourself.	Ramble or be too technical in terminology.
Accept being nervous as a normal condition!	Be fidgety or play with objects like hands, clothing, etc.
Be assertive.	Be a phony, make wise cracks or small talk.
Be attentive.	Beg for the position.
Remember the proper pronunciation of the interviewer's name.	Show prejudices.
Know the role and level of responsibility of the interviewer.	Show inability to take criticism.
Treat everyone you meet with respect.	Have unrealistic expectations of entry level job in salary, responsibility, etc.
Use direct eye contact, not a stare down.	Lie or exaggerate experiences or abilities, even

	a little.
Present a friendly smile and a firm handshake. Say the interviewer's name. "Hello, _____. I'm _____. It's a pleasure to meet you."	Try to create answers you think the interviewer wants to hear.
Sit only when told.	Apologize for your weaknesses or even bring them up. State only the positive.
Have good posture. Try to sit next to, not straight across from, the interviewer.	Force yourself to fit a job description.
Listen to the questions and flow of the interview.	Use non-words: um...uh...ah...like...

DO	DON'T
Understand questions before answering.	Begin the interview with a negative remark such as, "The room is hot."
Ask for clarification of the question if needed.	Interrupt the interviewer.
Convey interest and knowledge in the position and company.	Dominate the interview.
Provide information so that the interviewer can make a positive evaluation.	Expect the interviewer to do all the talking.
Use brief answers, but don't answer too quickly or talk too fast.	Rush your answers.
Answer questions clearly, concisely and enthusiastically.	Indicate that you have no idea what you want to do.
Be decisive on your career choice.	Criticize or talk negatively about former employers, co-workers, or companies.
Answer in terms that apply to the new job.	Interview the interviewer.
Be specific.	Ask about salary and benefits, unless the interviewer brings it up.
Be observant.	Underestimate the interviewer.
Stress willingness, ability and compatibility.	Give textbook answers.
State why you are suited for the job.	Answer an open-ended question with a "yes" or "no" response.
Listen for your tone, inflection and volume of voice.	Worry about abrupt switches in the topics of questioning.
Read the interviewer's body language.	Worry about momentary silence.
Ask meaningful questions. Prepare four or five questions.	Worry or be startled if the interview is over sooner than you expected.
Ask questions that are job-related.	Extend the interview.
Object to discriminatory questions.	Expect to be hired on the spot.
If not qualified, tell the interviewer, and they may have other openings later.	
Be courteous and appreciative of the interviewer's time.	
Thank them.	
Understand the next step of the selection process.	
Turn off all portable electronics.	

Typical Interview Questions Asked by Employers

Tell me about yourself.	What were your duties, responsibilities and accomplishments at your last job?
How would you describe yourself?	Briefly describe your educational background.
What are your long-range and short-range goals? How are you preparing to achieve them?	Briefly summarize your work history.
What is your greatest strength and weakness?	Why are you leaving your current job?
What was the greatest challenge you have ever faced? How did you handle it?	To what do you most attribute your successes/failures?
How do you think a co-worker or a friend would best describe you?	What was your biggest accomplishment at your most recent job?
What is more important to you: money or the type of job?	Is there anything else you would like to say about yourself with regard to this job?
What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in your career/in this company?	What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
Why should we hire you?	What do you know about our company?
What do you feel you will be able to contribute to this organization?	What do you feel is the most important thing our organization can do to help you achieve your objectives?
How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?	How would you describe your ideal job?
Describe a relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her?	Are you willing to travel or relocate? Do you have a geographic preference? Why?
What two or three things are most important to you in your job?	What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?	How do you determine or evaluate success?
How well do you perform under pressure?	What have you learned from your mistakes?
What do you see yourself doing five years from now?	What do you expect to be earning in five years?

Questions You May Ask an Employer

Is this a new position?	Where is the last person who held this position working now?
What are the principle duties of a person in this position?	Are there regular performance evaluations?
What characteristics do you most like to find in people on this assignment?	How is job performance measured?
What are the opportunities for advancement, in this job, for someone with my degree and skills?	Could you tell me about the primary people with whom I would be working?
What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?	Please describe the work environment.
What is the company's management style?	Will the company use formal on-the-job training? Please explain.
Is there anything unusually demanding about the job that I should know about?	What industry trends will occur in this company?
How stable and financially sound is the company?	What makes your firm different from its competitors?
Is there anything else I can tell you about my qualifications?	What is the next step in the selection process?
Why do you enjoy working for the firm?	

Interviewing Trends

Below is a list of pre-screening processes to which many companies are turning. In order to prepare yourself effectively for an interview or job opportunity, research the following trends. If appropriate, ask the potential employer what methods they will be using in their evaluation.

* Technical evaluations - Depending on the position, some employers will use technical evaluations to test your job-related skills. These evaluations may test your knowledge of software applications, (i.e. Excel, Word, PowerPoint) accounting, programming, drawing and presentation skills.

* Personality evaluations -These are used to assess your ability to fit into the culture or style of the position. Some of the commonly-used exams are the Predictive Index and Colbe.

* Aptitude evaluations - These will test your attention to detail. These evaluations may test general knowledge of addition/subtraction, putting together pairs of items, etc.

* Group/Team interviews - Some companies are involving co-workers and department heads in the interview process.

* On-site interviews - Some employers will actually have you sit in the position and work with a current employee or actually do the job for a few hours.

* Behavioral interviews - Companies are turning to questions that ask how you would behave in a particular situation. (i.e. Tell me about a time when...)

* Drug/Credit/Background screening - Be prepared to acknowledge that you will perform a drug screening. Credit and background screenings may be done to check previous credit history and criminal background for a period of time and for all places in which you have lived.

Always stay informed about other approaching trends. Information about these trends may be found on the HRAM website and also through other internet or media resources.