

# HIT THE TARGET WITH YOUR NEXT INTERVIEW

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**Interview preparation, Phone/Video Screen Tips, How  
to Present Yourself, 5 Interview Mistakes and More**

## THE INTERVIEW

- One of the best ways to separate yourself from the competition is to be prepared!
- During the course of each interview each person you meet will be forming an opinion of you and gauging your compatibility with the needs of the organization and more importantly, their ability to work with you within that role. Bottom line – you are trying to make a good impression.
- You need to be sincere, polite, and enthusiastic about your knowledge of their company and the industry to secure the position.
- Your resume may show examples of your skills as a team player, but now you need to convince them that you fit their team.
- To make the best impression you can you need to be prepared, know what to expect, and how to handle it if things do not go quite as planned.

## PREPARATION

1. Research the company. Check out their website. Know about their history and growth over the years.
2. Be familiar with other companies with similar products/services through websites like Hoovers or Dun/Bradstreet.
3. Look for relevant press releases via Google.
4. Read through any notes you have surrounding the interviewers you will meet. Try to understand their role within the organization and make sure you answer their questions with a bent toward their area of expertise.
5. Re-read the job description so you can fit your background most effectively to their needs.
6. Be ready with questions for each interviewer but focus on responsibility related issues not “what’s in it for me” questions.

## PHONE/VIDEO SCREEN TIPS

- Be careful, a laid-back attitude can come across as of lack of interest. If possible, stand up, walk around, get energized. It will come across during the call. Speak clearly, loudly, and at a medium tempo.
- This is the time to sell the employer on your experience and why you would be a good fit. Have 3 to 5 bullet points about your accomplishments, and the results for the company
- Have a few questions ready on a pad of paper. For example: goals for the group, company goals, and most important ask what the results are they'd like to see from a candidate coming into this role.
- Read over their company. Know the description, company information, and product/service info enough to be fluent. It is always good to review the press releases and citing those in the call.
- If it sounded good during the call and you have interest, be sure to express it. Let the interviewer know that you would be interested in meeting in person. If there is mutual interest have your schedule ready to give them some available dates.
- Find a balance between under-answering a question and over-answering. If it is a close-ended question, or one that ends with a yes/no, answer it and provide a reason why. If asked an open-ended question, be conscious of how long it takes to answer. If you find yourself talking for over 45-60 seconds, give the interviewer an option-out by asking if you have answered the question or if they would like you to continue.

### Video interviews are becoming the norm. Here are specific tips for video interview prep:

1. Pick the right location. Conduct your interview in a quiet, private, well-lit place where it is unlikely you will be interrupted. Position your webcam so the background is neutral and free of distractions. Position your webcam directly at eye level so it looks like you are looking at the interviewer. Do not have the computer on a table for example as you will be looking down at your audience.
2. Make sure your internet connection is stable. Take a minute to check the internet at your chosen location – it should be at least 1 megabit per second.
3. Check your computer's audio. Test your microphone and make sure your speakers are working. You do not want the interview derailed by malfunctioning audio.
4. Test your computer's webcam. Just because it worked a month ago, does not mean it is still functioning properly. Make sure your interviewer can see you!
5. Close any unnecessary browser windows and applications. Do not tempt yourself with distractions and avoid the possibility of pop-up notifications.
6. Pick the right outfit. Dress professionally and avoid bright colors. As with in person interviews, your outfit should reflect the job you want.
7. Bring a pen, some paper, and a copy of your resume. Be ready to copy down important information and refer to past experiences in detail.
8. Nod and smile. Do not forget conversational pleasantries just because it is a video call. Your body language should communicate that you are listening.
9. Use your hands. Do not be afraid to "think out loud" with hand gestures. This can keep the call from feeling awkward or stilted.
10. Place your phone on silent mode (or better yet – turn it off!). There is nothing more distracting than the sound of a text-message notification.

## GENERAL RULES FOR PRESENTING YOURSELF

1. Arrive early
2. Bring extra copies of your resume, a notepad and pen.
3. Be sure you know how to pronounce your interviewer's name correctly.
4. Be polite to everyone you meet there. They all count.
5. Be personable as well as professional.
6. Assume all questions are asked for a good reason and answer accordingly.
7. Do not assume that your interviewer knows how to elicit the information he/she is looking for.
8. Feel free to ask for clarification before answering a question.
9. Take some time to formulate your answers before you speak.
10. If you feel that your answer might be long winded, give them an option out by asking if you have answered the question or if they would like you to continue.
11. Answer all questions honestly, but in the best, most positive light.
12. Always stay positive about old employers.

## PROPER ATTIRE

First Impressions are extremely important. The way you present yourself can be as important as what you say.

- For a woman: A suit or conservative dress is appropriate. Minimal amounts of jewelry and perfume. Stylish low heel shoes are best.
- For a man: A conservative business suit, long-sleeved shirt and tie are still best. No jewelry other than a wedding ring and a watch, matching socks and polished shoes are the way to go.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What to say when a job interviewer asks, “Do you have any questions?” [Video](#)

The key is to ask great questions, not to ask questions that you should know the answers to already (“What does the position entail?”) or questions that make it all about you (“What is your vacation policy?”).

Remember, a lack of questions displays a lack of passion for, interest in, and curiosity about their company and the position.

**Here are 9 great questions you can select from and/or make your own on your next job interview:**

1. Who would make the ideal candidate for this position?
2. How will the work I would be doing contribute to the organization’s mission?
3. What were the best things about the last person who held this position?
4. How can I contribute to the company beyond the job description?
5. How can I best contribute to the department’s goals?
6. How do you see me best contributing to the corporate culture and morale?
7. What do you see as the biggest challenges of working here and how can I overcome those challenges?
8. What is your vision for where the company or department will be in one year? In 3-5 years?
9. How can I best help you and the team succeed?

Of course, the more research you do in advance, the more specific questions you can ask about the company’s recent news, blog posts, product launches, plans, etc. But here is the bottom line: **Ask questions that demonstrate genuine interest in the organization and how you can fit into their success.**

## A GUIDE TO BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to determine past behavior, this style of interviewing is gaining wide acceptance. Today, more than ever, every hiring decision is critical. Behavioral interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision.

Behaviors a candidate has demonstrated in previous similar positions are likely to be repeated, you may be asked to share situations in which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors.

Follow-up questions will determine if you exhibited the desired behavior in that situation:

- *“Can you give me an example?”*
- *“What did you do?”*
- *“What did you say?”*
- *“What was your role?”*
- *“What was the result?”*

**How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview:**

Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, and planning. Prepare short descriptions of each situation, be ready to give details if asked. Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end (i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result). Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable). Be honest. Do not embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation. Be specific. Do not generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

Instead of feeling anxious or threatened by the prospect of a behavioral interview, remember the essential difference between the traditional interview and the behavioral interview: The traditional interviewer may allow you to project what you might or should do in a given situation, whereas the behavioral interviewer is looking for past actions only.

These kinds of inquiries might resemble the following:

- What do you estimate to be your biggest career achievement at this point? What did you do to contribute to that achievement?
- Cite an example of when you were faced with an unpleasant task. How did you go about facing it?
- Give me the most recent example of a conflict you had with a coworker or a supervisor. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to use your communication skills to make an important point. Tell me about a time when you had to use a persuasive argument to help someone see things your way. How did you do it?

Note that each of the above examples integrates three universal components of a good behavioral inquiry:

1. A particular performance situation or task
2. An action on your part
3. The consequences of your action.

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Studies have shown that people can only rely on short term memory when asked questions under stress conditions. Below is a tool to help with faster recall.

### Reviewing Your Professional Achievements:

Start with your most recent employer – focus on the issues that will relate to this position.

**Company:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position:** \_\_\_\_\_

List your accomplishments/achievements while working at this position:

List the strategy, implementation, and processes you used to bring about these results:


## 5 INTERVIEW MISTAKES

1. **Confusing an Interview with an Interrogation** - An interrogation occurs when one person asks all the questions and the other gives the answers. An interview is a business conversation in which both people ask and respond to questions. Candidates who expect to be interrogated avoid asking questions, leaving the interviewer in the role of reluctant interrogator.
2. **Making a So-Called Weakness Seem Positive** - Interviewers frequently ask candidates, 'What are your weaknesses?' Conventional interview wisdom dictates that you highlight a weakness, "I'm a perfectionist," and turn it into a positive. Interviewers are not impressed, because they have probably heard the same answer a hundred times. If you are asked this question, highlight a skill that you wish to improve upon and describe what you are doing to enhance your skill in this area. Interviewers do not necessarily care what your weaknesses are. They want to see how you handle the question and what your answer indicates about you.
3. **Failing to Ask Questions** - Every interview concludes with the interviewer asking if you have any questions. The worst thing to say is that you have no questions. Having no questions prepared indicates you are not interested and not prepared. Interviewers are more impressed by the questions you ask than the selling points you try to make. Before each interview, make a list of five questions you will ask.
4. **Researching the Company but Not Yourself** - Candidates intellectually prepare by researching the company. Most job seekers do not research themselves by taking inventory of their experience, knowledge, and skills. Formulating a talent inventory prepares you to immediately respond to any question about your experience. You must be prepared to discuss any part of your background. Creating your talent inventory refreshes your memory and helps you immediately remember experiences you would otherwise have forgotten during the interview.
5. **Leaving Your Cell Phone On** - We may live in a wired, always-available society, but a ringing cell phone is not appropriate for an interview. Turn it off before you enter the building.

## DON'T TALK TOO MUCH

The gift of gab can be something of a curse during an interview. You could end up talking your way right out of the job. It is important to remember that interviewers are only human, and their attention tends to wane as you speak. Fully understanding this is critical to effectively communicating during any interview. Your response should be less than a minute and a half when an interviewer asks you to *"tell me about yourself."*

### The average interviewer's attention span looks something like this:

1. As you begin speaking, the interviewer is listening with nearly full attention.
2. After about 10 seconds, they begin listening with less intensity.
3. After 60 seconds, their mind begins to wander, and they are devoting less than half of their attention to you. The interviewer starts asking questions about your response or begins formulating their next question.
4. After you have been speaking for 90 seconds without interruption, the interviewer is barely listening at all.

An interviewer's attention level can be nearly impossible to detect since most people are skilled at nodding their heads and saying "hmmm" while looking at you, all in an effort to disguise their wandering minds. The longer you speak without interruption, the less attention the listener is giving you. Hence, when you provide a long answer that builds to an important conclusion, often the interviewer is no longer listening.

Your questions are key. Near the end of your response, it is important to keep the interviewer engaged by asking questions. Skilled interviewers will pose behavioral-event questions, asking you to describe specific examples of your experience. In these situations, your response can easily last much longer than 90 seconds. In such situations, interrupt yourself by asking the interviewer a question like, “Is this the level of detail you are looking for?” or “Is this the type of example you’re interested in?” This strategy helps to reengage your listener and promotes two-way communication.

Your interview goals are to ensure you are understood and to make the best presentation of your talents. Engaging interviewers in two-way communication by asking questions helps you ensure they are listening while you deliver your response.

## THE FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

First off, yes, everyone you interviewed with should receive at least a “thank you” email from you. And the email needs to be written well, with a few personal touches, and to show your enthusiasm for the role. It signals to the interviewer that you are not only interested in the role, but also respect their time and effort in bringing you in. This is an opportunity to remind them of a shared interest, background, experience, etc. that you talked about in the meeting. This also allows you to reiterate why you are the right person for the role. It is the perfect opportunity to wrap up what was a great interview.

**Below is an example outline of a properly structured follow-up email:**

1. **Opening** - Explain why you are writing to them. This is easy. You are thanking them for their time, for bringing you into the office, for explaining the role and telling you more about the company. So, thank them! While you do not want to overuse exclamation points, one is fine after a “thank you”. What you want to avoid is ending every sentence with one.
2. **Body** - Remember, this should not be particularly long, so it is not a chore for the recipient to read. This is your opportunity to touch on any similarities you found or things you bonded over. Try to think of something because it is likely they interviewed at least a few other people, and this is a great way to make yourself stand out. Next, explain exactly how your skillset and experience correlates to the open position now that you are more informed about what they are looking for. While the interview was your chance to convince them that you were qualified, this is your opportunity to put it in writing. But, do not come off as too stiff, either. This is a quick, informal follow-up so write as you would speak.
3. **Closing** - Whatever you choose, make it what you are comfortable with. I would steer clear of “Sincerely”, as that starts to shift over into the very formal category.

## A FEW LAST REMINDERS

- Line up your references in advance, remind them briefly about your accomplishments while working together, and ask if they would offer a positive reference on your behalf.
- Follow up immediately with thank you emails to everyone that you interview with.
- Your ultimate goal should be to go in there and make them want to give you an offer. Remember an interview is not a fishing trip, trying to fish out information. If you go in with that approach often you will discover that you like all you hear about the company and opportunity, yet, you have been so focused on gathering information for yourself you have forgotten to sell your abilities and now it is too late to give them the impression of yourself you wanted.
- The company will be anxious to know how you thought the interview went so it is important that we talk soon afterwards.