College Central Network Career Advice

Interviews: The Art of the Interview

Where credentials, credibility, and confidence create career success.

Lights! Camera...

Everything you've done has led up to this day. Your checklist is complete: "interview suit"; personal grooming; extra copies of your résumé and references; enough travel time; fresh breath.

Fast-forward: You've arrived 15 minutes early at your potential new employer's office. Cool your heels, use the restroom, collect your thoughts. No gum, no smoking. You're understandably nervous, but you've practiced and know your material. Remember, you *have* the credentials. That's why you're here. There may be no guarantees, but there are opportunities. Focus on that and grab them.

Showtime!

Above all, you are meeting another human being, so be pleasant and polite. When invited in for your interview, make eye contact — just remember to blink, not stare. Offer a quick firm handshake, a sincere smile, and a "Very nice to meet you." Body language can speak as loudly as words. This may seem obvious, but sit up in your chair, and look and act interested! No matter how good your résumé or work samples, poor body language might convey that you're not really interested in the job or company, or that if hired, you wouldn't work hard or fit in with the rest of the staff. You want your interviewer to feel comfortable with you. If offered anything, it's safest to politely decline. Otherwise, accept just water; it stains less.

Don't let them see you sweat.

Take a breath. Wait for your interviewer to take the lead, and then be attentive, polite and respectful. Focus on your interviewer and what's being asked. Listen carefully; the questions are likely familiar because you practiced with them. Take time to answer intelligently. Blurting is not attractive and conveys lack of self-control or preparation.

– "Why do you want to work here?"
– "Tell me about yourself."
– "What are your weaknesses?"
– "Why are you the best person for this job?'
– "If you were a tree, what tree would you be?"

Keep your answers brief, clear, positive, and relevant. Don't mumble. If nervous, try to pace your words so you don't speak too quickly. Give supporting facts, figures, and results where possible. Avoid speaking negatively and/or blaming others. Most important, DON'T PANIC or LIE! Pause. Think. Answer truthfully and as best as you can. Some questions have no right or wrong answers. They are more to help the interviewer gauge your thinking process, personality, and preferences. And no vulgarity. Period.

Remember, the interviewer is not your friend, but someone looking for the best candidate to fill a need. Their objective is to gather information to see if you are a good match. Your objective is to convince them that they need look no further because you can fill their needs. You know your strengths, so convey them with confidence. Smile and let enthusiasm work in your favor.

You should and are expected to ask well thought-out questions about the company. Good questions and comments convey your sincere interest in the job. However, save the questions about salary, bonuses, and other benefits. Unless first raised by the recruiter, they give the wrong impression in a first interview.

Take a bow.

And suddenly it's over. Regardless of how it went, offer a firm handshake, a sincere smile, and thank the interviewer for their time. Ask if you need to provide anything else. Let them know that you are very interested in the job and will be in touch. Stay professional until you've left the premises. Now go home and send the expected and courteous "Thank you" by email and snail mail. Congratulate yourself for making it. If you're hired, terrific. If not, you're now better prepared for the next interview.

in a nutshell:

Follow these tips for a successful interview experience:

- **Arrive 15 to 20 minutes early**
- **Collect your thoughts; focus**
- **Be pleasant, polite, positive**
- **Be confident, not arrogant**
- **Listen and answer carefully**
- **Ask intelligent questions**
- **Let the interviewer bring up the topic of money and perks**
- **Don't panic and don't lie**
- **Watch the body language**
- **Thank the interviewer**

You've rehearsed and know your lines. Now go for it!

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