

Yavapai College Guide to Job Interviews

Getting a job can be very stressful. It can be a daunting task and quite dreadful. However, the best defense against nerves is preparation and knowledge. Below are pointers and tips that will make interviewing for a job a piece of cake.

Preparation

Go into the job interview with the confidence that comes from being prepared.

To prepare:

- Research the organization where you are applying for work.
- Anticipate questions (especially problem questions) and practice your responses.
- Dress appropriately
- Know the route to the interview site and get parking information. Make sure you arrive ten minutes early.

While there is preparation that you as an interviewee will do also, remember that an interviewer may also prepare. A new trend for employers is looking at MySpace and Face Book to look at what potential employees are like outside of the professional world. A good rule of thumb is if you wouldn't want your grandmother to see it, you don't want your potential boss to see it, so take it down.

The first few minutes of the Interview

You impress other people each day. That impression may be positive, negative, or neutral. People usually make a judgment regarding you within five seconds of their first eye contact with you. Because that initial impression is formed so quickly, your choice of attire for a job interview is crucial.

When interviewing for a job wear neutral colors. Avoid loud colors and colorful patterns.

- Women should pull hair away from their face and avoid big earrings. Make sure that what you are wearing is appropriate for the job interview i.e. if you wouldn't wear it to church, don't wear it to the interview. Also women should avoid excessive jewelry, a wrist watch and a wedding ring, if you are married, are appropriate but that's about it.
- Men should also wear neutral colors and avoid a loud tie. Remove any loose change from your pants pockets as it is common for people to jingle it when they are nervous.

Remember you want the interviewer to listen to what you have to say without the distraction of your clothing/jewelry

While this is the day and age of electronics there is nothing worse than a cell phone or PDA going off during an interview. There are some things that don't belong at a job interview. Leave your cell phone, PDA, I Pod, and anything else that may make noise during the interview in your car or turn it off.

Make sure all piercings are removed and cover up all tattoos that are visible before you enter the interview.

A handshake usually opens your first verbal contact with the interview. Make the handshake firm, not crushing, and never give the person a limp hand to shake. Also, make good eye contact when greeting the interviewer.

The interviewer probably will break the ice by asking you about your trip to the interview, how the weather is outside, or other questions to set a friendly, casual tone. Keep your responses to these short and congenial. Use the interviewer's name during this first contact, so you will remember it later.

The core

The interviewer often will move from the causal discussion, by asking you a general question such as, "Tell me about yourself." Obviously, the employer is not seeking a lengthy discussion of your life history. You have two basic approaches to responding. One is to provide a brief explanation of your qualifications for the job. The other is to request clarification of the question. For example, you could say, "There's so much to tell; would you like me to emphasize my personal characteristics, education, skills, or experience that qualify me for this position?"

As the interview proceeds, seize opportunities to prove you have the skills to do the job well. To do this:

- Describe a skill
- Give an example of how you have used the skill
- Describe the results
- Tell how you could use the skill for positive results on the job you are seeking.

You may be asked questions where a yes or no response is appropriate. Avoid saying just yes or no, but elaborate slightly on your answers. Be specific when stating answers or explaining ideas.

Listen

Your ability and willingness to listen well throughout the interview are critical to your success. For example, you won't seem very sharp if the interviewer asks you about your career plans and you launch into a discussion of your employment history. Also, if you are not entirely sure you understand the question, ask for clarification—but don't ask for clarification too many times. If you are listening well, you shouldn't have to.

Honesty

Be honest in your statements to the interviewer. If a question is asked about a former job answer truthfully but do not offer any information that may be detrimental to your prospective job. While you want to be truthful, the interviewer does not want to hear about how you stole a candy bar in the third grade. Don't run the risk of being hired, then discharged later for false statements in your job interview, so answer all questions truthfully.

Nervousness

In any interview there will be some nervous tension, yours and the interviewer's. One of the best ways to reduce your fear is to be well prepared (see above). Keep in mind that you know this subject (you) very well. Also remember that you are also interviewing them. You may not want the job after hearing more about it.

Be aware of how you manifest nervousness. You will want to avoid nervous behaviors like fidgeting or tapping your pen.

Non-verbal behavior

Your body language should tell the interviewer that you are confident. Avoid slouching in the chair and keep strong, but natural, eye contact with the interviewer.

Silence

There may be some silences during the interview. These silences are often stressful, but don't feel obligated to retract a previous statement. If you've answered the questions, there is no need for you to talk yourself into a hole. You may need a moment of silence to gather your thoughts before answering a difficult question.

Closing

Near the end of the interview you will probably be asked if you have any questions. You should have some prepared questions, based on the research you did on the company. Do not ask about pay or benefits at this time, unless the employer offers you the job, Wait until you know the employer wants to hire you.

During this phase of the interview, you should review your strengths and briefly mention relevant ones that have not been discussed.

Thank the interviewer and express your interest in the job, if you still want it.

After the Interview

Take notes as soon as possible after the interview. Jot down things such as:

- The name(s) of the interviewer(s)
- Key things the interviewer(s) said
- What went well
- What you weren't pleased with and what you might do differently next time
- The next step you will take (hopefully you asked the interviewer what they're next step will be)

Send a thank-you letter preferably within 24 hours after the interview. Thank him/her/them for the meeting. Also consider the following possible components:

- Provide information or enclose materials the employer asked you for in the interview that you didn't have at that time
- Say what you learned from your meeting
- Reaffirm your interests in the job
- Briefly restate your strongest qualifications for the job
- Ask the employer to call you if they need further information.

Skills and Traits Identification Worksheet

Employers are hungry for employees with certain skills and characteristics. Some of these are general good employee traits like dependability, reliability, motivation, and competency in interpersonal relations. There are job-specific skills like manual dexterity or technical writing skills. There are also transferable skills—skills that are useful in a variety of work situations. Some examples of these are organizational skills, and good telephone use skills. Identifying your skills will help you increase your self-confidence, and convince prospective employers of your ability to perform. This process may also help you discover areas where you need to improve.

To identify your skills and good employee traits, think of those that are job-specific, and those that are useful in a variety of occupations. For example, an actor must know how to act—a job specific skill. On the other hand, motivation is an important skill for actors, and for most other jobs.

Personal characteristics and personality traits:

Check the skills you have in these areas:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Punctual | <input type="checkbox"/> Good Attendance | <input type="checkbox"/> Honest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meet Deadlines | <input type="checkbox"/> Follow Instructions | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get along with supervisor | <input type="checkbox"/> Get along with co-workers | <input type="checkbox"/> Discreet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hard-working | <input type="checkbox"/> Good-natured | <input type="checkbox"/> Productive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patient | <input type="checkbox"/> Learn quickly | <input type="checkbox"/> Spontaneous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eager | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent | <input type="checkbox"/> Assertive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal | <input type="checkbox"/> Steady | <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient | <input type="checkbox"/> Physically strong | <input type="checkbox"/> Capable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mature | <input type="checkbox"/> Tactful | <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful | <input type="checkbox"/> Methodical | <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take pride in work | <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Competent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Expressive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tenacious | <input type="checkbox"/> Complete Assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resourceful | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible | <input type="checkbox"/> Thrifty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrious | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conscientious | <input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy | <input type="checkbox"/> Open-minded |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dependable | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic | <input type="checkbox"/> Sincere |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Original | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of humor | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatile |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Well-organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solver | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking in public | <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling Budgets | <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supervising others | <input type="checkbox"/> Increasing sales/efficiency | <input type="checkbox"/> Instruct others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accepting Responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Assemble or make things | <input type="checkbox"/> Investigate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Build, observe, inspect things | <input type="checkbox"/> Construct or repair buildings | <input type="checkbox"/> Audit records |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analyze data or facts | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep financial records | <input type="checkbox"/> Budget |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Locate answers or information | <input type="checkbox"/> Calculate/Compute | <input type="checkbox"/> Classify data |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manage money | <input type="checkbox"/> Confront others | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuade |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing people | <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting deadlines | <input type="checkbox"/> Pleasant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting the public | <input type="checkbox"/> Organize/Manage projects | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Operate tools and machinery | <input type="checkbox"/> Repair things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drive or operate vehicles | <input type="checkbox"/> Good with my hands | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use complex equipment | <input type="checkbox"/> Compare/inspect or record facts | <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Count, observe, compile | <input type="checkbox"/> Counsel people | <input type="checkbox"/> Get results |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Detail-oriented | <input type="checkbox"/> Synthesize | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take inventory | <input type="checkbox"/> Diplomatic | <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing, art |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help others | <input type="checkbox"/> Insightful | <input type="checkbox"/> Perform, act |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teach | <input type="checkbox"/> Interview others | <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kind | <input type="checkbox"/> Tough | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding | <input type="checkbox"/> Outgoing | <input type="checkbox"/> Articulate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inventive | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Artistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate verbally | <input type="checkbox"/> Remember information | <input type="checkbox"/> Logical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Able to research | <input type="checkbox"/> Mediate problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Take risks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Music appreciation | <input type="checkbox"/> Dance, body movement | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play instruments | <input type="checkbox"/> Present artistic ideas | |

Other general skills you have:

Job-specific Skills:

List skills you have that are required to do a specific job, such as stocking shelves in a store and repairing brakes:

Interview Preparation Sheet

Date

Location

Position

Interviewer

Interviewer's Title

What do I know about this company?

What do I know about this position?

What do I know about this interviewer?

What skills, experience and qualifications are required for the position?

What can I match? How do my skills and qualifications match?

What qualifications and/or skills do I lack?

How can I compensate for what I lack?

Why does this particular position appeal to me?

What special qualities can I bring to this company, position?

Questions to ask during the interview or at the end of the interview

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Interview Styles

Many employers are well-trained to interview potential employees. Others, however, may not be skilled in the art of interviewing. Maintain your professionalism and use effective interviewing techniques, whatever the skill level of the interviewer.

Interviewers adopt different techniques for each interview and it is valuable for the job seeker to recognize these styles in preparation for interviews.

Directed: A directed interview has a definite structure. They will usually have an agenda and a list of specific questions.

Non-directed: a non-directed interview tends to be less structured. The interviewer may ask broad, general questions and not take charge of the interview. The applicant is non-verbally encouraged to present qualifications.

Stress: A stress-styled interview is not as common as other interview styles. It is used to determine how the applicant reacts under pressure. There are many possible forms of stress interviews, which may include timed and problem-solving tasks.

Group: A group interview is one where several candidates are interviewed at once. This style is often used to determine how candidates interact as team members, or may be used if the organization hires in large numbers.

Panel: A panel-style interview involves more than one interviewer questioning a candidate. While similar to the directed interview, it is necessary to establish rapport with each interviewer. Direct eye contact is extremely important.

Job Interview Questions

You can never know in advance all the questions an interviewer will ask you. However, based on the job you are applying for and the organization, you should try to anticipate what will be asked and practice your answers. Don't memorize your answers, just have a mental outline to use in response to each anticipated question.

Frequently Asked Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. Why should I hire you?
3. What are your major weaknesses?
4. What are your major weaknesses?
5. What sort of pay do you expect to receive?
6. How does your previous experience relate to the job you are applying for here?
7. What are your plans for the future?
8. What will your former employers (or references) say about you?
9. Why are you looking for this sort of position and why here?
10. Why did you leave your last (or another) job?
11. Do you have any questions?

Behavioral Questions

Many employers use behavioral interview questions. These questions ask you to describe what you did in certain situations. The idea behind behavioral questions is that your past behavior is a good predictor of your future behavior.

Here are some sample behavioral interview questions:

1. Tell me about a time when you experienced a very stressful situation at work. What did you do to handle it?
2. Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with an angry customer. What was the result?
3. Please discuss an important document you wrote in a work environment.
4. Tell me about a time you made an important presentation to a group of people.
5. Tell me about a time when you had to solve a substantial problem at work.
6. Give me an example of a project you completed that required good planning.
7. Tell me about a time when you had far too many things to do, and what you did about it.

Steps To Answering Problem Questions

1. Anticipate problem questions and practice positive responses.
2. Understand the real concern
 - Can we depend on you?
 - Are you a good worker?
 - Are you easy to get along with?
 - Do you have the skills to do the job?
3. Address the interviewer's concern. Give facts, but present them as advantage, if possible, or at least show that this does not make you an undesirable candidate.

Handling Possibly Illegal Interview Questions

You may be asked a question in an interview that you believe is illegal. As various federal, state and local laws regulate what employers can ask in job interviews, it is sometimes difficult to be certain the question is illegal. Even if the question is illegal, the interviewer might not realize it.

With these factors in mind, here are some options for handling a question that you believe is illegal:

1. You refuse to answer the question. You probably are jeopardizing your chances of getting the job, but maybe you would not want to work for an employer who asked that question anyway.
2. You can answer the question as asked, but you might be revealing information that could result in the loss of a job offer
3. You can try to determine if there is a legal, job-related concern behind the question, and if so, address the concern. For example, if an interviewer asks you, "How many children do you have?" You could answer, "I can assure you that my personal obligations will not interfere with my work attendance or performance."

Here are some examples of illegal interview questions, and related legal questions.

Age

Illegal: How old are you?
What is your birth date?

Legal: Are you at least 18 years of age?

Disabilities

Illegal: Are you permanently unable to walk?
Have you had any serious back injuries?

Legal: Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodation? Asked after describing the essential functions of the job.
Part of this job is to move 50-pound bags of fertilizer from storage to a pick up and then from a pick up to a lawn. Can you demonstrate how you would do that?

National Origin/Citizenship

Illegal: Are you a U.S. citizen?
In what country were you born?

Legal: Can you show proof of your eligibility to work in the United States?
In what languages are you fluent?

Arrest Record

Illegal: Have you ever been arrested?

Legal: Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

Affiliations

Illegal: What organizations do you belong to?

Legal: Do you belong to any professional trade groups or other organizations that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job?

Sample Questions to Ask Interviewers

1. How are employees evaluated?
2. What are the challenging aspects of this job?
3. How would you describe your organization's management style?
4. What is the work environment like?
5. What is the next step in the interview process?
6. Who is the immediate supervisor for this position?
7. What characteristics does a person need to be successful in this job?

Salary Negotiation

- Find out the prevailing salary range for the job you are seeking in the local area. Also, try to find out what the salary range is for new employees hired to do the job you are seeking, at the company where you are seeking employment. Salary.com is a good site for doing some research.
- Know the salary you need, what you want, and what you will settle for.
- Try to postpone a salary discussion until you know they want to hire you.
- If possible, let the employer discuss what they are thinking of paying before you state your salary expectation.
- If asked what salary you expect before you know the employer wants to hire you, and before the employer reveals what pay rate they have in mind, you could state that you are "open" until you learn more about the position.

You might also ask what their starting salary range is for this position. If the interviewer tells you, consider picking the top of their range and saying that is fine (if that pay rate is okay with you).

- If you are forced into stating your salary request before the employer has stated the pay they have in mind, give your request in a range. Begin near the top of the employer's probable range and end a bit above that range.

Sample Interview Thank-You Letter

1492 East Mayberry
Prescott, AZ 86301
November 13, 2001

Ms. Marlene Ostrushko
Automotive Department Manager
Shop-Mart Stores, Inc.
2902 East Commerce
Prescott, AZ 86301

Dear Ms. Ostrushko:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview yesterday for the sales associate position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about Shop-Mart.

My interview with you confirmed my previous positive impressions of Shop-Mart, and I want to reiterate my strong interest on working for you. My Associate of Applied Science Degree in Automotive Technology and years of sales experience prepare me well for the sales associate job.

Again, thank you for your consideration. If you need additional information from me, please call me at 928-555-1234.

Sincerely,

James Broadlow