

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

A jobseeker probably feels like an interview is similar to a lynch mob; but in actuality, it's nothing more than a meet-and-greet session with the opportunity to ask a few select questions from both sides.

It's important to understand that just as the employer is interviewing you, you should be interviewing the interviewer. Not all marriages last; therefore, not all relationships between employers and employees go the distance either. Select a company that best meets your wants and needs so you don't regret your decision down the road.

INVITATION TO AN INTERVIEW -- WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

An interview measures the value and effectiveness of your resume. It means that your resume did its job by relaying your qualifications and achievements to peak the interest of the reader. The only purpose of the resume is to produce interviews; which is why so many jobseekers get frustrated with their marketing material (resume and cover letter). Once your resume is set up to demand attention and make the reader take action, a much-welcomed interview is scheduled to take that interest further.



* * * *

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS?

Types include traditional, panel, lunch, and exit. Each of these interviews revolve around the same objective of holding an informational meeting that offers questions and answers from all parties.

A **traditional interview** is simply a one-on-one meeting between the employer and jobseeker. The atmosphere could be formal or casual and the interviewer may follow a traditional list of questions or make it feel like a laid back conversation that you were having with a friend or neighbor. This format can be one

of the most preferred because the interviewee is speaking to one person. In essence, they only have one person to impress and sway.

A **panel interview** is feared amongst jobseekers because they feel outnumbered or overwhelmed by the number of “opponents.” Due to the time constraints of managers and executives in today’s workforce, panel interviews are becoming common ground because the arrangement allows several parties to interview a candidate at one time. This platform enables panel members to discuss the candidates after the meeting before making a final decision. This type of interview can also be critical for a candidate who will be required to report to many departments or superiors. Ultimately, the individual would have several direct report superiors rather than one or two.

Do you remember when interviewing professionals once recommended trying to relate to the interviewer? That technique would be difficult to achieve if you’re faced with four interviewers instead of one.

A **lunch interview** could be similar to one of the above interviews — or a combination of each. Having a job interview over a meal can be difficult because the interviewee is oftentimes trying to juggle questions and a meal. Another common problem that the interviewee may face is to remain relaxed without spewing out casual answers to serious questions. Practicing troublesome interview questions will help you feel more confident and make you more prepared.

An **exit interview** is becoming popular amongst companies because an informational meeting can uncover critical information. The interview is typically performed just prior to the employee’s departure or shortly thereafter. It’s becoming a common practice for companies because it provides the platform to uncover detailed information needed for a predecessor, determine the employee’s mental stability, and serve as a mediation session. Companies that need to create a leaner and more productive operation are finding themselves utilizing every resource at their fingertips and that includes departing employees. Whether the employee is leaving on their own terms or leaving at the request of the employer, the company sometimes needs critical information from the employee that requires a question and answer meeting between both parties.

* * * *

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

- **Know the company’s reputation.** Just as you’ll visit a local library and scour the Internet for information about each business, you should also ask everyone within your network about the quality of the company. Do they have a reputation for treating their employees fairly?

Some employers are getting a bad reputation from the way they’re handling layoffs and employment cutbacks. Employees are being locked out of

buildings, being escorted out the door after arriving, and receiving pay and benefit cuts.

A company's reputation is fast becoming another facet for employment. Ask yourself if you'd rather work for a company that treats their employees with respect and dignity or one with a track record of handing out pink slips and treating employees like an object rather than a person.

- **Attend the interview with a written outline that highlights each of your assets.** When I say assets, I'm not talking about soft skills like "hard worker" or "team player." I'm talking about hard skills (measurable items) that will cause the interviewer to react.

If you notice on the way in to your interview that stacks of paper are burying the receptionist, you might want to mention how effectively you can restructure office procedures. Not only focus on your abilities to "unbury" the administrative support, but also highlight one of the bullet points contained in your resume. Your example might be, "as you'll notice in my resume, I completely restructured JKC's office to incorporate an easily maintained and affordable database that was accessible by all staff members. The database cut back on the amount of paperwork floating around the office and streamlined customer accounts. In the first year alone, I estimated a savings of \$150,000 — more importantly, the office support was happy and more productive after the change."

- **Be a problem solver.** Just as you'll create an outline of your assets, you may also want to focus on departmental or company-wide problems. Identifying exactly what these problems are can be difficult so don't be afraid to ask.

Query the person that contacted you for the interview and ask the interviewer during the interview. Don't be afraid to ask questions. The person that solicits key information can end up being the front-runner during the "interview race" because the answers he or she gives will be targeted towards the company's problems.

Think about it. If you were creating a new position or replacing an employee, wouldn't you want someone that will spearhead all your problems and make your dreams come true? I would!

- **Take a good, long look at yourself.** Do you need some spit shine? It's a common fact that an individual's confidence can be boosted with a new hair cut and a professional set of clothes. Your resume marketed you to get the interview, so don't drop the ball by walking into the interview with outdated clothing or hairstyle. It's common sense:
 - **If you smoke,** your clothes and breath will reflect that.

- **If you haven't interviewed in years**, you will need a refresher course and practice to ensure the answers you provide today are what today's managers want.
- **If you haven't bought new clothing in some time**, you should consider buying 2 or 3 new outfits specifically for interviewing — if you get the job, then you can splurge on more outfits.
- **If you are a perfume wearer**, you are treading on sensitive ground because some individuals can't tolerate perfume (also keep in mind that you may think you put on a light coat, but to those around you it smells like you bathed in it).
- **Focus on your words** so you don't use nervous fillers like "umm" and "do you know what I mean" too often; relax and be conscious of your sentence structures and professionalism.
- **Relax and learn from the opportunity.** Jobseekers tend to get discouraged when they interview but fail to land the job. Each interview you participate in is a learning environment, so relax and focus on the types of questions being asked. If you walk away thinking, "Geesh, I could have answered that question 50 times better," then you should make a notation of the question and later evaluate how you would answer it better the next time.

Don't be afraid to make notations during the interview, including notations of tough questions, because you want to improve upon your skills — interviewing skills.

* * * *

TYPICAL, YET TROUBLESOME, INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself. It seems logical that this question would insinuate that it should be answered with personal aspects of one's life. Actually, the jobseeker shouldn't go into personal issues but rather focus on those relevancies critical to the position. Complete the following to devise a perfect answer for this query.

Position title _____

List the 5 core responsibilities for this position

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Take a few moments to think about your career and how it relates to this position. For example, if the employer is looking for someone to manage a large staff, cut costs and increase revenue, then I suggest you devise an answer that will push the employer's buttons with these topics.

Sit back and think about the answer you created. Take a few days to examine and retool it if necessary. There's no size limitation, but try to keep your answer to a comfortable size of 3-6 sentences. Once you're happy with the final draft, practice your answer until it rolls off your tongue automatically.

Why did you leave your previous employer? There's a number of ways you should answer this question; however, I suggest that you keep your answer honest and as short as possible. When I mean short, I don't necessarily mean sidestep the question, but rather satisfy the inquiry of the interviewer and then progress to points that the company needs to know about you. And when I say honest, I don't mean get into a "he said, she said" dialogue that outlines every dirty detail. The employer doesn't want to hear about your personal conflicts, if that's the main reason you left your previous employer.

Just as not all marriages go the distance, not all relationships between coworkers, bosses, and employees last either. An interview can be tense for all parties so don't be afraid to crack a joke to lighten the mood.

INFORMATIVE CAREER ARTICLES

Visit the Resume to Referral website to read informative articles on a variety of career topics. Here's a list of the articles currently posted:

[Avoid a Three-ring Circus with New Interview Strategies](#)

[Basic Resumes Are Detrimental to Your Career](#)

[Career Planning Starts with Self-Assessment](#)

["Red Alert ... An Over-50 Jobseeker Has Just Entered the Building"](#)
Interviewing Tips for the Older Job-seeking Population

[ASCII ... huh? Transforming Your Resume to a Text-only Document](#)

[Now What? How to Ensure Your Resume Produces Top Results](#)

[Great Expectations: Obtainable or a Pipe Dream?](#)



If you are someone who cracks jokes easily, I suggest devising a small, quick-witted statement that will answer the question and lighten the air. Once you do that, proceed into specifics on why you're perfect for the job or ask an off-topic question that will steer the interview into a different direction.

You're not trying to trick the interviewer, but merely focusing on your assets rather than irrelevancies or negatives.

Poor performance or conflict from the past are probably not going to resurface again — unless you were the instigator — so there's no reason to give the employer ammunition to make a decision out of your favor.

Create two or three sentences in response to this question. Fine tune your answer and practice it so you're comfortable with the results. Solicit the help of a family member or friend to listen and critique your answer.

Describe your current job duties and outline how you've improved upon this position. I'm sure you've heard that adage of "the proof is in the pudding." The reason an interviewer will ask this question is solely to find how you'll outline and examine your own job performance. Overall, individuals are inclined to provide

honest, detailed explanations that will give the interviewer a good feel for your work ethic.

Contained within the "Attend the interview with a written outline that highlights each of your assets" paragraph on page 3, I suggest applying this strategy to these types of questions.

What do you feel are your biggest liabilities? Individuals tend to get confused with this question. The object is not to answer with negativities, so avoid using words like "couldn't," "unable to," or "unable to resolve." The object is not to answer with words that will reflect previous problems.

Liabilities can be "positive" elements — or twisted so they seem to be positive to the employer. For example, the following list can be integrated into your answer:

- Track record of working long hours and staying until the job is finished
- Driven to take on additional projects and solicit new tasks from superiors or colleagues
- Motivation to succeed regardless of obstacles

Of course, utilize liabilities that are factual to you. You want the interview to be packed with accuracies so the interviewer is given the information that he or she will need to make the right decision. If you provide the interviewer with false information or positives about your character or work ethic that aren't true, then you've stolen the position from someone more worthy.

In a Pickle?

A situational interview, much like the role-play interview, needs preparation to determine potential situations with resolutions. For example, a software engineer and developer might be given a code and summoned to provide a solution within a couple of minutes. Sometimes detailed questions, such as these, require the interviewee to sit back and consider the code before being able to offer a viable solution sought by the employer.

Since situational interviewing, also known as behavioral, is fast becoming the format of choice amongst hiring managers and HR personnel, identifying key areas where you've demonstrated initiative, reflected with quantities covering overhead, revenue, or time saving, interviewees should be armed with core examples and firm results.

If you may find yourself in this situation, prepare for it.

* * * *

UNUSUAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

Unusual really doesn't describe some of the interviewing questions that are floating around the "interviewing" world. In fact, some of them are so weird it makes you wonder what the interviewer is thinking when they ask such stupid questions. We'll help you identify some of the reasons behind such questions so you can compile proper answers.

If you were an animal, what kind would you be? This question is actually similar to the one about a car: "If you were a car, what kind would you be and what color?" It's a strange question and your answer really doesn't have any bearing on whether you're a good employee or not — in my opinion.

The answer you provide will reflect your character and possibly your quick wittedness. For example, an older and docile job seeker might say that he considers himself a giraffe whereas a bubbly and outspoken individual might say a hyena. If you say that you're a giraffe or a hyena, does that mean you're not qualified or capable of performing the job? Absolutely not! It would be asinine for an employer to base their hiring decision on such a question.

On the other side of the fence, however, personality traits are sometimes part of the mixture for making hiring decisions. Just as some employers perform credit searches on their employees, some are now utilizing personality tests to determine a person's characteristics in correlation with the demands of the position, and in relation to those workers already present in the department. Of course, none of these practices are absolute. Just as there are flaws in the hiring process, there are loopholes in the tests used to make these decisions.

Let's say you walk into your department one morning, and a female employee is yelling and acting erratic. As her manager, what would you do?

This question may seem unusual at first, but situational questions are becoming the norm. It's important for companies to understand your thought process during delicate situations, such as an uncontrollable employee, so don't be surprised if you're given a scenario and asked to explain your next actions.

A number of circumstances could cause an employee to act unprofessional; therefore, select a situation that is best for all parties involved. You could ask the employee to step into your office, mediate the situation with any or all involved parties, or give the individual a day off. Whatever decision you make, the interviewer will analyze your decision against the answers given by each of the other candidates.

* * * *

INTERVIEWING DON'TS

- **Keep your tongue in check.** Individuals sometimes talk too much when nervous, so focus on the amount of babble coming out of your mouth. If you need time to relax, even if for a short time, ask a couple questions so the interviewer will be given the time to speak. Take that time to compose yourself and refocus on the outline in front of you. As mentioned above, language fillers make it difficult to concentrate on the words themselves. Listeners may find themselves distracted by counting the number of times "umm" is mentioned.
- **Don't make it all about you (personally).** Don't make the mistake of talking about your spouse, your family, the new pooch, or any other subject that is irrelevant to the interviewer.

It can be important, however, to relate to the interviewer with the hopes of making yourself look "compatible" — a good fit for the position. New sales professionals sometimes try to "talk people into buying," but that isn't how a good sales person sells products or services. In a book by Joe Girard entitled, *How to Close Every Sale*, he indicates that, "most salespeople equate good selling with the ability to persuade prospects through a constant talkathon." He later states, "For my money, a top salesperson must be just as skillful at listening as he is at talking."

- **Don't walk in uninformed.** Every interviewing resource you'll ever peruse will encourage you to know the company front to back, if possible. Visit your local library, the company website, and talk to everyone around you about the company and how your background can influence the interview. Don't be afraid to ask for a company catalog or brochure.



Unique Interview Situation

Expecting to perform under pressure can be one of the most stressful interviews. Take an interview stunt shown on the *Today Show* where two finalists were competing for a Master Modeling position with well-known toy maker, Legos. Each "contestant" was expected to build a model within 45 minutes using a certain number of Lego pieces. The one that built the best model was given the job.

I want you to imagine for a moment that not only were they competing for a job, but they were also faced with performing creatively in front of millions. Talk about pressure!

SELECT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How would you describe your personality?

Explain your ideal position.

Are there specific duties that you dislike?

Will you have difficulty reporting to someone younger?

What are your salary requirements?

How did you land your last position?

Do you foresee yourself expanding your education and knowledge of our industry by going back to college?

Do you foresee immediate improvements that you can enforce within the first few days of employment?

Tell me what you know about our company.

Do you perform well under pressure?

Outline your short- and long-term career goals.

Why did you leave your previous employer?

Why do you want to work for us?

Did you dislike a previous employer?