



9. Job Interviews

Congratulations! You have been notified that a prospective employer would like to meet with you for a formal interview. For many job seekers, the interview is the most exciting – and stressful – part of the job search process. The prospect of a job is suddenly real, but the actual interview can be intimidating. The best way to calm your nerves and give yourself the best chance of getting the job is to take the interview preparation seriously.

Learn About the Company

Although you may have researched the organization when you first applied for the job, this is the time to do much more. Learn as much as you can from multiple sources. Knowledge about the company will help you answer interview questions, as well as demonstrate your interest in the company and commitment to the job. Your research will also allow you to match your skills to the needs of the employer, and will help you to ask thoughtful questions of your own during the interview. You do not need to memorize facts and figures about the company, but you should become familiar with certain basic information, such as the company's products, customers, organization, locations, size, sales, competitors, industry trends, and more. In reviewing this information, think about what makes this company a good place to work and why you are a good fit.

The best place to start your research is often the company's website. Other sources of information may include online news articles, annual reports, business and professional associations or publications, and personal contacts within the company, or even competitors of the company.¹³ Your [local American Job Center](#) can be a valuable source of information and provide you with multiple resources.

As you are conducting your research, prepare written notes of what you learn. You can bring these notes with you during your interview, which will help you remember key points and demonstrate that you took the time to prepare.

Prepare to Discuss Yourself

Your preparation should also include thinking through how you will discuss yourself, including your work history, education, goals, skills, and experiences both positive and negative. To win the job, you will need to demonstrate to the interviewer a combination of skills, experience, and personal attributes that set you apart from other applicants. Think about how to summarize your resume quickly and in a way that will emphasize what is most relevant to this job opportunity. Also consider what you learned from each of the previous experiences you listed on the resume and how these experiences will benefit your potential new employer. Prepare a list of "personal themes" that you want to highlight during the interview, especially your professional goals, skills, and accomplishments. Think of examples from your past that demonstrate each of your skills and successes. Think, on the one hand, about what makes you excited about this



opportunity and what you would like to gain from it (aside from the paycheck) and, on the other hand, what you will bring to the table for your new job.

During the interview, you will want to emphasize your strengths and the positive aspects of yourself. However, the interviewer may ask to discuss your weaknesses, how you handle conflict or stress, gaps in your employment history, reasons for leaving previous jobs, or other negative experiences. You need to think about and rehearse your answers to such questions beforehand so that you are fully prepared with appropriate answers. It will be important to answer honestly, but in a way that highlights what you have learned and how you have grown from previous experiences. For example, an interviewer may ask, “What techniques do you use to manage your time?” Even if time management is a problem for you, answering “I have real difficulty managing my time” will not help you win the job. Rather, knowing that this is a weakness, plan ahead to answer along the lines of “I’ve learned to make a real effort to keep a to-do list with deadlines to keep myself on task.”

Finally, plan ahead for several questions that you want to ask the interviewer. Asking thoughtful questions provides you with additional information about the job, demonstrates that you are actively thinking about how you will be a successful employee, and initiates a conversation that builds rapport with your potential future supervisor and enables him or her to envision you doing the job. Above all, you do not want to freeze up during the interview, unable to think of or articulate a good question to ask.

As with your research of the company, write down all of the key points and questions that you want to remember so that you can review them quickly on the day of the interview. Referring to your notes during the interview is acceptable and will demonstrate your diligence and preparation. Seeing all of your research and preparation on paper will give you a great feeling of confidence just when you need it.

Another technique to help you prepare is to conduct a mock interview. Consider recruiting family or friends to ask interview questions and provide feedback on your answers.¹⁴ Mock interview sessions may also be available in your [local American Job Center](#), in employment and staffing services, educational career centers, and other job placement organizations as part of their professional services.

Types of Interviews

There are many different types of interviews and employers may use more than one type to make their hiring decisions. When you are making arrangements for the interview, try to determine what type of interview the employer uses so that you are not surprised during the meeting. Here are several different types and tips for how to succeed with each of them:

Screening. Screening interviews are conducted to provide the employer an initial impression of your attitude and interest and to eliminate candidates based on essential criteria. Screening interviews may be conducted by phone or in-person, and they may call without an appointment. Have your job search records organized and resume handy. Even though you may not be meeting with the final decision



maker, it is important to take the screening interview seriously and treat it as you would a “regular” interview.

Selection. This interview features in-depth questions to evaluate your qualifications for the position and your ability to fit in. There may be more than one interview at this stage. Establish a connection with everyone you meet and sell yourself as a natural addition to the team.

Group or panel. Several people ask questions on your qualifications and assess how you fit with the team. The interview may include other candidates for the position. Direct your answer to the person who asked the question, but keep some eye contact with the group. If other candidates are present, introduce yourself and be polite. Volunteer to respond first to a few questions, but do not dominate the entire interview. Compliment another candidate’s response and then build on it with your own thoughts.

Behavioral. The interviewer will ask questions that require you to describe how you have handled work-related situations. Think of a few examples ahead of time. Use examples that illustrate your skills and give a good impression of you.

Work sample. You may be asked to provide samples of your work, such as a portfolio display, a presentation, solving a typical problem, or other demonstration of your skills. Consider different ways to describe the projects in your portfolio. Practice your presentation until it is smooth.

Peer group. You may be asked to meet with your prospective coworkers to determine how you fit with the team. Treat every member of the team with respect and try to build a rapport with each person. Often this may be informal, such as the individual who is escorting you to the formal interview. Remember, anything you say can and will be held against you or in your favor. Be professional and friendly ALWAYS and with everyone!

Meal. The interview may be conducted in a restaurant to assess how well you handle yourself in social situations. Choose an alcohol-free light meal (and not too messy) to eat so you can focus on answering questions and pay attention to the conversation.

Stress. The questions are intended to make you uncomfortable and to test how you will handle stress on the job. Keep your cool and take your time in responding to the questions. Don’t take anything personally.

Video Conference. The employer may use technology to allow people from different locations to participate without traveling. You might consider practicing before a video camera, mirror, or via Skype, if facing a camera during an interview makes you nervous.

Job Fair. This mini-interview might last only a few minutes and is similar to a screening interview. Prepare for and treat this interview as you would a regular interview. If you can, research the company beforehand and make your best impression on the interviewer to stand out from the crowd.



Third, Fourth, and More. The process is dragging on and you are getting discouraged. Try to stay upbeat and treat each interview with equal importance and preparation. Be sure to continue your job search activities as there is no guarantee that a job offer is forthcoming.

Acing the Interview

A great interview, and ultimately winning the job, depends as much on your attitude and personality as it does on your skills and qualifications. The interviewer already knows from your resume that you have the basic qualifications for the job. Your primary goal for the interview is to demonstrate that you have the full range of characteristics that will make you successful in the position. In general, employers look for certain traits, such as are you: Capable, Confident, Dependable, Enthusiastic, Flexible, Persistent, and/or Resourceful? To determine if you have these qualities, the interviewer will assess every aspect of what you say and how you behave from the moment you walk through the door until you leave. This assessment includes the substance of your answers to his or her questions as well as numerous non-verbal cues. Such non-verbal cues include your facial expressions, posture, dress and appearance, eye contact, and demeanor. The following are some key points for a successful interview:

Getting Ready.¹⁵ Get a good night's sleep and give yourself plenty of time to get ready for the interview. When choosing what to wear, consider that it is better to be overdressed for your interview than underdressed, even if you know that the working environment is casual. Similarly, be sure to be neat, clean and well-groomed. Refrain from perfume, cologne, large jewelry, or revealing clothing. Plan on arriving 10-15 minutes early. If you are driving to the interview, know the directions and where you will park, and be sure to factor in traffic. If you are taking public transportation, know the route, schedules, and fares ahead of time. Insure you have extra copies of your resume, references, a notepad and an extra pen, in addition to any information or documents needed in case you are offered the job, such as your Social Security card, driver's license, etc.

First Impressions. Smile. Use a firm, but not crushing, handshake. Maintain good eye contact, without staring. Make a point to remember the names of everyone you meet and write them down so that you can follow up with a thank you note later. Follow the lead of the interviewer. Be polite to everyone you meet. Even the receptionist at the front desk may be asked how you behaved when you arrived. Listen attentively and take notes of key points.

Brag Appropriately. An interview is not the time for modesty. Tell the interviewer about the accomplishments you are most proud of, what you have learned from them, and how they relate to the job you are applying for. Ideally, you will have several accomplishments from previous work experience that you are prepared to discuss, but you may also discuss accomplishments from your education or personal life if they are appropriate to the situation.

Emphasize the Positive. You should always describe your experiences in a positive way. Explain for the interviewer what your strengths are, including technical skills and personal qualities. If you have faced challenges in the past, how did you overcome them and what have you learned from them. Describe



how you stay motivated to do your best work. Avoid being negative about anything, especially past employers. If you need to discuss a bad experience, describe it as a learning experience. If you need to discuss a weakness, describe how you work to improve in that area.¹⁶

Be Prepared for Common Questions. The following are examples of common interview questions. Consider creating flashcards to help you prepare.¹⁷ There are many resources on-line or in your local library to help you think through how to answer any number of specific questions. Whatever you are asked, take a few moments to consider your response carefully, provide examples, and answer in a way that makes you a more attractive future employee.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in working for this company?
- Tell me about your education.
- Why have you chosen this particular field?
- Describe your best/worst boss.
- What interests you most/least?
- What is your major weakness?
- Give an example of how you have solved a problem.
- What are your strengths?
- How do others describe you?
- What do you consider your best accomplishment in your last job?
- Where do you see yourself in three years?
- Think about something you consider a failure in your life, and tell me why you think it happened.
- How do you think you will fit into this operation?
- If you were hired, what ideas/talents could you contribute to the position or our company?
- Give an example where you showed leadership and initiative.
- Give an example of when you were able to contribute to a team project.
- What have you done to develop or change in the last few years?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Ask Thoughtful Questions. The following are examples of common questions you may ask the interviewer.¹⁸ You may follow-up the answers to reassure the interviewer that you are up to the job and excited about the opportunity.

- Why is this position vacant?
- What have your most successful candidates brought to the company?
- What challenges is the company currently facing?
- How do you retain your top talent?
- Why do you work for this company?
- What are the responsibilities and accountabilities of this position?
- Please describe an average day on this job.
- What aspects of this job would you like to see performed better?
- What are the key challenges or problems of this position?
- Where can I go from here, assuming that I meet/exceed the job responsibilities?
- How would you describe the ideal candidate?
- What are the employer's short- and long-range objectives?
- What are some outside influences that affect company growth?
- Where does the company excel? What are its limitations?
- When and how will I be evaluated?



- What are the performance standards?
- With whom would I be working?
- Who would be my supervisor?
- Who would I supervise?
- What is the department's environment like?
- When will you make the hiring decision?

Illegal Questions. The following are examples of questions that an interviewer should not ask during a job interview. If you are asked, you may politely decline to answer.

- What is or was your spouse's name or line of work?
- Have you ever filed a Workers' Compensation claim or been injured on the job?
- Do you have any physical conditions that would prevent you from performing the job?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- What is your hair/eye color?
- What is your height/weight?
- Have you ever been hospitalized? If so, for what condition?
- Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist? If so, for what condition?
- How many days were you absent from work because of illness last year?
- Are you taking any prescribed drugs?
- Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?

Discussing Salary. In general, it is best to avoid discussing money, benefits, or vacation time during the interview. This discussion is best left until you receive an offer, as you want to keep the focus on why the employer should hire you. If the interviewer asks about your salary needs directly, you can provide a salary range or the salary from your previous job.

Talking to Your Current Employer

If you are currently working but know you are ready for a different job, it is sometimes appropriate to discuss this with your current boss. Consider your reasons for wanting a change – is it more money? Additional opportunities to advance your career? Perhaps you could find these solutions within your current company. Many businesses will help employees advance if they know the worker is dedicated to the company's success. Such a discussion would also be the time to ask if your boss could give you a good recommendation.

However, it is not always wise to be honest about your desire to change jobs. This strategy will work best when you know your company values your work and you trust your boss. Otherwise, it may be better to be discrete about your search for a new opportunity with a different employer and wait until you have a new job offer in hand to talk with your boss about your next



Follow Up

As soon as possible after the interview, while the discussion is still fresh in your mind, write a thank you note to each individual you spoke with. If you have neat handwriting, a hand-written thank you note is a nice touch; otherwise type and print your letter or use e-mail. Cite something specific that the interviewer told you that you are especially excited about. (Look back at your interview notes, if you have a hard time remembering detailed examples.) You can also reemphasize your strengths or describe something you did not get the chance to bring up during the interview. Be polite and convey your continued interest in the position. If you are unsure of the spelling of someone's name, be sure to call the receptionist and ask.

If the interviewer provided a timeframe for the hiring decision, do not contact them again until that date has passed. Otherwise, allow a week or two to pass before inquiring further. If you have not heard by then, you may follow up with an e-mail or phone call to inquire about the status of the decision. In the meantime, continue your job search to identify additional opportunities and create options for yourself.

If you have not heard three or more weeks after the interview you may want to send another thank you note.

Weighing the Pros and Cons

Congratulations – you have a job offer! As you decide whether or not to accept it, think about your list of priorities on your next job. How many of these items would be satisfied by the job opportunity you have just received?

Review your list and decide which factors are most important. Sometimes it isn't salary – instead, it might be a convenient commute, flexible hours, interesting work or excellent benefits for you and your family. If the job offer provides important solutions for your needs, it might be right for you!

Finally, consider whether the offer lines up with your long-term goals. Perhaps you could accept a position with a lower salary or benefits if it will help you land your ideal job in three to five years.

Accepting (or Declining) a Job Offer ^{19 20}

When you receive a job offer, depending upon the industry and occupation, you may want to ask for some time to consider it and talk it over with your family. However, if you want the position, don't let so much time pass that the company's second choice candidate will get "your" job! Ask the company representative to provide the offer in writing and go over the basic information: hours, salaries, benefits, work location, etc.

If you don't believe the job is right for you, contact the person offering you the job and also put your response in writing – promptly. Be courteous, as you may want to be considered for a future opening, or you may cross paths with that company representative in a professional capacity later. A short response is fine: Thank you for the job offer; I regret that it is not a good fit for me at this time; I enjoyed talking with you. Best wishes for future success.



A Word on Job Fairs

Job fairs or career expos may be hosted by many different organizations, including colleges and universities, community-based, non-profit organizations, business and professional associations, and more. These events offer job seekers the opportunity to meet with multiple employers in a short amount of time. In addition, job fairs often provide networking programs, resume reviews, and other workshops for job seekers.

When preparing for a job fair, the same general interview preparation rules apply. It is important to research the employers who will be participating. Many job fairs have information on participating companies on their website in advance. Ideally, investigate which employers hire people with your skill set. By knowing which employers are the best potential fit, you can focus your preparation and maximize your time during the event. Check out those companies' websites, specifically their mission, open positions, and general information. Being able to demonstrate knowledge about each company you talk to will help you stand out from the crowd. In addition, practice a quick elevator speech summarizing your skills and experience to promote yourself to prospective employers. You should also practice responses to interview questions and prepare a few questions of your own.

On the day of the event, be sure to dress in professional interview attire. Wear comfortable shoes as you can expect to do a lot of standing in line. Bring extra copies of your resume, pens, a notepad, and business cards if you have them. As you meet with the companies' representatives, show initiative by demonstrating your knowledge of the company and interest in their job opportunities. You should not necessarily expect an on-the-spot interview, but be prepared just in case. Your time with each recruiter will be short, so be concise and enthusiastic. You can take notes on the backs of the business cards you collect, which will help you keep track of who you spoke with and how to follow up.

During the fair, it is important to be flexible. No single employer representative is knowledgeable about all positions available, especially in a large organization. Some representatives are there to share their experiences working at the organization and may not be involved in the hiring process. Others may be looking for specific skill sets. If the employer representative at the fair does not know about the job you are interested in, ask for the name of someone who can help you.²¹

After the job fair, follow up with a brief thank-you note or e-mail to each company representative you met to remind them of who you are and any specifics you discussed.



Use the chart below to plan your answers to some of the most common interview questions and practice talking about yourself in a positive way. Remember that you don't want your answers to be as long as a novel, but they should be longer than just one or two words. A happy median is a brief and concise free-flowing conversation.

Practice Interview Questions

Question	Answer
Tell me about yourself.	
Why are you interested in working for this company?	
Tell me about your education.	
Why have you chosen this particular field?	
Describe your best/worst boss.	
What interests you most/least?	
What is your major weakness?	
Give an example of how you have solved a problem.	
What are your strengths?	
How do others describe you?	
What do you consider your best accomplishment in your last job?	
Where do you see yourself in three years?	
Think about something you consider a failure in your life, and tell me why you think it happened.	
How do you think you will fit into this operation?	
If you were hired, what ideas/talents could you contribute to the position or our company?	
Give an example where you showed leadership and initiative.	
Give an example of when you were able to contribute to a team project.	
What have you done to develop or change in the last few years?	



To document the completion of practice question activity, we recommend that you save your work electronically in an easily accessible location, with an appropriate file name and date.

Alternatively, you may also print out your work and maintain the documents in your work search records. Be sure to properly label and date your print documents.



Confirm the applicable NH unemployment insurance requirements and be sure to follow them closely to avoid benefit disqualifications or overpayments.

