


# Interview Secrets Exposed

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# Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate Interview E-book. In this book you will learn all the secrets you need to know to help nail your job interview and get the job. Follow our steps and make sure that you are well prepared to answer every possible interview question when the opportunity presents itself.

This E-book is a compilation of many months of research and discussions with hiring managers and career experts in recruitment, career counselling and interviews.

The purchase of this E-book is your first step in ensuring that you get the job!

Interviewing is all about research, confidence and creating a good rapport. The hiring manager needs to know that you are capable of performing the tasks of the job and also that you will be a good addition to the team. The interview is your time to shine. Don't be intimidated because you don't think you have all the skills that are wanted in the job specification. Most businesses will teach you as you go, so lacking a certain skill will not mean you can't get the job. If you do lack certain skills or experience, you need to work twice as hard in your interview to portray what you *do* have that you can bring this job. It is a myth to think that the most skilled person will get the job. When it comes to hiring the right person, it is about the overall package – skills, personality, confidence and also the passion you show in your interview.

## What is an interview?

Before you can even begin to think about nailing your interview you need to know what an interview is and what you plan to get out of the interview. Most people roll their eyes when they read this as they first think that the point of the interview is to get the job. This is the final stage, but there is a whole process that goes into the interview before it actually happens.

Wikipedia defines a job interview as the “process in which a potential employee is evaluated by an employer for prospective employment in their company, organization, or firm. During this process, the employer hopes to determine whether or not the applicant is suitable for the job.”

This definition describes the interview from the employer's perspective, but what about you? In this introduction the most important thing to remember is that an interview is a two-way process. The interview also provides you with the opportunity to assess your employer and see if the position is really something you want. Did you know that the average time a person spends at work over the course of their life plus or minus is 97,464 hours! If you spend that much time at work, it is imperative that when you go for interview you ask the hiring manager all the questions you have.

Think of it like this. When you purchase an expensive and important item like a car, you do your investigation and research to make sure that the car you're going to buy is the right choice for you. Choosing a job is exactly the same (and more important!) You need to do your research and ask questions. If you don't, you might find yourself in an unhappy situation and looking for a new job before you know it.

## Interviewing is a 2 way process!

### Preparing for the interview:

#### Part 1: Research:

Congratulations! You have been invited for the interview. Now what do you do?

The first step is beginning to research the company. Once you have done this you will be ready to prep for the interview questions, learn how to improve your interviewing skills and begin to think about what you're going to wear to the interview.

In order to succeed in the interview you need to do your homework on the company. There is no set of rules to how to do your research but preparing yourself as much as possible will greatly enhance your chances of getting hired.

Make sure you use every available resource to help you with your preparation. By doing a basic google on the company you can easily learn important facts about the company. Publically listed companies are easier to prepare your background research than privately listed companies as public companies are legally required to make certain information available. In the 21st century the Internet has made a lot of the pre interview research more available and easier to find. Don't forget that you can also use other sources of information like public libraries or bookstores. Many magazines and journals can provide important and up to date information on your company and also provide you with information that your competitors who are also applying for the same job won't know.

#### A true story...

A candidate of mine was applying for a job at one of the large investment banks. Out of 150 candidates the hiring manager had selected the top 10 best resumes to perform first round interviews. Every interview was 15-20 minutes long. The final question the hiring manager asked to each of the candidates was "Tell me something about the company." Nine out of ten of the candidates rattled off information they had read from the company's "about us page", but one candidate stood out. After reading about the company's strategic purchase of a new acquisition, the candidate was able to impress the hiring manager with his (somewhat different) knowledge.

The hiring manager later offered this candidate the role not because he was the smartest candidate, but because he showed his dedication by going the extra step in his interview preparation.

Your research for the job interview preparation should give you a better insight on

- The history of the business
- How old the business is
- The types of services the business offers
- The hierarchy structure
- How many offices/locations the business has
- Number of employees
- Career progression
- The business culture
- Competitors

- Benefits

Check out the Competitors websites as well – they are also a good source of information for your job preparation.

### Interview questions:

Now that you have a better understanding of the company you are applying for you can begin to prepare for the interview. We are going to go through all the types of interview questions you can be asked and how best to answer these questions.

### Ice Breaking Questions:

When you first enter the interview, the opening question is always designed to introduce yourself so you feel comfortable in the surroundings before the questions become more specific. Generally speaking, “ice breaking questions” are broad, yet they can be so important with how they impact the rest of your interview. Just like in a sports game, the opening minutes of the game are not where the game can be won, but where it can potentially be lost. The same goes for the interview – you are not going to get the job because of the answer you provide, but you can lose the job with your answer. Although the ice breaking question will be a general question about yourself or how your day is going, remember this is the hiring manager’s first impression of you. Giving off the wrong first impression can severely affect the outcome of the interview.

#### Examples:

Tell me a little about yourself...

Were there any problems finding our office today?

Have you visited our location before?

If there is a major sporting event like the Olympics going on the hiring manager may ask something along the lines of “Have you been following the Olympics?”

Would you like some coffee or a glass of water?

Are you enjoying this weather?

Why have you applied for this role? (Trickier ice breaker question)

The most important aspect of answering an ice breaking question is to build early rapport with the interviewer. As I mentioned, you are not going to get the job just because you answer the ice breaking question in a brilliant way, but answering the question the wrong way can give off the wrong first impression.

#### **Tips:**

- Keep the answer related to the question and be brief and polite. This is not a time to tell the interviewer your life story

- Use proper English – If you are asked how you are doing the correct answer would be “Very well thank you, and how are you?” or “Fine thank you, how are you today?” – Using slang or lazy English can create an unprofessional or even careless impression

### Case Study: How to blow the ice breaking question.

A colleague of mine was interviewing candidates for a new role. As a polite introduction he would ask the candidate if they found the company building ok. Most of the candidates smiled and said yes to this question. One candidate, however, told the interviewer how it took him a long time to find the building and how his train was late. He rambled on for 2 minutes about the difficulty in finding the building. Before the interview had formally even begun he had already created a negative impression on the interviewer. He had lost the job before the interview had even started.

Types of questions you can expect to get in an interview and how to answer them:

#### **Open-ended questions:**

We will delve into types of open-ended questions throughout the next few pages, but the one thing to keep in mind with an open-ended question is that you need to give the interviewer more than a yes or no answer. If you do the research beforehand, you will be in a position to adequately open-ended question.

#### **Closed –ended questions:**

There are times when an interviewer will need to know a specific piece of information and only require a brief response. My tip is to always answer the question directly in a brief, but complete sentence – never just in a one word answer.

#### **Examples:**

Q: Have you finished your bachelor degree?

A: Yes I did – I have a Bachelor of Commerce degree, majoring in Finance, from the University of XYZ.

Q: How many years of experience do you have as a truck driver?

A: This is my 6th year as a qualified truck driver with company XYZ.

Q: Are you proficient in using Microsoft Excel?

A: I am an advanced Microsoft Excel user and am also proficient in all Microsoft programs including Word and PowerPoint.

### Interview questions:

Interview questions are typically divided into three main categories: Traditional interview questions, Behavioural Questions (*competency-based interview*) and Situational questions (hypothetical questions).

Let's learn how to become a master in answering all three types of questions:

### General Questions:

What are general interview questions?



Best to prepare answers to these types of questions, but do not try to memorize exact answers word for word. It will sound scripted and will be easily picked up. What you need to do is have your answers planned, but be ready to adapt or change your answers depending on how well the interview is going.

There are literally thousands of “general interview questions”. We have selected the 15 most frequently asked questions and have given you examples of how best to answer these questions.

### **1) Tell me about yourself**

This is the most common question to begin the interview. It is so important that you are prepared for this question so you can give a good solid first impression before the interviewer moves onto the more challenging questions. Be careful to not to give the interviewer your life story or provide “too much information”. I have had candidates who have told me how they have a criminal past or how they despised their family, and this is not something you need to voluntarily bring up in an interview. Relevant facts about education and your career is all you need to be speaking about.

*Tip: Remember to tailor your answers toward the job you are applying for. If you’re applying for a role as a fashion editor for a magazine, tell the interviewer how from an early age you have always had a love for fashion and writing, and provide examples about how your passion has brought you to that interview.*

### **2) Why did you decide to leave your last job?**

Be careful!!! Do **NOT** (and I can’t stress this enough) bad mouth your old employer. Present yourself in a positive way. It is extremely unprofessional to talk badly about your previous company, boss or peers, no matter what the reason. You also don’t know if this new hiring manager knows people from your old company. The best way to answer this question is to tell them that you are looking for career advancement and you see this new company being the right career choice for you.

#### **How to answer this question if you were fired:**

TIP: If you were fired from your last job do not try to lie about it or cover it up in the interview. More than likely the company will do a background check on you anyway, so it is best to be upfront and honest. Trust me, you are not the first person to be fired. The best way to answer the question is to keep it brief and ensure the interview keeps flowing forward. Turn the negative into a positive by letting the interviewer know how you learnt from the experience and are now ready to move on.

Example: “The job was going in a different direction to where I wanted to be going. My boss and I both thought it was best to move on to a job where I could be of greater value and offer my skills in the most maximising way.”

### **3) Where else have you applied?**

Don’t be afraid to answer this question. The key to answering this correctly is to prove to the hiring manager that you are serious about finding a new job. This being said, you only want to mention a couple of places you’ve applied to rather than going into major details. If you’ve applied to many jobs, don’t admit this as you don’t want to come across as desperate. The aim of this question is to see if you really are seriously looking for a new job. There is nothing wrong with showing the employer that you are serious to find a new role.

#### 4) What's your greatest strength?

This is one of the easier interview questions, but to get the most out of your answer the best response needs to be related to the job you are applying for. If you're an accountant and applying for an accountancy role, the best response you can give for your greatest strength is your ability with numbers, your computer skills and your attention to detail. How about if you're a dancer applying for a role? Your greatest strengths need to be balance, team work, dedication etc.

Rather than using generic clichéd answers such as "hard-working" and "loyal", use this question to show the value you can add to the organisation.

A large advertisement for Deloitte. It features a circular splash of water forming a ring. Inside the ring, the text "360° thinking." is written in blue. Below the ring, the Deloitte logo is displayed in blue. At the bottom left, it says "Discover the truth at [www.deloitte.ca/careers](http://www.deloitte.ca/careers)". At the bottom right, it says "© Deloitte & Touche LLP and affiliated entities.".

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### **5) What's your biggest weakness?**

Without doubt one of the hardest questions to answer. Being too honest can severely affect your interview. Everyone has something they can work on, so saying you have no weaknesses makes you sound arrogant. The best way to approach this is to think of a weakness that won't impact your getting the job. Remember that this question is a work-related question, so don't say that your biggest weakness is not helping enough around the house or, the worst answer I ever heard, "chocolate cake."

#### **Tips:**

Do not mention a weakness that will prevent you from being hired. If you're going for a job as a telemarketer, don't say your greatest weakness is speaking on the telephone!

No clichéd responses. "My greatest weakness is that I am a perfectionist."

Do not avoid the question. The interviewer has asked you this question and you need to answer it.

My advice is to provide a real work-related weakness and follow it up with examples of how you are fixing the problem.

#### **Example:**

If you're asked this question, give a small, work-related flaw that you're working hard to improve. Example: "I've been told that I occasionally focus on details and miss the bigger picture, so I've been spending time laying out the complete project every day to see my overall progress."

Admitting a real weakness and then following up with what you're doing to improve yourself is preferable. "My presentation skills are not as strong as I'd like, so I signed up for weekend presentation skills classes and also joined a Toastmasters club." Remember that the specific job you are interviewing for will help to determine how you answer the question.

### **6) Why have you applied for this job?**

This is a fairly innocent question and easy enough to answer. To answer this question successfully you need to show your motivation for this role, but also your desire to work for the company. Through your research into the company provide further examples why this job is the job for you.

*Tip: Never say "money"!*

### **7) Where do you see yourself in five years time?"**

This type of question is seeing the extent of your ambition. Be careful when answering this question not to make it seem as though this job is a stepping stone in your career (even if it is). For example, if you are applying for an accounting job at an accounting firm, don't tell the interviewer that your long term goal is to work at an investment bank. This is not what the interviewer is going to want to hear. The last thing an employer wants to do is employ you, train you and then see you leave the firm. The best answer you can offer is to demonstrate that your 5 year goals are suitable and match the position you are applying for.

### **8) Why should we hire you for this job?**

The reason they should hire you is because you're best person for the job because of your skills and competence and also because of the enthusiasm you will bring to the role. You can be assured that 90% of the candidates will start pitching their skills and achievements, but what makes you stand out more is your enthusiasm and passion for the role. When describing your skills and achievements, relate them to the job description and give reasons why you would add value to the business. When pitching yourself, remember the importance of body language. Sit up in your chair and be positive.

*Tip: Prepare for the interview by taking the job description and write down the skills you bring to each description and examples of accomplishments and achievements. Having examples ready to go can really help you when answering this question.*

Example answer: (applying for a sales position)

"With my 5 years of work experience I have developed, maintained and expanded customer relationships, positioned new products to drive sales growth and developed new marketing strategies to ensure sales targets are exceeded and market share increased. I have expertise in the implementation of account strategies, tactical sales and marketing plans.

As you can see my sales records speak for themselves, and in my previous role I was awarded for consistently exceeding sales and profit targets. Most importantly, I am extremely passionate about what I do and have a love for sales."

### **9) Do you work well under pressure?**

This is an easy question to answer if you have done your research and prepared for this question. (Tip – telling the employer that you crumble under pressure and burst into tears is not going to help you get the job). Although this is a closed question and can be answered with a one word answer, always provide an example of a time where you worked under pressure and how you rose above the pressure to succeed.

*Tip: It may seem obvious, but keep the example work-related. I have interviewed a young man who told me that he kicked the winning goal with only one minute left on the clock. It may have been an example of working well under pressure, but what I was really asking for was a work-related answer.*

### **10) How do you handle change?**

This is a classic interview question that always makes a candidate think!

It is incredible the amount of times a candidate will say "I handle change well" before an awkward silence as they try to think about an example. Change is natural part of life and it is about adapting to change that makes you a stronger person. Choosing to embrace change is an opportunity for personal growth.

The best answer is that you embrace change rather than opposing change out of fear or routine. No matter what the job throws at you, you're able to handle it. Provide an example of where you were able to handle change and come out stronger as a result.

**11) Briefly describe your ideal job?**

This is a “curve ball” question. My ideal job would be earning a million dollars a week and only working about 3-4 hours a day. Perhaps my ideal job is playing first base for the New York Yankees. Either way, neither of these answers is right. The right answer to this question is to keep it in line with the characteristics of the job and company you are interviewing with. Concentrate on your strengths and what you best bring to the job. A sample answer would be along the lines of, “My ideal job is where I can utilise my key strengths including X, Y, and Z and as a valued member of the team make a positive and significant contribution.”

**12) What makes you want to work hard?**

This is a good question from the interviewer’s perspective, but also an easy question to answer if you’re prepared. If we were to answer this question in a court room under oath a large percentage of people (myself included) would naturally say material rewards, higher salary, big bonus, perks etc. Luckily we are not in a court room. Focus more on being part of a successful team, adding value to the organisation and the satisfaction you derive from it.

**13) How would your co-workers describe you?**

This is a time for you to show off the attributes that make you unique and further convince the interviewer that you are the right person for their organisation. This question is designed for you to put forward your strengths, but remember there is a difference between pride in how you believe you’re perceived and arrogance. Answers such as “My co-workers think I am wonderful” or “They think that I am the greatest thing since sliced bread” do not go down well in interviews. As per every good answer, provide examples of accomplishments you have achieved.

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### **14) What motivates you?**

This is a great interview question and a question that every potential job seeker should ask themselves while preparing for the interview. The right answer is providing a mixture of what motivates you as a person and what motivates you about the job you are applying for. Remember to be specific and tailor your answer to the job you are applying for.

Question: Do you mention money or not?

Typically saying that money or benefits motivates you is not the response a hiring manager is looking for. But as per always, the rules change depending on what industry you are applying for. For example, if you are applying for a sales role that offers high commission, being motivated to succeed and earn greater commission is definitely a motivation. Rather than just saying money motivates me (which is not advised), tell the interviewer that you are motivated to sell and succeed and enjoy working in an environment where the more you put in, the more you can gain in return.

### **15) Tell me about your salary expectations**

It goes without saying that everyone wants to make as much money as possible. The best way to answer this question is by researching the market value of the job you are applying for. Honesty is the best policy when it comes to salary expectations because if you are looking for a role that pays 60,000 but the role will only pay 40,000, it won't be long before you begin to lose interest in the role and start searching all over again for a new job. Show the hiring manager that you have thoroughly researched the role and have an understanding of how much the role pays. Many people try to avoid giving the interviewer a straight answer when answering this question as not to "rock the boat".

The worst answer is a "desperate answer".

Example Question: What are your salary expectations for this job?

Example Answer: "I'm easy – whatever you guys are willing to pay."

Good answer: - "Researched answer"

Example Question: What are your salary expectations for this job?

Example Answer: "From my research, I know that the salary range for this position is between \$60,000 and \$70,000 – having worked in the industry for 5 years I feel that my value would fit into this range".

### **Behavioural Questions**

*“Past behaviour is a better predictor of future behaviour”*

It is estimated that 80% of the interview is made up of behavioural questions. In order to understand how to answer behaviour questions we need to first define what a behavioural question is.

This type of interviewing is based on the philosophy that your past actions and behaviours will be a good indicator of your future behaviours. Therefore, how you acted to certain circumstances in your previous job is a reliable indicator of how you will act in your new job. As there are literally thousands of behaviour type questions, you can best prepare for this type of questioning by researching the culture of the company to get an understanding of the behavioural traits that are essential to working at that particular organisation.

Behavioural questions differ to standard interview questions as they focus more on experiences, behaviours, knowledge, skills and abilities. Rather than the standard question of “Do you have leadership skills” a behavioural question is more likely to be “Give me an example of your previous role when you displayed leadership abilities.” As the interviewer has already determined which skills are necessary for the role it is important that you are prepared for these questions.

The best way to begin studying for these questions is to look at the job description! The list of skills that they require are the skills they will more than likely focus on. When the job description mentions they require a person with good teamwork skills or negotiation skills, it is more than likely that this will be turned into a behavioural question to see if you really do possess these skills.

In good news, behavioural questions are not to be feared. When prepared properly, these questions can be easily answered.

#### **How to answer behavioural question:**

The best way to answer a behavioural question is to use the STAR format.

**Situation:** The interviewer wants you to present a recent challenge and situation in which you found yourself.

**Task:** What did you have to achieve? The interviewer will be looking to see what you were trying to achieve from the situation.

**Action:** What did you do? The interviewer will be looking for information on what you did, why you did it and what were the alternatives.

**Results:** What were the outcomes of your actions? What did you achieve through your actions and did you meet your objectives. What did you learn from this experience and have you used this learning since?



The Star Model:



## How to nail the behavioural interview

Follow my steps:

- 1) Take a blank piece of paper and write down between 10-20 examples from your education, work experience, community work, charity etc of where you added value in a positive way.
- 2) Now using the STAR format write out the **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult

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**Example question:**

“Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.”

**Situation:** My role as project manager was to ensure that projects are completed on time and on budget.

**Task:** My last role involved combining three office spaces into one. With a tight deadline of 90 and dealing with multiple contractors from different companies I knew it was going to be a struggle to complete the job in time. I set the goal of having everything completed within 80 days to give us 10 days at the end to make final corrections.

**Action:** By dividing all the different contractors into three main teams and having three project managers controlling the three teams I was able to create a more efficient and effective work timetable and ensure that downtime was kept to a minimum.

**Result:** As a result of this more efficient working time we completed the job on time and reduced costs by 15%. This new way of dividing contractors into smaller teams has now been implemented into standard work procedure and seen a reduction in overall costs.

**Second example:**

(Question is asked to a student or graduate)

“Tell me about a time during school when you displayed good leadership skills.”

**(Situation)** “As a senior member of the debating team, **(Task)** I noticed that the team performance and moral was being deteriorated due to fighting between two members of the team. **(Action)** I decided to speak one on one with each individual away from the groups in order to create an environment where they could trust me and open up to me with the issues. **(Result)** After speaking with both individuals I was able to convince them to meet face to face and sort out the issues with me as the mediator as opposed to getting teachers involved. As a result the two individuals were able to sort out their differences, shake hands and our team was able to function again as a complete team working together.

As you can see from both examples, the key to interviewing success is simply preparing for the questions and having a mental outline to follow when responding to each question. Preparing stories or examples that illustrate how you solved the problem or how you performed in an outstanding way will help you respond to any behavioural question that comes your way.

**50 most asked Behavioural Questions**

- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation and how you overcame the situation
- Tell me about a difficult decision you’ve made in the last year
- Give an example of a time when a project you were on failed
- Provide an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead
- Tell me about a situation where you have had to speak with an unhappy customer

- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others and how this led to a positive outcome
- Give an example of a goal you set and how you reached it
- Describe a decision you made that was unpopular with your co-workers and how you handled this
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use negotiation to successfully change a person's opinion
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to make a split second decision
- Describe a situation where you knew your boss wrong – how did you handle it?
- Give an example of a time when you used good judgment in solving a problem
- Describe a major change or adjustment to your job and your reactions to the change
- Describe a situation where the situation changed and you forced to adjust to the changes – how did you handle this adjustment?
- Describe a time when you were able to effectively communicate an error to your supervisor
- Tell me about a time when you encountered conflict in the workplace and how you handled the conflict?
- What was your most difficult decision in the last 6 months? What made it difficult?
- Provide an example of when you had to go above and beyond your normal duties in order to get the job done
- Describe a time when you put the needs of your workmates before your own when completing a task
- Tell me about a time when your knowledge or skills significantly enhanced an outcome or decision
- Provide an example of a problem you had with a co-worker or boss and how you resolved it
- Give an example of a pressure situation you faced and how you reacted to the pressure
- Provide an example of a time when you felt you were able to motivate
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on others
- Describe a time when you did not put in 100% into your job or performance and what you did about it
- Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem with very little guidance or direction
- Tell me about a time when you were successful in a team environment?
- Tell us about a time that you were able to adapt to a culturally different environment
- Give an example of a situation that you have gone out of your way to make someone feel comfortable in the working environment
- Tell us about the most effective contribution you have made as part of a task group or special project team
- Describe a team experience you found rewarding
- Describe a team experience you found disappointing
- What was the most stressful situation you have faced? How did you deal with it?
- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach?
- Have you ever had to deal with conflicting deadlines? How did you decide which task to complete?
- Explain a complex problem you recently encountered
- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Provide an example of an annoying or unpopular co-worker and how you deal with that person
- Tell me about a time when you went overtime on a deadline
- Describe a time where you were wrong in your decision making – what did you do to fix it
- Describe a time where you had to delegate tasks
- Provide an example where you were unsure what to do but afraid to ask for guidance
- Give an example of when you had to use different management styles for different people
- Provide an example of how you were able to promote morale

- What is the biggest contribution you made in your current role?
- What are you most proud of in your working career?
- Have you ever had to “go the extra mile” for a customer? What did you do?
- When was the last time a supervisor gave you constructive criticism – how did you react?
- Discuss a setback you have overcome in the last 12 months
- Give me an example of a time when you felt that someone wasn’t being honest with you in the workplace and how confronted it

### Situational Questions:

Situational interview questions, more commonly known as “hypothetical interview questions” are questions an interviewer uses to find out how you would approach certain problems if they were to arise. This type of questioning is designed to help the interviewer with determining how you would handle a certain situation. Unlike behavioural interviews which you are required to provide examples of how you handled a certain situation, situational questions ask you to envisage and hypothesise how you would handle a particular situation if it were to arise.

#### Examples of Situational questions:

- If you found out an employee was stealing from the business how would you approach this employee?
- What would you do if your supervisor asked you to do something that you felt was unethical?
- Imagine you have a deadline and you are running out of time. What would you do?
- How would you handle an employee that is disrupting the work environment?
- In a position of management, how would you handle a heavy workload if you were short staffed?



The advertisement features a woman, Jane, a Chinese architect, smiling. To her left, text reads: "I studied English for 16 years but... ...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons". Below this, it says "Jane, Chinese architect". To her right, there is a green speech bubble with the text "ENGLISH OUT THERE". Below the speech bubble, it says "Click to hear me talking before and after my unique course download".

- If your supervisor makes a decision you do not agree with how would you handle this?
- How would you react if a team member was not contributing towards a project?
- As a leader what would you do to build team spirit?

### **Keys to answering situational interview questions:**

Remember that situational interview questions deal with hypothetical situations and not necessarily past experiences – while a hypothetical question may seem daunting to answer, the best way to prepare yourself is similar to the steps involved in a problem solving exercise.

**Rule 1:** Be prepared and have a definite understanding of the role and the position that you are applying for. By understanding the position, you can already second guess the questions that an interviewer might ask. For example, if you are applying for a managerial position, it is more than likely that the situation questions will be about how you would handle certain scenarios as a manager.

Example: “How would you react if a team member was not contributing toward a project?” By researching the type of organisation and hierarchy you are in a better position to answer this question.

**Rule 2:** During your research, make a list of events that happened in your previous role or in your past that led to a positive outcome. If you’re a recent graduate or entry level, draw on other areas such as volunteer work or memberships you belong to.

**Rule 3:** Develop a few short stories about specific examples where you solved the problem and how you solved the problem. Most important is to have a clear understanding of how you resolved the issues.

**Rule 4:** Apply these examples to the questions.

### **Sample questions and excellent answers:**

#### **Question 1:**

*How would you react if a team member was not contributing towards a project?*

#### **Answer:**

Unfortunately, I have been in this situation before where one team member was not contributing, and it caused a detrimental effect on the whole team. I would handle this situation with honest communication at the very beginning. What I have found is that the more you ignore the problem, the worse it can get. Speaking with the team member in a non-confrontational way is the best approach. Often the reason for a team member not contributing is that they don’t understand the work or what is expected of them. By communicating with the individual, I am at least able to find out what the cause of the problem and then be able to work toward a solution.

***TIP:** As you can see from my answer I have drawn upon my experience, listed the event that occurred and presented a positive solution to the problem.*

**Question 2:**

*If you believed your supervisor was wrong how would you handle the situation?*

**Answer:** I would present my reasons to the supervisor and provide an alternate solution. In my experiences I find that telling someone they are wrong without providing facts or examples is the wrong way to go about it. I would ensure that I was fully prepared and had analysed the situation before speaking to the supervisor. Most importantly, I would discuss my reasons in private, in a one on one situation, not in front of other team members.

**Question 3:**

*How would you react if a project you had been working on suddenly changed or the deadline had been changed?*

**Answer:**

My first response would be to speak with the supervisors to get an understanding why the project had been changed and ensure that I had all the facts and answers before approaching the rest of the team. As soon as I had the answers I would notify the team to let them know things had changed. Once everyone was aware of the changes I would want to sit down with the team to develop a new strategy to move forward with the project.

## Asking the interviewer Questions

As a job candidate what is the best question to ask in an interview? At some point in the interview (typically at the end) the hiring manager will turn to you and ask “Do you have any questions which you would like to ask me?”

There are two main benefits in asking the right questions. Firstly don't forget the number one rule from chapter one. The interview is a two way process and you need to ensure that this organization is the right fit for you. If you are uncertain about certain aspects of the role or need greater clarification, than this is the time to ask those questions. Don't be shy or intimidated. Secondly by asking clever questions will not just help you in deciding if this job is right for you but will impress the interviewer and leave a positive image as someone who comprehensive and professional.

What you need to do:

- 1) Prioritize your questions based on the interview situation – Is this the first interview or the second interview?
- 2) The best questions you can ask are open ended questions
- 3) Have 3-5 questions prepared (The more the better)
- 4) Only ask questions that you are interested in knowing the answer!
- 5) Only ask questions that are relevant to the job, department, management and organization

**Sample 15 questions to ask:**

- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured?
- Do you provide any sort of professional development or training?
- How do you measure performance and how often is it reviewed?
- Who was in this job before and why did they leave?
- Is this a new position? How long has this position existed?

- Could you explain your organizational structure?
- How many people work in this office/department?
- How much travel is expected?
- What's the makeup of the team as far as experience?
- With whom will I be working most closely?
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- What would be the goals of the department in the coming year?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?

### Types of questions NOT to ask:

- 1) Salary and benefits
- 2) Questions that are clearly stated on the website
- 3) Generic / Obvious questions
- 4) Questions that the interviewer is unable to answer. Do not try to "outsmart the interviewer" Asking questions that appear to be challenging the interviewer or a question that the interviewer is unlikely to know will only create a negative vibe between you and the interviewer. Remember you are trying to build rapport with the interviewer not challenge the interviewer.
- 5) Questions that are irrelevant to the job or organization

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**Sample 15 questions NOT to ask:**

- How many sick days and holiday days do I get?
- Do I still get paid for a sick day?
- If I start next week how long until I will get a pay rise?
- How long is the lunch break?
- What is it that your company does?
- Are the working hours flexible?
- Am I able to have my own office?
- Who are the “coolest” people on my team?
- How many warnings do you get before you are fired?
- Are there many coffee shops close by?
- How financially sound is this company?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Will I be given an employee handbook?
- What is the company policy on internet use?
- Can I use Facebook?



## Dressing for the interview



Now that you have done your research and prepared for the interview it is now time to dress for the interview.

***“Don’t Dress for the job you have, dress for the job you want to have”***

Does what you wear to an interview really make a difference in the hiring process? The answer is yes – the way you dress always matters.

Don’t allow your appearance to damage your chances of being hired for a job. As the old phrase goes, “dress for success”! When you walk into an interview room the very first thing an interviewer does is look at you. No matter how many skills you have and how relevant your experience is, do not allow this first impression to ruin your chances.

Make no mistake – dressing properly will not guarantee you the job, but dressing inappropriately can definitely lose you the job.

Gaining employment is subject to numerous variables beyond your control and factors significantly unknown to you. You have no control over employer’s perceptions, personal preferences or the competitors for the job. You do, however, have control of your image and how you present yourself. How you look can send a powerful message to the interviewer and can portray a signal that you are a winner or a loser.

*Tip: The most important aspect is to dress appropriately for the role you are applying for. Applying for a position in a coffee shop is a lot different to applying for a role in a law firm. The best way to find out what the type of appropriate clothing to wear to the interview is to do a 10 minute stalk out of the organisation and see what the employees are wearing. This way you can’t go wrong.*



Once you have an understanding of the type of clothing you need to wear to the interview the next stage is picking the right colours to wear. I bet that this has never even crossed your mind. I bet you're thinking, "What's the difference if I wear a white shirt with a blue tie or a white shirt with a red tie?. Is the hiring manager really going to care what colour my tie is?"

Well the answer is **yes!**

Studies have shown that the colours you decide to wear in an interview can actually make a difference. In the competitive world we live in you need to ensure that you take every advantage you possibly can.

Different colours evoke different emotions and it is imperative when you're interviewing that you evoke the right emotions from the interviewer.

### Examples:

**Blue:** Words that describe the colour blue include: trust, loyalty, wisdom, peaceful. These are exactly the type of feelings you want to be portraying in your interview. Blue is a calming colour (think of the ocean and sky) and sends out a signal to the interviewer that you are indeed honest and sincere. Studies have shown that wearing the colour blue to an interview will increase your chances of getting hired more than any other colour.

**Red:** In contrast to the colour blue, the colour stirs emotions more than any other colour. Red is a strong colour, very emotional, an extreme colour that in an interview scenario can work against you. Unlike blue which has a calming effect, red is fiery (think love and passion), and can be an intimidating colour for the interviewer.



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**Orange:** Similar to red. A colour that stirs emotion and therefore one I would avoid wearing in a job interview. Although orange is not seen to be as aggressive as red, it is still perceived as a colour that can evoke feelings of power and aggression.

**Grey:** My second favourite colour to wear after blue. Grey gives the look of sophistication and authority. In a corporate environment, grey is professional and portrays an individual as being confident without being intimidating.

**Purple:** The colour of “royalty”. Purple symbolizes power, aristocracy, lavishness, and extravagance.

**Black:** Be careful when wearing just black to an interview. Black is seen as a power colour and can be viewed as threatening. Wearing black outfits can portray an individual as being powerful or even arrogant. Black is also associated with negative implications such as death, sin, and fear.

Most important advice: My advice is simple – remember that first impressions count a lot when you go to interview. Know your audience and dress accordingly.

## How to Nail the Telephone Interview

Phone interviews are becoming increasingly popular as a means of narrowing down candidates for a more traditional face to face interview. In the ultra competitive society we now live, a job advertisement can attract hundreds of resumes from candidates with similar sets of skills and backgrounds. The recruitment process is all about finding the one perfect candidate among the basket full of candidates. The phone interview has become a popular, flexible, inexpensive and speedy way of finding that one person.



### Preparing for a PHONE INTERVIEW

Before you begin your phone interview make sure that you are confident in your understanding of the position you are applying for and the company you are applying with. Do extra homework on the company's history and research recent company news. Preparation is the key and will make a great impression on your interviewers.

Prepare your interview location. Make sure you're in a comfortable place with no distractions. Keep your resume in clear view, have a pen and pad to take notes and a glass of water sitting close by. Minimise any outside distractions that could potentially take your mind off the interview (**HOT TIP**) Disable call waiting on your phone. Dress the part so you feel and sound professional. The more professional you feel the more professional you will come across on the telephone.

Most importantly – practice interviewing! **Rehearse and Practice.** There are many ways to help you prepare for the telephone interview. Have a friend/ family member conduct an interview. Ideally, rehearse with someone from the same industry. The best way to hear how you sound is to tape yourself. Remember the more preparation you put into the interview the better prepared you will be.

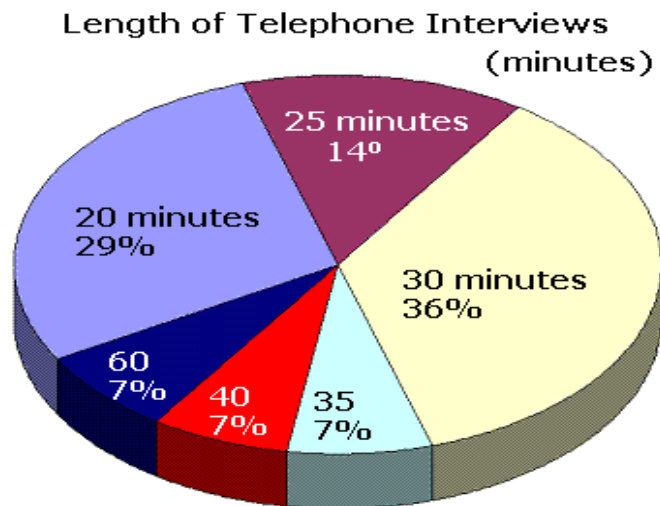
Preparation is the key! Write down answers to questions you believe are going to be asked. Have questions ready to go so when the interviewer says "Do you have any questions to ask us?" you're ready and prepared.

### What to do during the phone interview:

- Remember to **smile**. Experts say that smiling puts you in a better state of mind and will project a positive image to the listener
- Speak in a **steady voice**. Don't rush what you're trying to say. Ensure that you sound enthusiastic and passionate.
- Don't forget to **breathe**. It will help you stay calm and sound more relaxed.
- **LISTEN**. Answer the questions which are being asked. Do not make the mistake of telling the interviewer what you want to tell them. Give them the answers to their questions.
- Keep a **glass of water** handy. Nothing is worse than having a dry mouth.
- **Address** the interviewer in the appropriate way. Do not shorten people's name. They are your potential employer not your "mate".
- **Take your time** – don't rush the interview. This is your time to shine. If you're feeling nervous take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.
- **"Cheat Notes"** Prepare beforehand with notes to help drive you through the interview. If the interview is going to be technical, have notes ready to prompt yourself if needed.
- Don't forget to **ask questions**. (*For tips on the best interview questions to ask go to the "Tips from the Pros" page of [www.redstarresume.com](http://www.redstarresume.com)*)

**What NOT to do during the phone interview:**

- Don't eat, drink, chew gum
- DO NOT SMOKE
- Don't interrupt the interviewer
- Don't answer with just a "yes" and "no"- elaborate your answers, provide examples if applicable
- Don't be too casual/informal
- Don't use long-winded answers to questions



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## Top 10 Job Interview Blunders



What should you **NOT** do in an interview? A poll into interview blunders found that when hiring managers were asked to name the most common and damaging interview mistakes candidates can make, 51% listed dressing inappropriately. 49% percent cited badmouthing a former boss as the worst offense, while 48% said appearing disinterested. Arrogance (44%), insufficient answers (30%) and not asking good questions (29%) were also top answers.

Below is a top 10 selection of mistakes to avoid. A big part of a successful interview is avoiding simple mistakes. Mistakes are deadly to the job seeker and easy to avoid if you are prepared:

- **Arriving Late**

Get directions from the interviewer – or look up the location on a map. Wear a watch, and leave home early. In the extreme case that you cannot avoid being late, call the interviewer and arrange to reschedule.

- **Lack of Preparation**

Not being prepared is just about the biggest mistake you can make when it comes to job interviews. You need to prepare for an interview in the same way you would prepare for an exam. When you are offered an interview, make sure you ask what form the interview is going to take so you can prepare. E.g. is it going to be a one on one interview? Will it be a group interview? Who will be attending the interview, and what are their positions? Not being able to answer basic interview questions such as “What do you know about this company?” creates the impression that you don’t care, and it can end your chances immediately.

- **Dressing Inappropriately**

You make your greatest impact on the interviewer in the first 10 seconds, and you want that first impression to be strongly positive. Dress for the occasion. You will certainly need to wear a suit if you are interviewing for professional position. When interviewing for another type of job, such as a casual summer job as a lifeguard or waitress, for example, dress accordingly in neat and casual attire.

- **Badmouthing**

This includes badmouthing your current or former employers, employees or even the competition. Nobody likes a complainer and it portrays a negative image of your personality. In the world we live in, you never know who your interviewer might be friends with or who the company’s clients are. You don’t want the interviewer to think that you might speak that way about his or her company in the future.

- **Poor body language**
- Mumbling
- Using constant slang
- Crossing your arms
- Rigid
- Slouching
- Nervous gestures e.g. playing with your hair
- Using your hands too much when talking
- **Don't be rude or abusive**

You would expect this to be obvious, however an interviewer will want to test your patience and see how you react to their questions. Losing your temper, becoming defensive, and acting abusive are the best ways to not get hired. No matter how calm or apologetic you are, the damage has already been done.

- **Poor Communication Skills**

This includes answering questions with “yes” or “no” answers. You need to display confidence. Engage the person you are speaking with, and let the interviewer know that you are an excellent candidate for this position.

- **Talking Too Much**

The interviewer wants to know why you are the best person for the job. They do not need to hear your entire life story. There are few things worse than interviewing someone who goes on and on and on. Keep your answers concise, to-the-point, and focused. Don't ramble, and don't lie or make up stories. The best advice is to be honest and simply answer the questions.

- **Not answering the question**

Nothing is more frustrating for an interviewer than to ask a simple question and not get an answer. Straight away it sets off alarm bells in the interviewer's head that the person is either unprepared or not listening. Make sure you listen to the question and take a moment to gather your thoughts before you respond.

- **Forgetting to Follow Up**

No matter how well you think the interview went, always follow up. If you have not heard from the interviewer within a few days, don't be afraid to call and follow up and reiterate your interest in the position. A follow up thank you email or phone call can sometimes go a long way to securing you the job. It also leaves a good impression



## How to Answer Illegal Interview Questions



Federal and state laws world wide prohibit potential employers from asking certain questions that are not directly related to the job they are hiring for. Examples of illegal questions include questions pertaining to: Race, Color, Sex, Religion, National origin, Birthplace, Age, Disability, Marital/family status

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But the question is, how do you handle this type of question when you're being interviewed?

The interview process is hard enough without having to dodge your way through illegal questions.

Refusing to answer the question or becoming angry at the interviewer will probably cost you the chance of getting the job (however do you want to work at this type of company?)

My advice is to answer the **INTENTION** of the question. You need to understand and be aware of what the interviewer is really trying to find out. You need to measure the motive behind the question and if you believe the question to be "innocent" then go on the offensive with your response.

### **Example:**

Question: Are you a U.S. citizen? (illegal question)

Now what is the intent of this question? Is the interviewer discriminating against non-US residents or are they just making sure you are authorized to work in the USA?

If the intent of the question is finding out if I am authorized to work in the USA my answer would be: "I am legally allowed and approved to work in the United States."

Question: "What is your marital status? (illegal question)

If you're interviewing for a job that has long hours and overtime, again it's important to figure out the intent of the question. Are they asking you this question on a malicious intent (which is illegal and thus should be reported) or is the question intended because of the long hours? If you believe it's because of the long hours my answer would be: "I am available to work the hours required including overtime and weekends."

Just remember – Not all interviewers are even aware that they have asked an illegal question. Instead of getting defensive or angry take a moment to realise what the intention of the question is and answer accordingly. Even in this type of situation you can turn an inappropriate question to your advantage by showing the interviewer you're an intelligent and composed person.

## Following up from the interview

The final stage of nailing the interview is the follow up. After doing all the hard work of preparing for the interview, dressing correctly and being able to answer all the questions which the interviewer asks, the final stage is to follow up from the interview.

Find below a list of the best follow up tactics to use to continue to show your enthusiasm for the role.

Follow up with a letter or email thanking the interviewer for their time and re-expressing your desire for the role and because of your skills and experience you are the right person for the role. A thank you letter not only reiterates your desire, but continues the rapport you already built during the interview.



### Rules to follow:

When writing a thank you letter always remember to correctly use their right title and spell their name correctly. Nothing is worse than receiving an email with the persons name spelt incorrectly.

Send your thank you email that evening. You want the interviewer to receive the email in the morning so that they continue to remember who you are and you stay in the forefront of their mind.

Don't be afraid to follow up with a phone call 3-5 days after the interview. Ideally it is best to ask the interviewer in the interview when they expect to make a decision, but a follow up call is great way to further reiterate your desire for the job.

Do not burn any bridges. You may have felt the interview did not go well or that the role was not for you. That's ok. Continue your professionalism until the very end. You just never know what else can potentially come from that interview. I have seen cases where the interviewer was impressed with a candidate and although they did not have the right skills for that particular job they created a new position for that candidate.

The big misconception from candidates is that the interviewer does not want to be disturbed with follow up. THIS IS WRONG. Many hiring managers will observe the candidates who do follow up. Stand out from other potential candidates by making sure you follow through to the end.

Example thank you email

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to interview for the position of XYZ . It was a pleasure to meet you, and I appreciate your time and consideration in interviewing me for this position.

Following our discussion I consider that I have all the skills and requirements to fulfil your job. Having been a manager for 3 years and a project manager for 2 years, I have the desire to lead the team in a positive and productive way.

In addition to my technical skills I bring enthusiasm and energy into everything I do in order to get the job done in an efficient and timely manner.

I am very keen on this role and working for company ABC. If you require any further information from me please contact me anytime on XXX XXX XXXX.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Full Name



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