

Interviews

THE SECRET TO PERFORMING WELL IN AN INTERVIEW IS TO BE PREPARED. Reduced to the essentials, it consists in knowing three things: yourself, the position, and the organization. This tipsheet is designed to guide you through your preparation and point out some of the key resources you may want to consult for further advice.

How to prepare yourself for an interview

To assuage those pre-interview jitters, get thoroughly prepared by taking the time to know yourself, the position, and the organization.

Know yourself: Your education, your interests, and your experiences have given you a wide range of skills. Be able to articulate the skills you have, how you developed them, and how you used them. It is important to be able to demonstrate what you have to offer the employer. Get some help by attending our workshop *You and Your Career Options*.

Know the position: Carefully go over the job description to ensure you completely understand the qualifications for the position. This knowledge will help frame your answers as you try convince the interviewer of a good match between your abilities and the position requirements. Whenever possible, respond to questions using concrete examples from your experience as proof of your relevant skills.

Know the organization: Research thoroughly the organization. Go beyond the obvious and easy-to-find information about the organization and its needs. Get a copy of our *Company Research* and *Industry and Labour Market Research* tipsheets. Here are some questions to consider in your research.

- What is the nature of the organization's business? What have they done and where are they headed? Are there any organizational changes occurring?
- Who are their competitors? What is the outlook for the industry?
- How would this organization define success and what are its values?

Types of interviews

In order to be prepared, it is important to ask what format your interview will be and who will be conducting it —

number of interviewers, their names, and titles. The most common types of interviews are:

- panel interviews (more than one interviewer),
- one-on-one interviews,
- stress interviews (interviewers deliberately introduce stress into the experience — not common),
- telephone interviews, and
- case interviews.

Case interviews are commonly used in fields like consulting and investment banking. The questions are geared around solving problems on the spot. The interviewer is trying to judge your logical thought process, general business knowledge and acumen, general knowledge, comfort with quantitative analysis, creativity, and communication skills. Case interview questions generally fall into three formats. Here are sample questions.

Brain teasers — There are eight balls, one of which is slightly heavier than the others. You have a scale that you can use for weighing, but you are only allowed to use it twice. How do you find the heavier ball?

Market sizing — How many golf balls were lost in England this year? How many Air Canada Aeroplan miles are outstanding?

Project — The largest supermarket chains in the country is considering opening its own bank branches in its supermarket locations. What is your advice?

For further information on case interviews refer to the suggested library resources section on next page.

Typical questions

In most interviews, regardless of the format, there is a common underlying structure. Here are some examples of questions you may encounter at each interview stage.

The icebreaker and introduction: A good interviewer wants you to be comfortable and relaxed. To establish this sort of atmosphere, they will use rapport-building statement such as I notice you're a squash player. So am I. They might also ask small-talk questions such as Did you have any trouble finding our offices?

Questions about you: You will be asked general questions about your skills and experiences: What are your major strengths and weaknesses? Why did you choose your program of study at university? You will also encounter questions that ask you to specifically relate your skills to the various duties and responsibilities of the position: How long would it take you to edit 2000 words? How would you analyze current economic and market conditions in Japan?

Behavioural questions: This type of questions is quite common. Interviewers want to determine how you react in situations that could occur in the position for which you are interviewing. Here are some sample questions.

- Describe a time when you faced a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Describe a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.

Prepare your answers by choosing at least two relevant examples of your skills and accomplishments — preferably work-related. Write your answers using the S.T.A.R. method: describe the situation, the task (or problem), your action (what you said or did), and the results (what was accomplished).

Questions you could ask

In all types of interviews, the interviewer will give you a chance to ask some of your own questions. This is your chance to ask thoughtful and intelligent questions that involve the interviewer in discussion and reflect how in-depth your company research has been. It also gives you a final opportunity to articulate why you are the best person for the position. Potential questions could be about the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job or on how the firm handle recognition for a job well done.

Tips and strategies

1. Do a practice interview first, with someone you know acting as the interviewer, to rehearse possible answers. You can also sign up on-line for a practice interview with one of our career counsellors.
2. Stay calm! Arrive 10 to 15 minutes before your scheduled time to compose yourself. Take a few deep breaths and relax. This will greatly improve your performance and help make a positive first impression.
3. During the interview, you will be judged by your presentation skills and how effectively you

communicate. Make frequent eye contact, smile, and don't fidget.

4. Before you answer each question, take a moment to compose yourself and think about what skills the interviewer is really looking for. Ask for clarification if you are unsure what a question means.
5. Employers are limited as to the type of questions they can ask. For example, questions about marital status or country of origin are illegal in Canada. For more information visit <http://www.ohrc.on.ca>.
6. Make sure you send a thank-you note after the interview. This is also an opportunity for you to clarify or add to anything you said in the interview, and to restate your interest.

Resources available at the Career Resource Library

Interview preparation

- Interview resource binders prepared by the library
- *201 Best Questions to Ask On Your Interview*
- *Ace the Technical Interview*
- *Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions*
- *Knock 'Em Dead with Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions*

Case interview

- Ace Your Case!
- The Fast Track

Useful websites

- Job Interview.Net ► <http://www.job-interview.net/sample/Demosamp.htm>
- Quintessential Careers Interview Resources ► www.quintcareers.com/intvres.html
- Settlement.ORG Resources for Newcomers to Canada ► http://settlement.org/sys/faqs_detail.asp?faq_id=4001078

Here for you at the...

Career Resource Library

- **Career tipsheets** — over 40 topics available in the library and online.
- **Career research tools** — over 1,000 occupational books, *Careers by Degree* series, Career Cruising database access, and graduate school resources.
- **Job search resources** — Résumé, cover letter, and interview guides; *Informational Interview Contacts*; and employer directories.
- **Additional services** — word processing, Internet access, free local faxing, photocopier, and video terminals.

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