Interview Guidelines - How do I prepare myself for an interview?

Before the interview:
The best, but most frequently overlooked way to demonstrate enthusiasm for an opportunity at job a new company is to do RESEARCH! Read about the company and the position for which you going to be interviewed. Employers are very impressed by well-informed candidates.

Make sure you are prepared for the interview and please study this document carefully and clarify any uncertainties with myself before the interview.

Learn as much as you can about the company beforehand e.g.
- Major Products & Services;
- Key people in the organization;
- Organizational structure of the company;
- View of the company by clients, suppliers, and competition;
- Size & Locations of the company;
- Goals & Values; and
- Latest news reports on the company or on local or national news that affects the company.

Visit the company’s website!

Very Important!!!

WHAT EVER YOU DO - DON’T BE LATE!!!

Be sure to schedule enough time for you to get to the interview and for the interview. Rushing through an interview is a mistake. Most interviews last at least an hour.

Arrive roughly 5-10 minutes early, no later. If, for some unforeseen reason, you cannot arrive at the interview on time, call the interviewer(s) and myself as soon as you realize that you will be late. Explain why you will be late and offer to reschedule.

Remember you have only one chance to make a good first impression! Should you at any point in time not be able to make the interview for whatever reason, please remember to phone the interviewer(s) and myself to make alternate arrangements?

Dress Code:
Always ensure a professional image through your dress code. You should do this even if the company is relaxed about their dress code. One can always access the situation during the first interview and dress down for the future but you can never make up for being under dressed during your first interview.

The clothing you wear to your interview should make you look like you will fit in at your prospective employer. When in doubt, err on the side of conservatism, suggest the experts. Securing a job is much easier if you look the part.

Here are some basic guidelines for your first interview:

General:
- Clothes should be clean, well fitting, and wrinkle free;
- Look neat and clean, it gives an air of efficiency;
- Don’t go reeking of after-shave or perfume. Don’t wear large pieces of jewellery, and heavy or unnatural makeup. These distract the interviewer from your qualifications;
- Keep hair neat by tying it back, putting it up, or cutting it short. A good haircut can do wonders for one’s image; and
- Shoes should be polished and coordinate with your suit or dress.

Men:
Traditional business attire means a dark, conservative suit and a white, long-sleeved (even in summer), pressed dress shirt. If you wear an earring (or several), remove it before the interview. The object is to look reliable, not trendy.
Ladies:
Traditional business attire is a conservative suit, dress or loose fitting pants with a jacket. Dress in a business-like, professional manner, and you'll be sure to fit in wherever you interview.

Introduction:

First impressions
The interview begins the moment you arrive. Everyone you meet, from the receptionist to the interviewer, will form an impression of you. To ensure the impression is positive, remember that your words and mannerisms will affect the image you project. When greeting people, smile warmly and shake hands. Make eye contact and maintain good posture. Don't create a negative impression by using slang, chewing gum, smoking cigarettes, or giving curt, one word answers.

Eye Contact - If you look away while listening, it shows lack of interest and a short attention span. If you fail to maintain eye contact while speaking, at a minimum it shows lack of confidence in what you are saying and at worst may send the subtle message that you are lying. Do not just assume you have good eye contact. Some people maintain excellent eye contact while listening, but lose eye contact when speaking, or vice versa. You need to practice until you are comfortable maintaining sincere, continuous eye contact.

Facial Expressions - Take a good, long, hard look at you in the mirror. Look at yourself as others would. Then modify your facial expressions - first eliminate any negative overall characteristics that might exist, e.g. frowning, squinting eyes, tight-lipped grin, chin down, touching nose or face, darting eyes, and then add a simple feature that nearly every interviewee forgets to include - a smile! Not some grin, but a true and genuine smile that tells me you are a happy person and delighted to be interviewing with our company today. You do not need to keep the smile plastered on for the full interview, but remember to keep coming back to it. Think about it - who would you rather spend thirty minutes with?

Posture - Posture sends out a signal of your confidence and power potential. Stand tall, walk tall, and most of all, sit tall. When standing, stand up straight. When you are seated, make sure you sit at the front edge of the chair, leaning slightly forward. Be aware of postures like: arms crossed in front of chest, clenched hands, gestures with fist, pointing with fingers, chopping one hand into the open palm of the other, rubbing back of neck, clasping hands behind head while leaning back in the chair. Rather focus on openness and warmth: open-lipped smiling, open hands with palms visible, unbuttoning coat upon being seated.

Gestures - Contrary to popular belief, gestures should be very limited during the interview. So please don't use artificial gestures to try to heighten the importance of the issue at hand (pardon the pun). It will merely come off as theatrical. When you do use gestures, make sure they are natural and meaningful.

Space - Recognize the boundaries of your personal space and that of others. Be prepared, however, not to back up or move away from someone who has a personal space that is smaller than your own. Hang in there, take a deep breath, and stand your ground. For most of us, merely the awareness of our personal space is enough to consciously prompt us to stand firm when speaking with someone. If you have a smaller than average personal space, make sure you keep your distance so that you do not intimidate someone who possesses a larger personal space.

Interview Sequence:

A typical interview sequence could be as follows:
• Tell us about yourself
• Technical information checks - your technical abilities
• Your reason for leaving
• Company info and position info - what they have to offer
• Salary expectations
• Interview End

Tell me about yourself:
Be prepared to talk about yourself. You will definitely be asked to do so. Be concise, to the point but thorough and stay positive. These questions help the interviewers determine what makes you tick.

Ensure that you give them just enough to see that you are a balanced individual with a positive outlook of life. In general, all employers are looking for individuals that are well balanced, positive, and with a pleasing attitude.
Know yourself - identify your past successes, interests, skills, values and strengths. Practice describing your professional characteristics. Recalling accomplishments beforehand, when you don't have to respond under interview pressure, will strengthen your answers during the actual interview.

Every interview will be different, and there may always be surprising questions.

These are questions that the interviewers might ask:

- How would you describe yourself?
- What makes you unique?
- What goals have you set for yourself? How are you planning to achieve them?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- To what do you owe your present success?
- What is your favourite hobby and tell me why?
- What motivates you?
- What type of work environment appeals to you most?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Why have you chosen this particular profession?
- What do you like most about your current job?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- Tell me about a situation in which you were under tremendous pressure and how you dealt with it;
- Give me an example of a time in your life in which you had to overcome great adversity to get the job done; and
- Tell me about your most difficult decision and how you went about making it.

Some examples of Strengths and Weaknesses:

- Self-Motivated
- Ability to work in teams
- Ability to perform under pressure
- Ability to take initiative
- Fast learner;
- Positive attitude;
- Making things happen
- Ability to complete projects
- Ability to work unsupervised
- Leadership abilities; and
- I get the job done!

Don’t just talk about your strength—relate it to the position

Include a negative but forgivable weakness such as:

- Meticulous
- Painstaking
- Detailed; or
- “I’m not the most organized of individuals, so I always answer my e-mails and phone calls right away. I’m aware of the problem and I have strategies to deal with it.” etc.

Each question gives you an opportunity to illustrate your favourable characteristics. When responding, focus on subjects related to the job. For example, if asked to describe yourself, talk about your professional characteristics and background, not your personal life.

Important questions that WILL be asked:

WHY YOU ARE THE RIGHT CANDIDATE:

Question: “Why should I hire you?”
Answer: Stress the areas in your background that relate to the challenges inherent in the new position. Meet the interviewer’s description of the position point for point with your skills and experience. Emphasize your qualifications and your dedication to success. Discuss how you will bring this to bear for the interviewer’s company.

Question: “You don’t have the correct experience for the job! Why should we employ you?”
Answer: Be prepared to answer this one with comments such as “I'm a fast learner and I have the ability to tackle any challenge!” or show them from your experience/strengths why you should get the job. Remember that you are now busy selling your personality and positive characteristics, so be positive and complementary about yourself!

Question: “Give me an example of how you could help my company.”
**Answer:** Describe a project where you made a significant contribution and how it affected the bottom line. Emphasize results. Show how this ability transfers from your past positions to the one being discussed during the interview.

Whatever the question, be ready to accentuate the positive.

**Technical Information check:**

During this time in the interview, you will be asked to tell them about your technical abilities, projects and achievements. These questions will be used to determine not only your background experience and skills, but also your suitability for the discussed position. Don't be bashful. Thoroughly explain your background, experience and skills.

When asked about your technical abilities give detailed answers. E.g. When asked if you can programme in for instance Visual Basic, don't just say yes. Rather respond as follows: "Yes, I started with Visual Basic in 200_. My first project was to _____, etc. I initiated a system that saved the company ________! I've also done a course in Visual Basic programming from (Company name) etc. I'm currently busy with a project where I'm responsible for _______.”

**State, clearly and concisely, your duties and responsibilities on each job, focusing on:**
- Particular problems/challenges you encountered
- Your solution
- How you implemented those solutions; and
- How you will bring the same skills to bear for a new employer.

Listen attentively and answer all questions put to you with answers that are to the point. Don't waffle and include irrelevant information! Watch the interviewer's mannerisms for clues about whether to elaborate or keep your responses short.

Do not be afraid of silence. Take a few seconds to gather your thoughts before launching into an answer. A few seconds of silence followed by a well thought out answer reflects very well on you. If you are finished answering and the interviewer does not ask another question immediately, you may ask if you should elaborate on part of your answer or just wait. Just as you may need a few seconds to phrase your answers, the interviewer will often have to spend time gathering thoughts in order to phrase intelligent questions.

**More technical questions that can be asked:**
- What is your most significant accomplishment?
- What part of the project life cycle have you worked on?
- Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team;
- Tell me more about the project you described on your CV?”
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your skills;
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities;
- Give me an example of a problem you solved and the process you used;
- Tell me about a project you initiated;
- What are your short and long term goals?
- Have you ever supervised people?
- What is your management style?
- How do you interface with users?
- Which area of technical expertise do you feel is your strongest?
- Describe the type of manager you prefer;
- What do you know about our firm/organization?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate a particular firm/organization?
- What factors are important to you in a job?
- How do you evaluate success?

Remember to tell them how your last or current company benefited or saved money having you on their team. How do you make yourself indispensable to a company? Emphasize the results of your work. How did your experience and input create something positive? Reduce costs? Increase Productivity? Streamline workflow?

This is very important, as you are now in a phase where you are selling your abilities and special achievements.

Some candidates are so focused on specific answers, they forget to relax and connect with the interviewer. An interview should be conversational. However, that does not mean you are expected to speak without pause. You should stop to consider an answer before responding to difficult or unexpected
questions. And if a question is confusing, ask for clarification.

**Reason for leaving:**

Should they ask you for your reason for leaving, remember not to run your current company down, it’s not going to buy you any points.

**Always talk about your real reasons for leaving such as:**

- Wanting greater opportunities
- Looking for new challenges
- Needing a change in career path
- Working with new technologies
- Ready for greater responsibilities
- Wanting to work for a bigger/smaller company
- Wanting to make a difference in the company
- Desire to grow and get exposure on how other people do things

**Company and Job Info:**

At this point they will give you background on the company and the specific position you applied for. If they don’t, then you should ask them.

**Asking questions during the interview:**

At some point in the interview, usually toward the end, you will have the opportunity to ask your own questions.

Don’t just answer the questions. Ask some yourself. - Communicate! The questions that you ask are just as critical as the responses that you give. Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates your intelligence, common sense and your interest in the position to the employer. By posing good questions to the interviewer, you will gain additional useful information about the opportunity.

**Ask questions such as:**

- What other technologies are currently being used by the company?
- What learning opportunities on new technologies exist?
- What are their technology plans for the future?
- Your direct reporting structure
- Your team size
- Can you describe a typical assignment?
- Where is the company heading, e.g. its strategic direction?
- What significant changes do you foresee in the near future for the company?
- What was the background of the last two or three employees who held this position? Where are they now?
- How is success measured and determined?
- What are some of the more difficult problems facing someone in this position?
- Where can this position lead? What would be a typical career path?
- If you could change one thing about this company what would it be?

**Salary Talk**

Don’t talk salary until they bring up the subject. They haven’t just invited you in to discuss how much they want to pay you. They will first want to know what you can do for them. Also don't ask about the company benefits, leave, study assistance, HR policies, allowances etc that the company provides. I will make sure you get all the relevant information before you have to make a final decision on any job offer.

Should the subject of salary come up, don’t put a price on your head and don’t mention any figures. Let’s say they are willing to pay you R 15 and you price yourself at R 12, they will surely give you the R 12 you asked for. Rather say you are open for negotiation and would consider a market related salary for your skills and experience. Leave the salary negotiation for myself, as I would usually know what the company is prepared to pay and can negotiate the best deal for you.

Stay with facts and mention your current salary should they want to know it. We always include your current salary in the CV and they will usually have this with them.

Should they make you an offer in the interview and it’s not acceptable to you, never turn it down outright. Always leave the door open for myself to see if I cannot get a better offer out of them. Should you be happy with the offer they make in the interview, you can accept it there and then. It is preferable that you leave all salary negotiations up to myself as I have the experience and know how to do it. It is
also easier for a third party to negotiate on your behalf. Also remember, it is in my interest to get you the best salary possible!

**The Interview End:**
Before leaving the interview, make sure you understand the next step in the hiring process. Find out whether there will be another round of interviews, whether you should provide additional information, and when a hiring decision will be made.

If you liked the interview, you can at this point say it to them. This could open the door for the follow on interview and it would most certainly set a positive ending to the interview.

Remember to smile and thank the interviewer for the opportunity to see you and if you are interested in the job, say so.

**The most important things to remember:**
- Respect yourself without taking yourself too seriously
- Don’t talk religion, politics or other contentious subjects!
- Be positive, happy and talk, YES-TALK to them the same, as you would to an old work acquaintance.
- Never jump to any unfavourable conclusions. Evaluate the job opportunity as a whole and base your conclusions on the bigger picture. See the whole process through and then make your decisions

**Follow Up:**
Phone myself as soon as possible after the interview to give your impressions of the company, job and the interview. I will then follow up with them and give you any feedback.

**The 3 rules for a successful interview are:**
"Be positive! Be yourself! And remember only you can make it happen!!" = ATTITUDE!!!

The key element to successful interviewing is not your experience, your grades, what classes you took, your extracurricular activities, or any of the other basic necessities. Those skills are what got you the interview. The key element to successful interviewing can be summed up in one word: ATTITUDE!!!

If you want to rise above others with better experience, better grades, or better anything, you will need to work on developing a highly positive work attitude.

Your attitude determines whether you will "make the cut" or be discarded. Remember, there are plenty of competitors with the ability to do almost any given job. Your attitude is often what recruiters will remember when the dust has settled after reviewing ten, twenty, or even one hundred candidates - the one who was sincerely willing to put forth their very best effort. If you have the attitude of wanting to do your very best for the company, of being focused on the company’s needs, of putting yourself forth as the person who will be committed and dedicated to fulfilling their needs, you will likely be the one chosen.

**Good Luck and I'll speak to you after the interview!**

Remember!!! - Go in with an enthusiastic attitude and a full night’s sleep.