



Interviewing for Success



Stages of the Interview

- Opening
- Structuring statements
- Questions about credentials, skills, and knowledge
- Situational and behavioural questions
- Closing

Employers Want to Know

1. Can the applicant do the job?
2. Will the applicant do the job?
3. Will the applicant fit in?

Purpose of an Interview

The employment interview is a critical point in your job search. These 30 or 45 minutes may determine your future. It is the time to tell relevant, pertinent stories about yourself. This requires practice. But don't forget that you are interviewing the company as much as they are interviewing you. Having done your research on this firm, you have a chance in the interview to find out more about the corporate culture, the specific job opening, and whether or not it is a good fit for you. Think of the interview as a mutual exercise in determining compatibility.



Sample Questions

Three Ways to Ask About Your "Ability to Handle Stress"

1. How do you handle stress? (simple question with simple answer: "I handle stress very well")
2. You are a copy editor at a local publishing house. It is 4:28 p.m. on a Wednesday. Your very busy supervisor is leaving at 4:45 to catch a flight to Toronto. She plans to review the chapter you have been editing during her flight. You have nothing to give her because your hard drive just crashed and your back-up floppy is contaminated. The technical support person in the office is away at a conference until the end of the week. What are you going to do? (situational question, but the answer is usually hypothetical: "Under this situation, I would...")
3. Could you please tell us about a time when you had to complete a job under pressure? (behavioural question which gets you to tell about a specific, real experience)

Unusual Questions

Companies often ask these questions to see how you would handle something unexpected. Your response may demonstrate aspects of your personality and your thought process.

1. If you were a vegetable, what would you be, and why?
2. If you were a car, what would you be, and why?
3. If you were an animal, what would you be, and why?
4. How many cars are there in the USA? (Microsoft has asked this!)
5. How many windows are there in Vancouver?
6. How are M&Ms made?
7. Why are manhole covers round?
8. What is your favourite dessert?

General Questions

These questions are broad in scope and ask you for information that pertains to one or more of the preceding categories.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Describe your personality.
3. Which three words describe you the best?
4. Are you competitive?
5. What would you most want to change about yourself?
6. What are your outside interests/activities?
7. If you could change one thing in your life, what would it be?
8. Define success. Define failure.
9. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn?
10. Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
11. Who are your role models?
12. Do you have any hobbies? Tell me about them.
13. Do you have any questions for us?

Illegal Questions

Under the Employment Standards Act of BC, questions pertaining to age, race, ancestry, religion, colour, sex, marital status, physical/mental disability, place of origin, political beliefs, family status, and sexual orientation are illegal (unless they are directly related to the position). Below are six examples of such questions.

1. Are you planning to have a family?
2. "Bryce," is that a European name?
3. Do you mind if I ask you a personal question—why aren't you married?
4. Would you say that you're generally healthy?
5. How are you planning to vote in the election?
6. Have you ever missed work as a result of stress?

Behavioural Questions

Preparing for Behavioural Interviewing

1. Complete an Outcomes Analysis of the job
2. Define the General Competencies needed to achieve the outcomes (Technical, Managerial, Leadership, Personal)
3. Define the Specific Competencies needed to achieve the outcomes
4. Identify examples of experience and accomplishments related to outcomes/competencies

Handling the Question

- C** - Clarify the questions
O - Organise your answer
R - Respond to the question
 (and the question behind the question)
E - Examples of past experience are given

What is a Good Answer?

A good answer to a behavioural interview question...

- describes a specific past event which relates to the employer's outcomes.
- has a sufficient amount of detail to show the interviewer that the event did actually occur.
- shows you in a positive light.
- avoids statements such as: Generally... Usually... Always... That happens all the time... I would...

The Employer's Approach to Behavioural Questions

1. Ask an open-ended question and allow for silence
2. Gain a behavioural example and take notes
3. Probe for clarification and seek contrary information
4. Rate the candidate

Behavioural Questions

1. Solving problems requires more than good plans; it means taking action. Give me an example of a time when you were able to take meaningful action in solving a practical problem.
2. Getting the job done may necessitate unusual persistence or dedication to results, especially when faced with obstacles or distractions. Tell me about a time when you were able to be very persistent in order to reach goals. Please be specific.
3. Setting of goals and objectives assist us in the realisation of success in our projects. How have you used goal and objective setting in your projects or tasks?
4. Could you talk a bit about how you manage your time, what techniques or tools you use in order to be as productive as possible?
5. Describe a high pressure situation you had to handle at work or school. Tell me what happened, who was involved and what you did in terms of problem solving.
6. Can you tell me about a time when you had to deal with an especially difficult customer and how you handled that situation.
7. Think about a time when you experienced difficulties in a group situation. How did you handle it?
8. How do you establish a working relationship with new people? Please provide a specific example.
9. How do you get your peers to accept your ideas and contributions?
10. Please describe a situation where you felt you did not exhibit as much self-control as you would have liked.
11. Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
12. Describe a situation where you were involved in a leadership role.
13. What makes you think that you can supervise effectively?
14. Please give me an example of a time where you had to work hard to complete a task.
15. Tell me about a team project where you're particularly proud of your contribution.
16. Think about a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker. How did you handle it?
17. Think about a time when you experienced difficulties in a group situation. How did you handle it?
18. What are some situations where your work was criticised?
19. Give me an example of a time when you've shown initiative on the job.
20. What do you do when you don't agree with your supervisor?
21. How do you determine your priorities?
22. How have you developed your interpersonal skills?
23. When have you had to demonstrate outstanding communication skills? When was the last time you were involved in public speaking?



More Sample Questions

Bear in mind that every interview question is asked for a reason. From an employer's perspective, the underlying goal of an interview is to assess whether or not you are the right candidate for the job. Interviewers will attempt to determine whether you are well suited to the role (experience, goals, and personal values, etc.), and whether you will fit in the company (the culture, the demands/ expectations of the job, etc.), and whether you are genuinely interested in this job/company.

Work Experience / Skills / Qualifications

1. What are your strengths?
2. What are your weaknesses?
3. What was the best/worst part about your last job?
4. Why did you leave your last job?
5. What type of supervision did you receive in your last job?
6. What was the best/worst job/manager you ever had?
7. Describe the ideal manager/employee.
8. What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
9. What motivates you to do a good job?
10. What did you achieve in your last job?
11. Have you ever been laid off?
12. How would you evaluate your present firm/manager?
13. What constructive criticism did you receive on your last job?
14. What bored/excited you the most about your last job?
15. What would your managers say about you?
16. What aspects of your work performance would you like to improve?
17. Tell me about your work experience.
18. What goals did you set for yourself in your last job? Did you achieve them?
19. Did you work while going to school? In what positions?
20. What did you learn from these university work experiences?
21. What problems have you solved in your previous positions?
22. Have you ever quit a job? Why?
23. Have you ever done any volunteer work?
24. Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
25. Which do you prefer, large or small companies?
26. How do you feel about working in a structured environment?
27. How do you feel about working overtime? Flex time?



Education & Training

These and Work Experience questions centre around what you have done—not specifically focusing on the skills applied, but on the work environment and your work values.

1. Talk about your university program.
2. How has your education prepared you for this position?
3. What courses did you enjoy the most/least at UBC? Why?
4. Why did you decide to attend UBC?
5. Why did you choose to study _____?
6. Describe your study habits.
7. What was the worst part of your experience at UBC?
8. Do you feel your grades reflect your ability?
9. How did you choose your major/ program of study?
10. Looking back on your university experience, would you make the same decisions?
11. What were the biggest problems you encountered in university? How did you handle them?
12. What is the most important thing you learned from your university program?
13. Do you plan to return to school for further education?
14. To what extent have you been involved in extra-curricular activities?
15. Do you think you received a good education at UBC?
16. Describe your computer experience.

Job & Career

These questions pertain to your goals, interest in the company, and your expectations.

1. How are you conducting your job search and how will you make a decision?
2. Where do you see yourself in five years?
3. What would you like to be doing next year?
4. How does this job fit into your career plans?
5. What are your career goals?
6. Define the perfect job/career.
7. What challenges are you looking for?
8. What kind of work do you want to do?
9. Why did you apply to this job?
10. What interests you most about this position?
11. What are your expectations of your future employer?
12. What do you know about this job/our company?
13. What concerns do you have about this job?
14. What research have you done on our firm and industry?
15. What are you seeking in this job that you're not receiving in your current job?
16. What are your salary expectations?
17. Would you relocate to advance your career?
18. Are you willing to work long hours?
19. How long would you stay with us?
20. Why should we hire you?
21. Why do you think you're qualified for this job?
22. What do you bring to this job that other candidates don't?
23. What can you do for us?
24. Why are you looking to change careers?

Top Ten Interview Mistakes

Based on Feedback from Corporate Recruiters

1. **Lack of proper preparation** - Failure to gather information on the company and the job before the interview makes a very poor impression on recruiters; it suggests that you are not really that interested in the position.
2. **Inappropriate personal appearance** - Consider the nature of the position sought and dress accordingly. When in doubt, dress somewhat more formally than you think would be expected for the job. Be conservative and be detail-oriented (polished shoes, neat hair, non-overpowering cologne or perfume, etc.) First impressions are very important.
3. **Poor non-verbal communication** - In addition to what you say, your non-verbal behaviour is very important in an interview. Are you making eye contact? Are you listening intently when the interviewer is speaking? Do you give a firm handshake? Are you fidgeting? Practise with a friend or in front of a mirror to assess these factors.
4. **Poor attitude** - Overbearing or self-centred behaviour (a “what’s in it for me” attitude) is very poorly received. Ask yourself what can you contribute to the company: what skills and experience would you bring to the job?
5. **Over or under answering questions** - For most interview questions, a “Yes” or “No” answer is not appropriate. Provide more detail and cite examples from personal experience whenever possible. Do not, however, talk endlessly. If you do not understand a question, seek clarification before responding.
6. **Failure to ask questions** - Employers will assess your interest in the company and the position by the types of questions you ask. Proper research prior to the interview will help ensure that the questions you ask are intelligent ones.
7. **Disorganisation** - Make sure you arrive a few minutes early so that you have time to get composed and check your appearance. Arriving late is simply unacceptable—so plan for the unexpected. Always bring an extra copy of your resume and references.
8. **Exaggeration or deceitfulness** - Do not exaggerate your experience or skills when answering interview questions. Remember that employers may follow-up on your assertions during reference checks, so always answer honestly.
9. **Excessive anxiety** - Interviews tend to induce some anxiety in everyone, but for some, it can seriously undermine performance. Employers cannot and will not attribute poor answers entirely to your anxiety. They also do not have the benefit of knowing you outside of the interview situation. To decrease anxiety, the single best thing you can do is practise. Ask friends or family to help.
10. **Failure to send a thank-you note or card following the interview** - Take the time to send a thank-you card. This small gesture can make a significant impact on an employer. Not only does it demonstrate your sincere interest in the position, but it also helps distinguish you from other interview candidates.

FUTURE MAPPING

Need more help?



Come take our Future Mapping workshop on Interviewing. You may also want to take our workshop on Resume and Cover Letters.

Module 5

Interview Clinic

- Learn everything from what questions will be asked to employer's worst fears
- Practice mock interviews with actual employers from the community
- Investigate the process of evaluating a job offer

Module 4

Resume and Cover Letter Clinic

- Understand the do's and don'ts of resumes
- Work with your peers and career educators to improve your resume
- Learn about other self-marketing tools such as cover letters and portfolios

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The guide to your Career