

INTERVIEW TIPS

Interviewers may usually shoot five different types of questions for you that may be directive, non-directive, hypothetical, behavior descriptive, and stress. Being aware of the different types can help you in the preparation stage as you build your skills. It may also help you focus in on exactly what is being asked and what the employer is looking for in specific questions.

Directive Questions

The interviewer determines the focus of your answer. The information that the interviewer wants is very clear. If you have completed the research on yourself, this type of question should be easy to answer.

Example: “What skills do you have that relate to this position?”

“I have very good communication and interpersonal skills that I have refined through several summer and part-time jobs working with the public. In addition, I am fluent in both English and French.”

Non-Directive Questions

You determine the focus of your answer. The interviewer asks a general question and does not ask for specific information. The most common non-directive question is

“Tell me about yourself.”

When answering the question, keep in mind that the employer is interested in knowing how your background and personality that may qualify you for the job. In your answer, you should cover four areas: your education, related experience, skills and abilities, and personal attributes. As you talk about these areas, relate them to the job you are seeking. Decide what your response will be before starting to speak, this helps to keep responses concise.

Example: “Tell me about yourself.”

“I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology, and have recently completed the course in Volunteer Management through the Volunteer Center of Winnipeg. These have given me a strong background in many of the principles of human behavior and the recruitment, training, and supervision of volunteers. I have experience in working with young adults in a helping capacity, both through my position as a Peer Advisor at the University of Manitoba, and as a camp counselor at a camp for behaviorally troubled adolescents. Both of these positions involved

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individual counseling, facilitating discussion groups, and teaching young people about health issues – all of which relate directly to the services which I would be training volunteers to provide within your organization. In addition, I thoroughly enjoy working with young people, and can establish rapport with them easily.”

Hypothetical or Scenario Questions

When asking a hypothetical question, the interviewer describes a situation, which you may encounter in the position and asks how you would react in a similar situation. This is a good way to test problem-solving abilities. When answering this type of question, try applying a simple problem solving model to it gather information, evaluate the information, priorities the information, seek advice, weigh the alternatives, make a decision, communicate the decision, monitor the results and modify if necessary.

Example: “Suppose you are working your first day in our laboratory, and a fire at nearby work station breaks out. What would you do?”

“Before I start working in any laboratory, I always locate the emergency equipment, such as eye washes, fire blankets and alarms. I would also review the safety protocols. So in this situation, I would be aware of these. As soon as I noticed the fire, I would shut down my experiment and if the fire is significant, I would pull the fire alarm and help to evacuate the lab. In the case of very small flame, I would ask the staff member at the station what I could do to help, Which would vary with the type of substances involved.

Behavior Descriptive or Behavioral Questions

This type of question is becoming increasingly popular in interview situations. It asks what you did in a particular situation rather than what you would do. Situations chosen usually follow the job description fairly closely. Some employers feel that examples of past performance will help them to predict future performance in similar situations. There is no right or wrong answer to this type of question, but keep in mind that you should relate the answer to the position. If you are interviewing for a research position, talk about a research project you completed.

Example: “Give me an example of a work situation in which you were proud of your performance.”

“While working as a sales representative for XYZ Company for the summer, I called on Prospective clients and persuaded them of the ecological and economic benefits of Recycling. I also followed up on clients to ensure that they were satisfied with the service they received. This involved both telephone and in-person contacts. I increased sales 34% over the same period in the previous year.”When preparing for this type of questioning, it is crucial that you review the skills and qualities that the position would require and identify specific examples from your past which demonstrated those traits.

Stress Questions

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Some questions will surprise you and possibly make you feel uncomfortable during an interview. For

Example: “ Which do you prefer, fruits or vegetables?”

There are many reasons why an interviewer might ask such questions. They may want to see how you react in difficult situations, or they may simply be trying to test your sense of humor. Such questions may directly challenge an opinion that you have just stated or say something negative about you or a reference. Sometimes they ask seemingly irrelevant questions such as,

“If you were an animal, what type of animal would you be?”

The best way to deal with this type of question is to recognize what is happening. The interviewer is trying to elicit a reaction from you. Stay calm, and do not become defensive. If humor comes naturally to you, you might try using it in your response, but it is important to respond to the question. What you say is not nearly as important as maintaining your composure.

Example: “Which do you like better, Lions or Tigers?”

“Oh, lions definitely. They appear so majestic and are very sociable. To be honest, I think that seeing The Lion King four times has probably contributed to this!”

Way of answering to various questions:

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You can never predict every question that you will encounter, so approach the interview with an inventory of important points. Make a list of the points about yourself that you want the interviewer to know. For example, if you were to apply for a job as a Sales Representative, you might want to list the products you have sold before, types of customers (by industry, age, etc.), languages spoken, personal experience in that industry and related knowledge (perhaps from your academic program).

Consider each question an opportunity to provide some of this information. Don’t assume anything. You will be evaluated on your answers, not your resume. Therefore, ensure you incorporate the relevant information from your resume in your answers.

Pause a couple of seconds before you respond to each question, even if you know exactly what you want to say. Take this time to quickly plan your answer, this helps to avoid misunderstandings and produces much more concise answers.

If you don’t understand a question, ask for clarification. This is expected and is preferable to providing an unsuitable answer. If you need time to collect your thoughts – take it. When people are nervous they tend either to “draw a blank” or to babble. It is better to think for a few

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moments and make sure that your answer is doing you justice and that there is a point to what you are saying.

Always expand. Never answer a question with a “yes” or “no.”

The interview is an opportunity for you to sell yourself. Don’t be afraid to ‘blow your own horn.’ As long as you can back up what you are saying with examples which demonstrate that what you are saying is true, you are not bragging. Third party observations can also be mentioned. For example, “My last employer told me that I was promoted because of how I handled conflicts with clients.”

Be very positive. Don’t complain about anything – from your former employer to the weather – and don’t apologize for experience that you don’t have. Just sell what you do have and let the employer decide if you have what he/she is looking for. Also, avoid negative words. For example, you would not say “I have a little experience...,” you would say “I have experience.....”

Don’t be afraid to repeat important points. In fact, it is a good idea to do this.

Interview process:

There are many different types of interviews designed to serve different purposes or situations. Regardless of the type of interview, most will incorporate the following stages: establishing rapport, exchanging information, and closing the interview. Pay attention to the job titles of the interviewer(s). This can help you decide how much technical detail to provide in your responses.

Establishing Rapport

This is a very important part of the interview because while establishing rapport, first impressions are made, and the tone of the interview is set. Some people suggest that the decision to hire is greatly influenced by the first five minutes of the interview. A good interviewer will introduce him/herself, and take the lead. Follow his or her lead – if they are chatty, be chatty; if they are formal, be formal. Some employer’s use what seems to be casual conversation to get to know you on a more personal level this may be crucial to a hiring decision!

Tips:

- Smile and maintain eye contact. This is one way of communicating confidence, even if you don’t feel it.
- If the interviewer offers his or her hand, shake it firmly. If they don’t, it is appropriate to offer yours.
- Wait until the interviewer sits or offers you a seat before sitting down.
- If the interviewer is making small talk, participate. Keep your answers short and positive.

Exchange of Information

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This is the bulk of the interview. It is your opportunity to let the interviewer know what you have to offer, and your chance to learn more about the organization.

Tips:

- When you answer a question, look the interviewer in the eye.
- Be aware of the interviewer's reactions. If he or she looks confused, ask if you can clarify anything.
- Be aware of what your body is saying. Avoid closed postures. Sit upright, but not stiffly.
- Try to find a comfortable position as that will make you feel more relaxed.
- Control your nervous habits. Don't swing your foot, talk with your hands (to an extreme), or fiddle with jewelers, buttons, pens, etc.
- Show that you are interested in the job by asking questions.
- Try not to appear bored or anxious. Don't look at your watch.

Closing the Interview

When the interviewer is done gathering the information that is needed, he or she will ask if you have anything to add, or if you have any questions. This is your opportunity to mentally review your inventory of skills and make sure that you have communicated everything that you wanted to. If any of your questions have not been addressed during the course of the interview, now is the time to ask them.

Tips:

- Thank the interviewer for his/her time and consideration.
- Ask when you can expect to hear from him/her.
- If it is not known when a decision will be reached, ask if you can phone in a week's time to inquire about the progress.
- If the interviewer offers his/her hand, shake it firmly. Otherwise, it is fine to offer yours first.
- If not already discussed, you can offer to leave a sample of your work, or portfolio if you have one.