

Successful Interview Techniques

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So your resume caught their attention, your cover letter got you in the door, and now comes the hard part: the interview. You know, the part where you try your hardest to make a great first impression on a person you don't even know who holds the keys to a job that you really, really want. Is it any wonder then why everyone, from entry level workers to seasoned career people, finds job interviews stressful?

There's no such thing as a perfect interviewee, and there's nothing you could do, in any given interview, that would somehow guarantee you the job. But there *are* ways that you can eliminate unnecessary stressors and roadblocks, giving yourself the best possible chance at landing the job and making a great first impression.

Do Your Homework—Before the interview, take some time to research and learn about the company or workplace where you're hoping to get a job. Employers aren't just looking for a five-star resume; they want to hire people who have a genuine interest in their particular organization and the work that they do. So, show that you really want *the* job—not just “a job, period”—by showing the employer that you know what you'll be getting into, and can't wait to start.

Have an Inquiring Mind—At the end of your interview, the employer will ask you if you have any questions for him/her. The floor will be yours, so you don't want to squander it by drawing a blank and not knowing what to ask. To make the most of this moment, prepare for it by coming up with at least 5 questions the day before you have the interview. Asking specific, relevant questions in an interview shows your employer that you have thought a lot about the job and are genuinely interested in it.

Be Early, Not “On Time”—When walking or commuting to the interview place, err on the side of caution by giving yourself plenty of time to get there. For example, say you have an interview scheduled for 10:00am. Depending on how far away you live or work from the interview, you may want to plan to arrive there at 9:00am or even earlier—use your own judgment. Either way, don't plan to be there *at 10*. Why? A slow train or morning traffic can push your arrival time back to 10:30 or 11!

Dress the Part—Dressing appropriately accomplishes three things: it tells the employer that you are serious about wanting the job, it tells the employer to take you seriously as a professional, and it shows that you can fit in. Like showing up early, dressing appropriately for your interview is a simple way to ensure that you make a good first impression. Fair or unfair, the plain truth is that people make assumptions about you based on your appearance the first time they see you. So don't leave anything to chance.

Be Yourself—An interview is a presentation, not a performance. In other words: while you want to make the best first impression you can possibly make, you need to feel confident enough in yourself and your convictions to show the interviewer who you really are. That means answering questions as

honestly as you can, even the tough ones like “What are your Weaknesses?” and “Why Should We Hire You?” Dressing sharply is important, but if you don’t let your identity out at all during the interview, you’re just another empty suit.

Thank You Note Etiquette—Someone took time out of their day because they were interested in the idea of giving you a job. If you really want to stand out among the other candidates, go home that afternoon and write a “thank you” email to the person who interviewed you. In the note, you should touch upon a couple of the points covered in the interview. Then, write a traditional note (on a note card) that reminds the interviewer of your particular skills or experiences, and send it US mail the same day.

Keep Your References in the Loop—Make sure your references know that they are, in fact, your *references*. Meaning: make sure they understand that employers may contact them to ask questions about you. You may even want to help prepare them for this by giving them talking points about your background and the particular positions you’re applying for.

Interview Inventory—Job searches more often than not take time, and you may end up going on more than one interview before you get hired. Here are two key ways to keep your information organized during your job search. Keep well-ordered, meticulous notes of your interviews, the people you come in contact with, and particular questions raised or topics discussed that stood out in your mind. Second, keep detailed records of each position-posting you apply for.