



Scoring a Perfect 10 on Your Interview



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Types of Interviews



The Initial Interview

This interview takes place on-campus, at the company (on-site), or over the telephone and usually lasts approximately a half-hour or less. The interviewer is trying to narrow the candidate pool so first impressions are extremely important during this interview. Some employers may make a hiring decision based upon this interview only.

On-Site Interviews

This interview is used to assess your “fit” with the organization. Interviews are offered to the most promising candidates and usually involve a good portion of the day. During such a visit, you may meet with one person or many people from a variety of departments. You will have the opportunity to discuss job responsibilities, your qualifications and interest, salary and benefits. This is an excellent opportunity for you to evaluate the job, atmosphere and people with whom you would be working. Some organizations also administer tests of various types at this time.

If travel is involved in an on-site visit, be sure that you understand the situation before accepting the invitation. Travel arrangements for second interviews are handled in one of the following ways:

- 1.) The employer representative will take care of everything, including expenses.
- 2.) You will be expected to make all or part of the arrangements, and the employer will reimburse you for all or part of the expenses later.
- 3.) You will be expected to take care of everything, including expenses.

Telephone Interviews

Many companies screen applicants over the telephone. How well you do will depend on your preparation for such calls and the impression you make. Here are some tips:

- 1.) Any telephone calls during your job search could be an employer. Answer the phone appropriately every time; first impressions are important.
- 2.) Be sure to inform roommates and parents of the importance of taking careful telephone messages for you.
- 3.) Your greeting on your answering machine should be businesslike.

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- 4.) Keep the following items next to your telephone: paper, pen, copy of your resume, date book, a log of companies you have contacted, your own course schedule including major exams/projects, and a copy of the job description.
- 5.) Express your pleasure at receiving the call, but don't act like you have won the lottery.
- 6.) Ask for a minute to turn down the stereo, close the door and set the stage for privacy and quiet.
- 7.) Your voice is your only means to express energy and enthusiasm.
- 8.) Use pauses effectively -- think about what you will answer or ask next.
- 9.) Don't hang up before you know the next step and thank the interviewer for calling
- 10.) Get the interviewer's full name, title and phone number.

Behavioral Based Interviewing

The basic premise of behavioral-based interviewing is the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior in similar circumstances. Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask how you did behave. Below are tips for preparing for one:

- 1.) Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or action (example: course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.)
- 2.) Be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result.
- 3.) Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you even if the result itself was not favorable.
- 4.) Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story.

Interview Cheat Sheet



Relax -- a cheat sheet is not really cheating. It's a checklist to make sure you stay focused before, during and after the interview. Creating a cheat sheet will help you feel more prepared and confident. You shouldn't memorize what's on the sheet or check it off during the interview. You should use your cheat sheet to remind you of key facts. Here are some suggestions for what you should include on it.

In the Days Before the Interview

1. Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. On the left side, make a bulleted list of what the employer is looking for based on the job posting. On the right side, make a bulleted list of the qualities you possess that fit those requirements.
2. Research the company, the industry and the competition.
3. Prepare your 60-second personal statement: Your answer to the, "Tell me about yourself," question.
4. Write at least five success stories to answer behavioral interview questions ("Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of a time...").
5. List 10 questions to ask the interviewer about the job, the company and the industry.
6. Research salary data and determine your worth.
7. Determine your salary needs based on your living expenses -- what is your bottom line?
8. Get permission from your references to use their names.

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Before You Go to the Interview

Do you look professional? Check yourself in the mirror; part of your confidence will come from looking good.

Carry these items to the interview:

- Several copies of your resume on quality paper.
- A copy of your references.
- A pad of paper on which to take notes (notes are optional).
- Directions to the interview site.

Prepare answers to the 10 most common interview questions.

Upon Arrival

- Arrive early -- enter the building 10 minutes before your appointment.
- Review your prepared stories and answers.
- Go to the restroom and check your appearance one last time.
- Announce yourself to the receptionist in a professional manner.
- Stand and greet your interviewer with a hearty -- not bone-crushing -- handshake.
- Smile and look into the interviewer's eyes.



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Interview Cheat Sheet



During the Interview

- Try to focus on the points you have prepared without sounding rehearsed or stiff.
- Relax and enjoy the conversation. Learn what you can about the company.
- Ask questions and listen; read between the lines.
- At the conclusion, thank the interviewer and determine the next steps.
- Ask for the interviewer's business card so you can send a follow-up letter.

After the Interview

- As soon as possible, write down what you are thinking and feeling.
- Later in the day, look at what you wrote and assess how you did.
- Write a follow-up thank-you letter, reminding the interviewer of your qualities.

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Prep for the Top 10 Interview Questions



Too many job seekers stumble through interviews as if the questions are coming out of left field. But many interview questions are to be expected. Study this list and plan your answers ahead of time so you'll be ready to deliver them with confidence.

What Are Your Weaknesses?

This is the most dreaded question of all. Handle it by minimizing your weakness and emphasizing your strengths. Stay away from personal qualities and concentrate on professional traits: "I am always working on improving my communication skills to be a more effective presenter. I recently joined Toastmasters, which I find very helpful."

Why Should We Hire You?

Summarize your experiences: "With five years' experience working in the financial industry and my proven record of saving the company money, I could make a big difference in your company. I'm confident I would be a great addition to your team."

Why Do You Want to Work Here?

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought and are not sending out resumes just because there is an opening. For example, "I've selected key companies whose mission statements are in line with my values, where I know I could be excited about what the company does, and this company is very high on my list of desirable choices."

What Are Your Goals?

Sometimes it's best to talk about short-term and intermediate goals rather than locking yourself into the distant future. For example, "My immediate goal is to get a job in a growth-oriented company. My long-term goal will depend on where the company goes. I hope to eventually grow into a position of responsibility."

Why Did You Leave (Or Why Are You Leaving) Your Job?

If you're unemployed, state your reason for leaving in a positive context: "I managed to survive two rounds of corporate downsizing, but the third round was a 20 percent reduction in the workforce, which included me."

If you are employed, focus on what you want in your next job: "After two years, I made the decision to look for a company that is team-focused, where I can add my experience."

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When Were You Most Satisfied in Your Job?

The interviewer wants to know what motivates you. If you can relate an example of a job or project when you were excited, the interviewer will get an idea of your preferences. “I was very satisfied in my last job, because I worked directly with the customers and their problems; that is an important part of the job for me.”



What Can You Do for Us That Other Candidates Can't?

What makes you unique? This will take an assessment of your experiences, skills and traits. Summarize concisely: “I have a unique combination of strong technical skills, and the ability to build strong customer relationships. This allows me to use my knowledge and break down information to be more user-friendly.”



What Are Three Positive Things Your Last Boss Would Say About You?

It's time to pull out your old performance appraisals and boss's quotes. This is a great way to brag about yourself through someone else's words: “My boss has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can rely on me, and he likes my sense of humor.”



What Salary Are You Seeking?

It is to your advantage if the employer tells you the range first. Prepare by knowing the going rate in your area, and your bottom line or walk-away point. One possible answer would be: “I am sure when the time comes, we can agree on a reasonable amount. In what range do you typically pay someone with my background?”

If You Were an Animal, Which One Would You Want to Be?

Interviewers use this type of psychological question to see if you can think quickly. If you answer “a bunny,” you will make a soft, passive impression. If you answer “a lion,” you will be seen as aggressive. What type of personality would it take to get the job done? What impression do you want to make?

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Questions to Prepare For



- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
- What do you consider to be your strengths? Weaknesses?
- Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
- Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
- What motivates you most in a job?
- Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/co-worker? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever spoken before a group of people? How large?
- Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
- What do you know about our organization (products or services)?
- How do you think a friend, professor, or former supervisor would describe you?
- How do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- How do you solve difficult problems?
- Give me an example of your experience working as part of a team.
- What are your career goals?
- Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
- Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
- Describe how you are able to work on several assignments at once?
- How do you feel about working overtime?
- How do you feel about travel?
- How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?
- Describe your ideal job.
- Why did you choose your major? This university?
- Do you think you received a good education? In what ways?
- In which campus activities did you participate? What did you learn from them?
- Which classes did you like best? Least? Why?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?
- Do you plan to return to school for further education?

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Questions to Prepare For



- What job-related skills have you developed?
- What did you learn from your work experiences?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
- Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
- What kind of boss do you prefer?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What do you consider the single most important idea you contributed — or your single most noteworthy accomplishment — in your last job?
- Can you describe what your ideal workplace is?
- What did you enjoy most/least about your last job?
- Can you walk me through how you arrived at an important decision in your last job?
- What were the best/worst risks you took in your last job? What was the result of those risks?
- What would you like us to know about you that is not on your resume?
- Where do you want to be five years from now in your career?
- Give an example of your ability to work independently.
- What aspects of your work do you get most excited about?
- How did you hear about us?
- If you were hiring for this position, what qualifications would you look for?
- What interests you most about this position?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What is a major problem you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- Give us an example of your creativity.
- How would you describe your writing abilities?

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Do You Have any Questions?



Surprisingly, the most common answer to this question is “no.” Not only is this the wrong answer, but it’s also a missed opportunity to find out information about the company. It is important for you to ask questions -- not just any questions, but those relating to the job, the company and the industry.

Be Prepared

What information do you need to decide whether to work at this company? Make a list of at least 10 questions to take with you to the interview. Depending on who is interviewing you, your questions should vary.

If you are interviewing with the hiring manager, ask questions about the job, the desired qualities and the challenges.

If you are interviewing with the human resources manager, ask about the company and the department.

If you are interviewing with management, ask about the industry and future projections. This is your chance to demonstrate your industry knowledge.

Timing Is Important

You will have to use your judgment about the number of questions you ask and when to ask them. Think of this as a conversation. There will be an appropriate time to ask certain types of questions, like those about benefits and vacation. To be on the safe side, it is best to concentrate on questions about the job’s responsibilities and how you fit the position until you get the actual offer.

When you begin to think of the interview as a two-way process, you will see it is important for you to find out as much as possible about the company. Questions will give you the opportunity to find out if this is a good place for you to work before you say “Yes.”

Possible Questions to Ask

Can you tell me what a typical day is like for someone in this position?

What type of training is given to new employees?

Who will be my manager and how much contact will I have with him/her?

What are the best aspects of the job? The worst?

What is the company culture?

Exactly what type of person are you looking for to fill this position?

How soon do you plan to fill the position?

What type of work/clients are you currently working on?

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The Power of a Simple Thank-You Note



A simple thank-you note after a job interview can wield considerable power and influence, and reflect very favorably on your candidacy for the position. Why? Several reasons:

By sending a thank-you note, you show your interviewer common courtesy and respect.

Unfortunately, in our busy and often impolite world, we simply don't acknowledge each other's time, efforts and commitments. So in sending a thank-you note, you tell your interviewer in no uncertain terms that you appreciate the time he has given you. After all, he had to give up part or all of the day to be with you, and expend effort learning more about you and what you have to offer.

So few job applicants send thank-you notes that you automatically stand out if you do.

It's shocking, but the majority of job applicants fail to send thank-you notes after their interviews. Why? Who knows? But the bottom line is that you wind up in a position to shine simply by putting forth the effort of sending a note. Strange, but true.

A thank-you note gives you an opportunity to reiterate points you made during your interview.

Have you ever left an interview wishing you'd more strongly emphasized a certain skill or experience the employer seemed to be looking for? A thank-you note gives you the chance to do just that. After using the first paragraph of your note to thank your interviewer, you can use a brief second paragraph to touch again upon the key points you made in your interview. You can also use a similar strategy to clean up any interview rough spots you might have had -- i.e., to expand upon or clarify responses you felt were weak or shaky.

A thank-you note lets you make points you forgot to make in your interview. Sometimes after an interview, as you walk out to your car, you smack yourself on the forehead and say to yourself, "Why didn't I talk about _____?" Frustrating? You bet. But you can take care of the problem to some degree in your thank-you note. Again, perhaps in the second paragraph, you can say something to the effect of "After our discussion, it occurred to me that I forgot to tell you about _____."

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A thank-you note demonstrates your written communication skills.

In receiving and reading your thank-you notes, your interviewer will see firsthand how you handle yourself on paper. You'll be using similar skills every day with the company's potential clients, customers and vendors -- so the interviewer will be reading carefully to see how you come across in print.

Writing thank-you notes isn't terribly difficult or time-consuming. If you'd like some ideas on how to proceed, take a look at one of Monster.com's sample thank-you notes. Then, be sure to follow through, preferably the same day as your interview. It can make a much bigger difference than you might think -- perhaps even the difference between the job going to you or someone else.

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Notable Note



The thank-you note is a necessary tool for any job hunting strategy. But should you send it by email or snail mail, handwritten or typed? In this fast-paced computer age, the question baffles even the most sophisticated job hunters. Follow these guidelines to help you through the maze.

Email Thank-You Notes

How did the company initially contact you? If you have always corresponded with them via email for setting up the interview and answering questions, then by all means send an email thank-you note as soon as you return from an interview. However, make sure to follow it up with a typed note to show that you are not Mr. or Ms. Casual. Email thank-you notes have one clear advantage over their snail mail counterpart: They can put your name in front of the interviewer on the same day -- sometimes within hours -- of your interview.

Snail Mail

If the company you interviewed with is formal and traditional, use snail mail to send your thank-you note. Should it be handwritten or typed? Typed is standard. Not only will you show that you are business-like, you'll also prove you know how to put together the salutation, format a letter and sign off. Executives want to know their administrative assistants can do this, since writing letters for your boss will be a big part of your job.

Handwritten notes are appropriate if you'd like to extend your thanks to others in the office who helped you out. For example, if a receptionist, assistant, office manager, or other person involved with the interviewing process was especially helpful -- say they took you to lunch or guided you from office to office -- then a handwritten note is a nice gesture to show your appreciation.

What to Say

More important is what you say and how you say it. A standard thank-you note should accomplish several things:

Thank the person for the opportunity to interview with the company.

Recap some of the conversational highlights.

Clarify any information you needed to check on for the interviewer.

And most importantly, plug your skills. Use the last paragraph as the chance to state, "The job is a good fit for me because of XYZ, and my past experience in XYZ."

Interviewers have short memories. A thank-you note is your final chance to stand apart from all of the others who want the same position.

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Write Winning Thank-You Letters



Writing powerful thank-you letters is not just a formality. Thank-you letters are marketing tools that can have tremendous value in moving your candidacy forward and positioning you above the competition. Although much of what you include in your thank-you letter may have already been communicated during your interview, there is nothing more effective than the written word to etch those thoughts into your interviewer's mind.

Overcome Objections

If during an interview there were specific objections raised as to your candidacy, use your thank-you letter to respond to and overcome those concerns. Demonstrate the concerns are not an obstacle but an opportunity, and you're fully prepared to meet the challenge.

Example: You're interviewing to be CEO for a well-established company in the Midwest. Although you're extremely well-qualified, they're concerned you've never lived in the area and have no network of local contacts. Eliminate their concerns by explaining your network of professional contacts is nationwide and, in fact, you know John Doe of X Company, have a long-standing relationship with an economic development director in the area, etc. These contacts will only serve to expand the company's already-established network.

Reiterate Your Expertise

If the company communicated its specific needs, issues or challenges, use your thank-you letter to demonstrate how you can meet those needs.

Example: You've interviewed to be the CFO of a distressed company in need of immediate action. They need a candidate with proven success in fast-track turnarounds and revitalizations. Highlight your experience in turning a company around and showing profitability.

Highlight Your Core Professional Competencies and Successes

If the company communicated its ideal qualifications for a candidate, use your thank-you letter to outline how you meet or exceed each qualification.

Example: You've interviewed for the position of EVP of technology and product development with a high tech venture, and the company has clearly communicated its four essential candidate qualifications. Help them see immediately that you have those four qualifications with an overview of your career highlights.

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How long should your thank-you letter be? Of course, as with anything else in a job search, there is no definitive answer. One or two pages is the norm, depending on the amount of information you want to communicate. Letters certainly do not have to be only one page.

Remind yourself that you already have the company's interest or you wouldn't have been interviewing, and use your thank-you letter as a tool to communicate valuable information. The entire job search process is marketing and merchandising your product -- you. There is no reason why writing thank-you letters should be any different than any other of your job search activities.



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Interviewers' Pet Peeves



You sit facing the interviewer, feeling like things are moving along nicely when all of a sudden the interview takes a drastic turn for the worse. What just happened? You may have hit one of the interviewer's pet peeves, one of those things that automatically triggers a negative response.

Here are seven of the most common peeves provided by experienced interviewers, along with some tips on how to avoid them:

1. Smells: Too Much of a Good Smell Can Be Bad

Pat Riley, author of *Secrets of Breaking into Pharmaceutical Sales*, has a pet peeve story to relate: "Preparing for an interview is not like preparing for a date. I had one interview with a woman who doused herself with perfume (the same perfume my ex-girlfriend used to wear) right before stepping into the small interview booth. The perfume was overpowering and brought back bad memories."

2. Communication: Too Little Leaves Interviewers Exasperated

"My number one interviewing pet peeve is an applicant who won't talk," says Steve Jones, a manager of client services at a software company in Dallas. "I try to ask open-ended questions and prod them for longer answers, but no luck. I've even mentioned to a few that I need more information so I can get an idea of where they're coming from -- still no luck. I always end the interview saying, 'Now it's your turn to ask questions,' and still no luck; they don't have any. Oh well -- next!"

"Help me out here," says Jones. "Come prepared to answer questions and talk about yourself."

3. Communication: Too Much Can Be Too Much

"Candidates who ramble are the ones who get to me," says Dotti Bousquet of Resource Group Staffing in West Hartford, Connecticut. "Last week, I was interviewing a candidate and asked her one question. The candidate talked and talked and talked for 45 minutes straight. I was unable to stop her. I had to say, 'Let's wrap this up,' and I stood up while she continued to talk. I walked to the door of the office and opened it. She left, but continued to talk while walking out the door."

The lesson? "Candidates should stay focused, and answer the question asked -- in less than two to three minutes," advises Bousquet.

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Interviewers' Pet Peeves



4. Lack of Focus: Results in Losing the Interviewer

"Typically, candidates are simply too intimidated by the process," says Mark Fulop, project director for a large nonprofit agency. "Relating the answer given to one question back with another -- and asking clarifying or follow-up questions -- shows me that the candidate is confident and thinking about the whole picture instead of enduring an interrogation."

5. Averting Your Eyes: One Way to Avert an Offer

"People who do not make any eye contact during the entire interview" irritate Gwen Sobiech, an agency recruiter in West Hartford, Connecticut. "I realize some people are shy, but to never look at me once -- they look down, around, everywhere, but not at me for the entire interview. I find that extremely annoying. I also tend to distrust someone who will not look at me when I've asked a question."

If you are uncomfortable looking into someone's eyes, look at his "third eye," just above and between the person's two eyes.

6. Slang and Street Speak: Leave Them on the Street

"Poor communications skills really get to me," says Robert Fodge of Power Brokers in Dover, Delaware. "What I mean by this is not merely their language fluency, but more about the use of language. Slang words and street speak just don't have a place in most business environments. Also, candidates who say 'um,' 'like' and 'uh' between every other word lose my attention very quickly."

7. Deception: Little Lies Leave a Big Impression

One major complaint among recruiters is when a candidate is not completely truthful; small lies are all too common in the world of recruitment. This includes not being completely forthcoming with relevant information, embellishing accomplishments, hiding jobs or leading the process on with no intention of ever following through. Building trust during the interview is key to getting an offer.

SOURCE: The majority of this material was compiled from monster.com.