

Successful Interview Tips (40!)

The purpose of the interview is for both you and the company to decide if there is a “**fit**” for the position. Remember that an interview is a two-way street, and although of course you would like to receive an offer, you should be evaluating whether this is a place you want to work, work you want to do, people you want to work with.

It’s all about them! We think interviews are about us, the candidates. But really, it’s all about the employer and the company. There are only two things we can do as employees, and our responses should generally try to address these: we help the company **make money** (produce revenue, get and keep customers), or **save money** (reduce expenses, improve productivity, etc.)

What are the questions for? Interview questions will do several things: elicit facts about you; find out how you have behaved in the past as a predictor of future behavior (“tell me about a time when...”); discover what your thought process is (“How would you handle this situation? What if?”); and try to get some **insight** into your character.

Interviewers are not equally skilled. In large companies hiring managers have typically received training and are required to prepare questions in advance so that the process will be consistent for all candidates. The process may be more casual in smaller companies. You can **help the interviewer** by being prepared and by volunteering certain information if they fail to ask important questions.

Research shows that interview decisions get made in the first few seconds. Hiring managers use the rest of the time to confirm their decision. The visual impression you make when you first meet is the strongest factor. The second impression comes from an emotional reaction to your tone of voice. The weakest link is the actual content of your speech.

Before the interview:

1. **Research** the company. The biggest single factor that hurts candidates is being unprepared, showing no curiosity or effort to learn about the company.
2. **Dress** appropriately. Generally this means dressing conservatively, a level above the position for which you are interviewing. Leave flashy/noisy jewelry at home. It includes being clean and neat, recent haircut, using deodorant, avoiding using perfumed products or lotions. If you wear a cap, remove it.
3. Do not bring any **food** or beverage (including chewing gum) into the interview.
4. Bring a copy of your **resume** and your notes. Be sure the **facts** on your resume are accurate.
5. Think about possible **questions** you will be asked and prepare **responses**. Take notes, write them down, but do not memorize them.
6. **Rehearse** your answers. Practice is the most important thing you can do to prepare. It will help you relax at your interview.
7. **Prepare** and bring questions about the company and the position.
8. Prepare your **one minute story** (“Tell me about yourself”). You should be able to describe yourself and your history in 30 to 60 seconds. It takes practice! Think it through from the employer’s perspective, what might help them to learn about you?

At the phone interview:

9. Remove **distractions** (music, other phones or electronic devices, call waiting, family members)
10. Take the call in a **quiet place** where you can shut the door. If the call was not scheduled in advance and is not convenient or if you are not prepared, ask if it can be rescheduled.
11. Use a **landline** if possible.
12. Have your **resume** and notes available.
13. Have **paper and pen** available to take notes.
14. Have a glass of **water** available so you can moisten your mouth.

15. **Smile**, it improves your communication.
16. **Stand**, it improves your communication.
17. Speak **slowly and clearly**.
18. Do not **interrupt**. Let the speaker finish.
19. Keep your answers **short**. Answer the question, and then stop. Do not start rambling.
20. Allow **silence**. You may take time to think about your answers, silence is sometimes a good thing.
21. **Communicate** your interest in the position, request an in-person interview, ask about next steps.
22. Say **thank you**.

At the in-person interview:

23. Arrive a few minutes **early**. It is a good idea to check the route and the location before your appointment, if you are not absolutely sure about it.
24. **Be yourself** – your thoughtful self. As Oscar Wilde says, everyone else is already taken. We are not asking you to act like something you are not, but it is important to be professional.
25. Check your personal life – and **emotions** – at the door. Keep the focus on your professional situation. Employers may not ask about personal things such as marital status, children, etc. There is rarely a good reason to volunteer them unless it is directly related (for example, you just got married and that is the reason for relocating). If something just happened that is troubling you, try to set it aside during the interview.
26. **Behave** appropriately. This means sitting in a professional manner, paying attention and staying focused, not being distracted.
27. Take time to **think** about your answers. There is nothing wrong with pausing to think through what you want to say.
28. **Stories** are your strongest asset. Avoid headlines such as “I’m a team player.” Instead, think of a story that illustrates the point. All of your life experience counts, not just work.

29. Speak, just enough. **Short and sweet** is a good rule of thumb. Answer the question, then stop. When we get nervous we sometimes just start talking and can’t stop. Do not fill the air with words. Do not bad-mouth previous employers. Always respond in a positive, not negative way.
30. Be **polite** to everyone you meet.
31. Put your cell phone or other electronic devices away. Make sure they are **turned off** or silent.
32. Be a good **listener**. Do not speak over your interviewer or interrupt. Make sure you understand what is being said. You can confirm by ‘mirroring’ what you have heard back to them.
33. Maintain **eye contact** and pay attention. Focus directly on what is being said and who is speaking.
34. **Relax** and be **calm**. Do not become anxious or defensive. At this point you have controlled the factors you can control, the rest are out of your hands. Stressing over them will prevent you from responding effectively.
35. **Avoid** asking about wages or benefits at this stage of the process.
36. Before you leave: is there something important about you they should know but did not ask? **Volunteer** it.
37. Ask what **next steps** will be.
38. Say **thank you**.

After the interview:

39. Send a **thank you** note.
40. **Follow up** to learn status in about a week if you have not heard anything.