

INTERVIEW PREPARATION GUIDE

- Research the company's products, services, and clients before you apply
- Be aware of the dress codes and dress accordingly
- Bring copies of your resumes, cover letter, references and a pen and notebook to your interview
- Avoid smoking and discard chewing gum before your interview
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early for your interview and don't bring friends or family
- Introduce yourself and always be polite and respectful to everyone you meet
- Be conscious of signs, policies, and company literature while in the waiting room
- Stay positive and don't be critical of past employers or supervisors
- Thank the employer

INTERVIEW ATTIRE

General Rules

- Check out the "Appearance code" at the workplace and dress accordingly
- Clothes should be neat, clean and in good shape
- Hair should be neat, groomed and conservatively styled
- Suit or shirt, tie, Skirt and/or dress pants
- Dress shoes / low heels
- Freshly shaved or neat beard/moustache
- Discrete jewelry, make-up, nail polish and perfume

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The following answers are provided as samples only. It is important to rework them personally and genuinely, since memorized textbook responses do not appeal to employers.

Question: Tell me about yourself.

Purpose: To put you at ease and learn something about your background.

Suggestions: Briefly touch on the following three areas:

- Your qualifications and experience related to the position.
- Your attributes, including your ability to get along with others.
- Some appropriate personal information to indicate stability and a well-rounded character, for example, personal interests, community involvement and fitness.
- Be prepared to answer further questions from the interviewer about the interesting points you have made when answering this question.

Question: Tell me about your experience with this type of work.

Purpose: To find out if you have the experience to do the job

Suggestions:

1. If you have experience, education or training, state where you received it and give specific examples including special achievements.
2. If you have related experience, education or training, state where you received it and list your transferable skills.
3. If you don't have experience, education, or training, state your work-related skills and attributes, and indicate our interest in on-the-job training.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS - Continued

Question: Why do you want to work here?

Purpose: To find out if you are genuinely interested in the position and what you know and like about the organization. This question also gives the employer an idea if you would be a long-term employee.

Suggestions: Describe what you know about the organization. If you can honestly compliment the company on its reputation, service, products, or growth, do so.

Question: How often were you absent from work in your last job?

Purpose: To find out if they can depend on you.

Suggestions: If you have had an excellent attendance record, say so. If you had poor attendance and it was due to something that has now been resolved, briefly explain this to the employer.

Question: Why did you leave your last job?

Purpose: To discover any problems, you have had that would be reason not to hire you and assess your attitude towards employers, supervisors, policies etc.

Suggestions: Find something positive to say about your former company, its products, services, and personnel. Briefly and matter-of-factly state your reasons for leaving. If you left on good terms or have a letter of reference from your last job, say so. If you left on bad terms, keep in mind that your interviewer may check references. Mention what the employers appreciated you, some of your work achievements and the good relationships you still have with some personnel.

Question: What are your salary expectations?

Purpose: To find out how close you come to what they are willing to pay and if you are realistic about current salary ranges and rates for the occupation.

Suggestions:

- Politely say, "I'm really interested in finding out which salary range you are offering". They will often share this information.
- Express your interest in working for them and request more specific information about the job description if you need it, stating that your responsibilities will influence salary.
- If the employer is obviously interested in hiring you, or insists on an answer, state a range that you know is realistic. Ask about benefit plans, raises and opportunities for training and promotions.

Question: When are you available for work?

Purpose: To find out how soon you can start and if you have any other commitments

Suggestions: If you are free to start immediately and you are keen to work for the company, say so. If you are working and need to give notice, state the length of time you need.

Question: What are your greatest strengths?

Purpose: To discover reasons for hiring you and to see if you believe in yourself and are confident that you are the right person for the position.

Suggestions: State your greatest skills, education, training, and experience that you would contribute to the position and the company. If possible, and if there is time, back these attributes up with specific examples.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS - Continued

Question: What are your weaknesses?

Purpose: To discover if you are wrong for the job due to a lack of experience or training, poor attitude, laziness, or an inability to cope with pressure.

Suggestions: Describe a positive attribute that you know you have. For example, state that it is important to you to meet deadlines; maintain high standards; satisfy the customer; maintain the equipment; or see that all messages are answered. Then continue with a statement of reassurance such as, "I have to really make myself be patient when I see this is not happening". Be ready to describe such a situation and how you handled it. Honestly state an obvious weakness, and then describe factors that compensate for it. Remember that once you have raised a doubt about yourself you have to explain it immediately.

Question: What are your long-term goals?

Purpose: To discover whether you will stay with the company, what it is you really want and to identify your career goals.

Suggestions: Keep your answers work-related and with this company in mind, state your interest in and commitment to staying and growing with the company.

Question: What types of office equipment have you worked with?

Purpose: To find out if you meet the position requirements and can make a seamless transition to the new position.

Suggestions: Name the job-related equipment you can operate giving specific types, brands, categories, sizes and where and how you used it. If you have not operated the equipment they have, assure them of experience on similar types of equipment and express a willingness to learn.

Question: What is your greatest achievement?

Purpose: To discover if you can recognize and share your achievements and to provide even more reasons to hire you.

Suggestions: Describe a work-related achievement that shows your knowledge and expertise in the field or in dealing with people or problem solving/ Give specifics and use examples. If you are new to the work force or are re-entering it, take an example from school, volunteer, or part-time work. Show how the skill is transferable to this job. It might demonstrate quick thinking, flexibility, leadership. Creativity or dedication.

Question: How long have you been out of work or changed jobs?

Purpose: To find out if you have a work-ready attitude and will be a reliable employee.

Suggestions: State the length of time it has been since you left your last job, then, if it's true, point out that you have been working diligently at a full-time professional job search, doing career planning, interviewing people in the field and staying up to date with industry trends. Explain any good reason you had for changing jobs often. These could include moving, a recession, cutbacks, a health or family concern or contract work.

Question: What would you do in "this situation"?

Purpose: To assess your ability to handle unexpected questions, real life situations and your knowledge of company policies and procedures.

Suggestions: Describe a time when you successfully dealt with a similar situation and mention your commitment to follow company guidelines and your willingness to consult your supervisor where appropriate.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS - Continued

Sample Questions: What would you do if?

- You discovered another employee was stealing from the organization, breaking important safety rules, breaking confidentiality?
- You saw a customer stealing? Two different supervisors gave you conflicting instructions.
- Fellow employees kept interrupting your work to discuss personal problems?

Question: What questions do you have?

Purpose: To indicate the interview is almost over and to find out what you are interested in knowing.

Suggestions: Keep questions brief and watch for non-verbal signs from the employer that it is time to end the interview. Show that you have listened to the employer and already researched the company. This is also an opportunity for you to make sure the company and position are right for you.

The following questions are suggestions of what you could ask an employer:

If you want to know how the company engages and supports employees...

- How does the company support professional development and career growth?
- Is risk-taking encouraged, and what happens when people fail?
- What role do company values play in hiring and performance reviews?
- If you want to know what the day-to-day work environment is like...
- What are some of the ways the company celebrates success?
- How do you as a manager—or, if more appropriate, how does your manager—support and motivate your team?
- Do you have a matching gifts program or sponsor local volunteer events?
- What is the typical leadership style here?

If you want to clarify uncertainties about the position...

- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?
- What are the most immediate projects that need to be addressed?
- Why was this position created/ opened?
- Is there potential for this position to become permanent or for the contract to be extended?
- (if not already permanent)
- If you want to know more information about the ideal candidate...
- What types of skills is the team missing that you are looking to fill with a new hire?
- Is there anything that concerns you regarding my background and being a good fit for this role?
- If you want to get a view of the future or uncover red flags...
- What sort of people do well in this company?
- Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed within the company?
- What are the career paths in this department/company?
- What can you tell me about your new product or plans for growth?
- When you are ready to wrap up the interview...
- What are the next steps in the interview process?
- Will unsuccessful candidates be contacted?

Topics to avoid...

- Readily available information, such as something you could have found on their website, or questions you already know the answer to from the job description.
- Never ask about benefits, pay, what they will do for you i.e., how often can you take a sick day?
- Personal or non-work-related questions.
- Negative topics – you want to end with them feeling positive about you.

BEHAVIOUR BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Give an example of a time when you used good judgement and logic in solving a problem.
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to get yourself out of a difficult situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
- Describe a time in any job that you held, in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Give an example of a time in which you had to use your written communication skills to get an important point across.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation you have completed.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person, even when that individual may not have liked you, or vice versa.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me a specific occasion on which you conformed to a policy, with which you did not agree.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Except where this is a genuine occupational requirement, it is discriminatory and contrary to the Human Rights Act for a person or an employer to refuse to employ or to dismiss a person, or to discriminate against a person with respect to any term or condition of employment because of the persons:

- Age
- Race
- Sex
- Marital Status
- Political Belief
- Ancestry
- Religion
- Place of Origin
- Physical or Mental disability
- Conviction for a Criminal or Summary
- Conviction charge that is unrelated to the employment

It is also contrary to the Humans Rights Act for an employer to pay less to one sex for work that is like work performed by the opposite sex.

If you are asked illegal questions, it is important not only to know your rights, but also be able to respond to the question with dignity and assertiveness. If it is an employer you want to work for, indicate a willingness to demonstrate your suitability for the job without compromising your rights.

Respond with a counter question, for example:

- “Could you tell me how my <age, marital status, disability, etc.> might have any bearing on the job I am applying for?”
- “That’s a very interesting question. I’d be happy to answer it if you could tell me the reason for asking it”.

If the employer doesn’t mention a topic but you feel it could be an unstated concern, you may want to tactfully bring the subject out into the open and put the doubts to rest.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS - Continued

Examples of Answers (if you choose to answer them)

These questions are not typically asked in a formal interview; however, if these “topics” arise in the conversation, here are some guidelines on how to answer.

How old are you?

Youth: mention flexibility, pride in punctuality, work performance, eagerness to learn, good attendance, sports or academic achievement and references from previous employment or volunteer work.

Adults: mention experience, flexibility, maturity, stability, reputation, and business/ client contacts. There may be an objection that you are overqualified or may expect a higher salary. Mention (if it’s true), that at this point in your career, job satisfaction is a higher priority than salary.

Are you married? Do you have children?

- If you are married and have children, assure the employer that you have reliable childcare with a back-up for emergencies and that you do not use company time to make private calls or run errands and that you pride yourself on punctuality.
- If you are married, but do not have children, assure the employer that you are (if it’s true) a loyal employee looking for long-term employment.
- If you are not married and don’t have children, assure the employer of your loyalty and reliability, and emphasize that you are free to do overtime and travel for the company (if it’s true). How long have you been in Canada? Where are you from?
- If you are a Canadian citizen or have been in Canada for a while, tell the employer. Mention your Canadian work experience or training, ideally in the same community or province. If it is from another province, country, or overseas organization with North American affiliations, mention it as well.
- Immigrants: Relate your knowledge of current Canadian market trends to the employer’s immediate needs.
- Try to attend a Canadian upgrading or refresher course from a recognized training institution. Join a North American Association for your occupation if there is one. Mention your current occupational and market knowledge. Include your study of related by-laws, codes, acts, government regulations as well as product knowledge and trends.
- Talk about your transferable skills with confidence. Mention your ability to learn quickly and work challenges that you successfully met that would likely occur in Canada.

Do you have a criminal record?

- Be sure to know the procedure for receiving a pardon for a criminal record.
- Assure the employer of your determination to prove yourself. Mention that you can’t take chances and that you will probably be more loyal and honest than most other employees.
- Mention your good personal and professional references.

Have you ever had issues with alcohol or drugs?

- If the employer knows that you have had an addiction, point out that you have recovered, and you don’t take alcohol or drugs (if it’d true). Mention if you are in a support program and point out your good personal and professional references.