



Community
Employment
Services

INTERVIEW PREPARATION GUIDE

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

- Research the company's products, services and clients before you apply.
- Be aware of dress codes and dress accordingly.
- Bring copies of your resume, 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.

MEN

- Suit or shirt, tie and dress pants.
- Dress shoes and socks.
- Freshly shaved or neat beard/moustache.

WOMEN

- Suit, skirt or dress pants.
- Dress shoes or low heels.
- Discrete jewelry, make-up, nail polish and perfume.

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

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 a 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 about 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.

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 that this is not happening." Be ready to describe such a situation and how you effectively handled it.
- Honestly state an obvious weakness or handicap, and then describe factors that compensate for it. Remember that once you have raised a doubt you have to explain it immediately.

QUESTION: *What are your long range 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 answer 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 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 are able to recognize and share your achievements and to provide even more reason 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.
- ❖ **Sample Questions:**
 - What would you do if?
 - You discover 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 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 that you have already researched the company
- ❖ **Sample Questions:**
 - Why was this position created?
 - Is this a new position? If not, perhaps ask why the other person left.
 - What are the main duties of this position?
 - What characteristics do you look for in people doing this job?
 - What opportunities are there for advancement?
 - Does your company have branches elsewhere?
 - Do you have any plans for expansion?
 - What areas does your market cover?
 - When will you be making your decision?
 - When will a hiring decision be made?
 - Are there opportunities for professional development and training?
 - Is performance feedback provided in the role?
 - What does a typical day look like on the job?

BEHAVIOUR BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behaviour based interview questions are designed to predict future performance.

❖ **Strategy:** The STAR Approach can be used to format answers to behaviour based interview questions. Use the STAR Approach format to communicate to employers how you have previously demonstrated a skill in the workplace.

- S – Situation
- T – Task
- A – Action(s)
- R – Result (Always Positive)

❖ **Samples:**

- Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment 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 in order to get a job done.
- 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 in order to get an important point across.
- Give me an example of an important goal that you set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- 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 in 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 Human Rights Act for an employer to pay less to one sex for work that is similar to 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 questions 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.

❖ **Strategy:** Respond with a counter question.

❖ **Examples:**

- “Could you tell me how my 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.

- ❖ **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 conversation, here are some guidelines on how to answer.

QUESTION: *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 over qualified or may expect a higher salary. Mention (if it is true), that at this point in your career, job satisfaction is a higher priority for you than salary.

QUESTION: *Are you married? Do you have children?*

- ❖ **If you are married and have children:** assure the employer that you have reliable child care 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 is 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 is true).

QUESTION: *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 and government regulations as well as product and service 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.

QUESTION: *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 any chances and that you will probably be more loyal and honest than most other employees.
- ❖ Mention your good personal and professional references.

QUESTION: *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 is true). Mention if you are in a support program and point out your good personal and professional references.