



Take Ten

10-Minute Career Consults

Interview Successfully

1. Know the interview styles before you encounter them.

Interview styles vary depending on the career field and the individuals conducting the interview. It's always good to find out who will be interviewing you when you set up your interview time. If the person is from human resources, you can expect the interview to be more formal with traditional questions that focus on your behavior, asking you to give examples of how you accomplished things or demonstrated skills in the past.

If you are interviewing with someone who works in the field directly, the interview may be more personality driven—that is, if they tend to be a casual person, their style and questions may be more casual; if they tend to be more formal, their questions and style will be as well. In a casual interview you're likely to get more general questions like "tell me about yourself."

Sometimes you'll be invited to a group interview where several people are being interviewed at the same time. You might be asked to take part in an activity with the group. You will likely be evaluated on how well you connect with other people in the group and assessed on your teamwork and leadership skills.

Sometimes you will be interviewed by several people at once. And some interviewers will challenge you and create a stressful environment—primarily to see how you cope with it.

Regardless of how casual or relaxed the interviewer is, you must always stay alert and on top of your game. Don't get casual just because they are.

Take Action!

You will likely not know the type of interview you will encounter until you're in it, so start thinking now about how you will handle the different types of interview styles.





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2. Develop 3 key points employers need to know about you.

It's amazing how fast time can fly in an interview. You are so busy responding to questions that you don't realize the interview is over—and you haven't made a key point. One way to prevent this is to

- Identify ahead of time the three key items you want the employer to know about you and find a way to work those points into the interview even if you're not asked directly.
- Use stories or examples to illustrate your points.
- Make sure that you know the industry in which you plan to work so that your points are relevant.
- Relate your strengths to the industry and the job you're seeking.

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Identify three key strong points about your experience, knowledge, or style that will be of interest to an employer. Come up with some examples that illustrate these points.





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3. Develop 3 questions to ask during the interview.

Most interviews end with the question “Do you have any questions for me?” The worst thing you can do is say no. You should always have some questions prepared in advance.

Although it might not feel like it, an interview is really a two-way street. You are permitted-- in fact, expected-- to ask questions and engage in the conversation.

The types of questions you ask will be important—they can reveal how much research you’ve already done. So you don’t want to ask things like the salary for the position (that will come in a later discussion after the job offer) or ask questions which could have been easily answered by reading the website.

Ask questions related to the job or the organization, such as:

- I read an article that said you were considering expanding your business to the west coast. Is that still a possibility?
- How would you describe the work style in the division where I might be working?
- Who succeeds in this position? (Always link your personality traits with the ones described.)
- How much guidance or assistance is provided during my first year of employment?

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Develop 3 questions you can ask at the interview. Make sure you are genuinely interested in the answers and analyze them for what they might reveal about you.





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4. Get ready for the interview.

You never want to go into an interview cold. Before you enter the interview room, you should already be familiar with the career field, the organization, and the job you're interviewing for.

Good interviewing involves planning ahead and being prepared. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Have you done your research? Do you know as much as possible about the organization and the job?
- Have you thought through how you relate to the job?
- Have you analyzed your skills, experience, and education related to this position?
- Do you know the three traits you're going to emphasize and do you have your questions prepared?

Take Action!

Practice. Practice. Practice. Check with your career center to see if they offer interview training workshops and/or mock interviews. The more you practice your interviewing skills, the better you will sound when you're in the interview room.





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5. Research the organization.

So what exactly do you research when you're told to "research an employer"? You'll want to be as familiar as possible with the industry, the company, and the job you're seeking. Become a member, or be knowledgeable about, the professional organizations related to the industry.

Here are some things to consider:

- What does the company "do"?
- What is their product or service?
- What is their reputation?
- Who are their competitors?
- Where are their offices?
- Do they have any subsidiaries?
- What issues are facing the industry in general?

Take Action!

Select an industry or career field which interests you. Identify 3 employers in your geographic location where you could interview for a job or complete an internship.





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6. Research the job.

It goes without saying that the better you understand the job you're seeking the better you will be able to match your qualifications with the position and be seen as the best candidate.

The best way to research the job is to first read the complete job description or advertisement. Note what the employer has selected first in their description-- that will give you a clue as to what they are most concerns about.

Check the company's website. Run a search on the job title and company name and see what's floating on the internet about it.

Go to websites like Payscale.com or Salary.com to find out the typical salaries for that job title in case you are asked about expected salary in the interview.

Take Action!

Google the job title and company name.

- If you see any negative information (sometimes former employees post their grievances online) read them carefully.
- Don't bring up the criticisms directly at the interview, but use the information to develop questions that relate to a concern. For example, if former employees complained about ridiculously long hours, you might want to ask what a typical workweek is like.
- Just remember that people have many reasons for posting poor reviews online-- it might just be that person's problem, not yours.





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7. Know what the employer is seeking.

Keep in mind that the employer is likely looking for the following traits:

- Communication skills.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Math and quantitative skills.
- Business sense.
- Common sense.
- Good work ethic.
- Ability to fit in.

Take Action!

What examples from your education and experience can you provide to an employer to prove that you have the skills they are seeking? Think of times when you demonstrated those skills.





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8. Wear the right clothes for an interview.

As a general rule of thumb, it's better to be overdressed for an interview than underdressed.

Many interviewers come to the interview in their company clothes which might be khaki pants and a company logo shirt—but that doesn't mean you should be so casually dressed.

At the first interview, it's better to stick to a traditional suit or coat-and-tie for men, and a suit or matching pants/jacket for women unless you have been specifically told to dress casually.

And remember that "business casual" or "interview casual" is dressier than what you might consider "casual."

Take Action!

Go to your closet and select the most appropriate interview outfit you can find. If you can't find anything, it's time to go shopping. And—if you're on a tight budget, check out the 2nd hand clothing stores or places like Goodwill. Executives and business professionals often donate their gently used clothes and you can find a real bargain.





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9. What to do after the interview.

When the interview is over, there are some steps you can take which may increase your chances of being called back or offered the job:

- Send thank-you letters to everyone you interviewed with or that assisted you during the day.
 - Reiterate your interest in the job and touch on topics that were discussed in the interview. Express your appreciation for the interview.
 - Underline how much you think your background and skills complement the position.
- Take notes quickly after you leave the interview: what you learned about the company, impressions of the interviewer, etc.

Reflect: After your first few interviews take some time to think about how the interviews felt for you.

- Did you prepare enough?
 - What did you do well?
 - What can you do differently next time?

Take Action!

Think back on any interviews you've ever had. What have you done particularly well — and what would you change in the future?





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10. Expertly handle difficult questions.

To successfully handle interview questions you need to get inside the head of the interviewer—what are they looking for? Why did they ask you this question?

Don't feel the need to respond immediately—it's OK to take a second to think about your response.

Even the most difficult questions come down to some basic principles: what are your strengths, what should we know about you, what challenges might you face on this job, and how reliable are you? If you are prepared to answer these basic questions and back up your answers with stories or examples, then you'll stand out in the interview.

If the questions are complex, it's ok to ask for clarification. Remember that part of the process might be placing you under some stress to see how you respond.

A difficult question might involve factual information related to your field. For example, a banking interviewer might ask you what the current interest rate is on their loans. An investment firm might want to know what the Dow closed at yesterday. It's important that you keep up with the field you're interviewing for.

Take Action!

What factual questions might you be asked about your field? What are the specific items you need to be knowledgeable about? Consider what information source you might consult (newspaper, website, etc.) just prior to your interview.

