

HOW TO SUCCEED AT INTERVIEWS

Interviews are an opportunity to meet with potential employers so they can find out more about your skills, abilities, attitude, experience, qualifications and interests to determine if you are a fit for the role and employer. You are usually invited for a formal job interview after submitting your interest by sending a resume and cover letter that reflects why you are suitable for the role. When you get to the interview stage go in with the frame of mind that the employer is already interested in you!

Interviews are a 2-way process so they are a great opportunity for you to find out more about the job and employer. *Remember they are not an exact science and no two interviews are usually alike!*

When you meet somebody face-to-face they get to know your **personality**, which according to a recent [BMO study](#) tops the list for what employers look for in new graduates, with 30 per cent ranking this as the most important quality that employers use to recruit students. Meeting somebody face-to-face allows your drive, passion, strengths and uniqueness to shine through. You are no longer just a name on a resume!

Like everything, practice makes perfect and it's very likely that you will attend a number of interviews before you are offered a job. You can maximize your chances of doing well in interviews using the tips that follow.

Before the interview

- Research the role, company and industry - find out about the latest projects the employer is involved in, who the employer's main competition is and trends in the industry. This way when asked "*what do you know about the role and/or company?*" you **do not** regurgitate the home page of the employer's website, which if anything, shows a lack of research!
- Use LinkedIn to find out more about those conducting the interview(s), if possible, as this allows you to find out if you have any shared interests with the interviewers.
- Based on your research, prepare 3 informed questions to ask that demonstrate your eagerness to learn more about the role and company.
- Plan your route and arrive at least 15 minutes early, however don't report in more than 10 mins early as most interviewers schedule the appointments so that applicants for the same job don't meet each other.
- Practice interview questions using the PAWS, STARR and SHARE formulas – see *the section on Interview Strategies*.
- Gather a portfolio of work samples to show your breadth of experience, abilities, talents and what you have achieved in your past roles, paid or unpaid.
- Dress appropriately for your industry, after all first impressions do count! If unsure of what to wear add this to the list of things you need to research.

During the Interview

- Bring a professional looking case or portfolio to the interview and have pen, paper and additional copies of your resume with you.
- Have positive body language, for example, a firm handshake (not too firm though!), smile and maintain eye contact with all the interviewers.
- Observe the interviewers body language – stop talking when they stop taking notes or stop smiling.
- Try to get business cards from the interviewers to make following up easier.
- Focus on the questions asked to ensure you understand what is being asked of you. Don't be afraid to ask "*can you clarify the question*" or "*can you repeat the question please*".
- Ask at least one good question near the end of the interview.
- Thank all interviewers when the interview is close to completion.
- Confidence is everything. Show the interviewer your personality and be confident in your ability to do the job.
- Ask about the next steps, if you haven't already been told as part of the process.
- Don't forget to show samples of your work to back-up your suitability.

After the Interview

- Follow-up if nobody has gotten back to in the time-frame you discussed. Always be polite and professional and never pushy. Recruitment usually involves many unpredictable factors so can often take longer than anticipated.
- Write down all the questions you were asked, and specifically those you struggled to answer so you can practice them.
- Write down your answers to the questions you were asked so you can refine your answers next time you are asked the same questions.
- Send a thank you e-mail or handwritten card to the interviewers.
- If references have been requested send them in, however make sure your referees are aware of the request and they understand what information they need to provide.
- If you don't get the job let the employer know you would still be interested in future applications. Ask if they will be posting any future jobs?
- If unsuccessful, ask for feedback at the appropriate stage.

INTERVIEW STRATEGIES

To help formulate answers to regularly asked interview questions use the following formulas.

PAWS

Personal: What is it about the company and/or role that you are interested in? This would be a great time to use an interesting anecdote to describe your journey so far and why you are here.

Academic: Describe how your education and training relates to the position and focus on those subject areas you are passionate about.

Work: Mention any work and voluntary experience that would be useful to the role and outline your results and achievements. What value have you added to your positions?

Skills: Describe the skills you developed and demonstrated formally and informally and how they relate to the job that you are applying for now. How did you develop them and why? When have you used them?

STARR

Situation: What happened? Where were you working? What role were you in?

Task: What needed to be done?

Action: What did you do? Much of your response should be focused on the Action as it demonstrates the skills you utilized.

Result: What was the result? Be sure to wrap up your story with an ending that is positive. If not, explain what you learned from the situation. Many people often forget this piece.

Relevance: How the situation relates to the question being asked.

SHARE

Situation: Build a picture of the scene you are trying to set. Spend enough time on this section so the interviewers can fully understand the problem.

Hindrance: What exactly was the problem? What barriers did you face? What were the challenges?

Action(s): What did you do to overcome the problem and perceived barriers and why?

Result: What was the final outcome? Talk about customer satisfaction, results, and achievements.

Evaluation: What did you learn from the process and how has it helped you to solve similar problems?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Recommendation: Use the **PAWS** formula for Q1 (**P**ersonal **A**cademic **W**ork **S**kills)

Additional Tip: If you are struggling with a question, ask the interviewer if it's ok to come back to that question and move on to the next! If you stumble while answering a question, it's an opportunity to show how you handle a setback: smile and gather your thoughts. Ask them to repeat the question or ask for clarification. Stay positive!

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. **Tell me about yourself.**
2. How would your best friend describe you?
3. What interests you about our company and why would you like to work with us?
4. What is the greatest strength you can bring to this position?
5. What is your greatest weakness?
6. Tell me something about yourself that's not on your resume.
7. How would you describe your ideal work environment?
8. What motivates you?
9. What are you looking for in your next job? What is important to you?
10. Tell me about a time you set a goal but didn't achieve it.
11. Tell me an interesting fact about yourself?
12. What are your salary expectations?
13. How do you deal with stress?
14. What do you look for in a supervisor/manager?
15. Why should we hire you?
16. Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
17. If you could be an animal what would it be, and why?
18. What flavour of soup are you?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Recommendation: Use the **STARR** (Situation Task Action(s) Result Relevance) or **SHARE** (Situation Hindrance Action(s) Result Evaluation) formulas for the following questions

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Analytical/Problem Solving

- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation.
- Describe an instance when you had to think quickly to free yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give me an example of when you identified potential problems and resolved the situation before it became serious.
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem.
- Tell us about a job or setting where great precision to detail was required to complete a task.
- How did you handle that situation?

Communication

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get a point across.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to handle an irate customer.
- Tell me about a recent successful experience in making a speech or presentation. How did you prepare? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?

Creativity/Innovation

- Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation/idea that you developed/implemented.
- Tell me about a time when you created a new process or program that was considered risky.
- Tell me about a time in which you took initiative.

Decision Making

- Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make within the past year.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed.
- Discuss a time when you had to make a quick decision.
- Give me an example of a time when there was a decision to be made and procedures were not in place.

Goal Setting

- Give me an example of an important goal you have set and tell me how you reached it.
- Tell me about a goal that you set and did not reach.
- Describe a specific goal you set for yourself and how successful you were in meeting it.
- Tell me about a goal that you set and reached which you are most proud of.

Flexibility/Adaptability

- Would you describe for me one of the most difficult people or situations you've had to deal with, and specifically, how you handled that person or situation?
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives.
- Describe a major change that occurred in a job that you held. How did you adapt to this change?
- Tell me about a situation when you had to be tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.
- We're all sometime faced with tough choices when a boss expects us to do something and it conflicts with plans or demands in our personal lives. Can you describe a time on a previous job when you had to make such a choice and what you learned from it?

Integrity/Honesty

- Tell me about a time when you experienced a loss for doing what you perceived as right.
- Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree.
- Tell me about a specific time when you had to handle a tough problem that challenged fairness or ethical issues.
- Tell me about a time when you challenged the status quo to do what you felt was right.

Interpersonal

- Give me an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with.
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual and how you dealt with it.
- Tell me about the most difficult challenge you faced in trying to work cooperatively with someone who did not share the same ideas.
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss. What was the nature of the disagreement, and what did you do about it?

Leadership/Initiative

- Describe a leadership situation that you would handle differently if you had it to do over again.
- Tell me about a time when you were in a leadership role and were faced with resistance.
- Tell me about a time when you showed initiative and took the lead in a team project.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.