



University of Phoenix®

# Interview guide

Preparing for a successful job interview

Job interviews are a two-way street: The employer wants to see if you're a good candidate for the role, and you're looking to see if their company is a good fit for you too. There are multiple factors to a successful interview, and taking time to prepare can make all the difference.

## In this guide...

**YOU'LL LEARN THE FIVE COMPONENTS OF A JOB INTERVIEW**

- 1 Pre-interview prep**
- 2 Common questions**
- 3 Behavioral questions**
- 4 Tough question techniques**
- 5 Post-interview procedures**



# 1 Pre-interview prep

## DETERMINING WHO, WHAT, WHEN AND WEAR

Preparing for a job interview can often be overwhelming. Avoid feeling frazzled by breaking down your interview prep into four groups:



### **Who** / *Research the company*

Find out more about the company's history and jot down talking points about their mission statement and any recent achievements. If you know who'll be interviewing you, check out their LinkedIn profile.



### **What** / *Items to bring along*

Pack a bag the evening before your interview with at least three copies of your resumé, a list of professional references, questions to ask the interviewer, and a notepad with a pen.



### **When** / *Plan on being early*

Build in time before you arrive for parking, check-in and any building pass procedures. Try to show up five to 10 minutes before your scheduled interview time, as this can indicate you are serious about the position and respectful of the interviewer's time.



### **Wear** / *Dress for the job you want*

The more confident you feel in how you look, the better you'll feel about how you'll perform. Here are a few guidelines for helping you pick what to wear:

#### OUTFIT DO'S

Dress slightly more professional than you would on a typical day working there.

Steam or iron your outfit the night before and check for any stains.

Plan on bringing a blazer. Even if it's business casual, you'll feel better knowing you can "suit up" quickly if need be.

#### OUTFIT DON'TS

Avoid accessories and garments that make distracting noises.

Swap out any garments that are too tight, low cut, itchy or potentially distracting.

Try not to mix too many colors and patterns; you want the interviewer to focus on your skills, not your style choices.

# 2 Common questions

## KNOCKING THE EASY BALLS OUT OF THE PARK

Standard interview questions are opportunities for you to signal your strengths and convey your knowledge of the company. Here are some questions you should be ready to answer:

### Common questions

### How to answer

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Tell me about yourself

Tell me about  
[section from resumé]

Tell me about a time when...

Visualize your resumé.

Use it as a map to tell your story or to reference one or two examples highlighting a specific strength.

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What do you know about the company?

Why should we hire you?

Why are you interested in this position?

Draw on your research from the company's website or recent articles, or mention a personal contact, if you have one.

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Why did you leave your last position?

What is your biggest success or failure?

Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?

These are complicated questions disguised as simple ones. The key is to avoid going into too much detail. Keep your answers relevant to the position you're there for; they don't need a full deep dive.



#### TIP

What you say is just as important as how you say it. For guidance on verbal and nonverbal cues, [click here](#).

# 3 Behavioral questions

## HOW YOU CONDUCT YOURSELF IN CONTEXT

Even if you look great on paper, you'll likely get questions about how you acted in certain situations. Since past behavior can indicate your future performance, it's important to tell your story in a logical format. Use the **STAR** technique to help outline your response:

**If the question starts with, "Tell me about a time when..."**



### **Situation**

Describe the problem you faced. Where were you working? Who was there? What other variables were at play? Provide context for the interviewer before you dive in.



### **Task**

Identify what the goal was and your role in trying to accomplish it.



### **Action**

How did you execute the task? Include relevant details.



### **Result**

Did you accomplish your goal? If not, convey what you learned and how it's shaped you to become a better and more effective employee.



### **TIP**

Try to pick a situation that had a positive result. If you don't have one, reveal what you learned from the experience and how it's helped you grow into this next role.

# 4 Tough question techniques

## HOW TO DEFUSE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

Interviews are an opportunity for employers to see who you really are in a work environment. To help them decide if you're a good fit, you're probably going to get some tough questions. Here are some tips for taking each one like a pro:



### Look beyond the question

Think about what the interviewer is really looking for in their question. Do you work well with others? Can you meet deadlines? Try to answer the best you can and keep it positive. There may not be a "right" answer.



### Buy some time

You can ask the interviewer to repeat the question or say something like, "Great question, let me think about that for a minute." You aren't expected to have an answer immediately, so take a beat before you begin.



### Don't overthink it

Remember, they're not trying to trick you. They're just trying to see how quick you can think on your feet. If you're confused about the question, ask for clarification. You can also ask them to rephrase the question.



### TIP

There's a difference between difficult interview questions and illegal ones. For a list of questions you DO NOT have to answer in an interview (and how to respond respectfully), [click here](#).

# 5 Post-interview procedures

## FOLLOWING UP IS FOLLOWING THROUGH

Just because it's over, doesn't mean it's over. Staying in contact with your recruiter after your interview keeps you in the loop on the hiring process. Here are some ways to follow up and follow through:



### Email your recruiter

Send an email the following business day to thank them for the opportunity and ask for a rough timeline for next steps.



### Send a thank-you note

Write a thank-you note within 24 hours to everyone you interviewed with.



### Keep track of your timeline

Once you know the timeline for next steps, mark the dates in your calendar and follow up accordingly.

## Still need help?

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You'll get access to personal career coaching, including job search planning, resumé fine-tuning, interview prepping and more. See all of your options at [phoenix.edu/career-services](https://phoenix.edu/career-services).

## RESOURCES

### NONVERBAL CUES

#### Actions that can impact your interview

It's important to be in tune with both your verbal and nonverbal communication during your interview. Below are some nonverbal cues to be aware of:

- **Facial expressions** – Make sure to smile at everyone you meet.
- **Gaze** – Look at the interviewers while they're talking, but don't stare the whole time since this can appear unnatural.
- **Fidgeting** – Keep movements to a minimum when you're sitting down for your interview. If you have a tendency to touch your face or hair, try clasping your hands together in your lap. This can keep you from distracting the interviewer.
- **Crossing your arms** – Don't sit or stand with your arms crossed since this can make you look closed off, uninviting or even upset.
- **Head nods** – Nod your head when the interviewer is explaining something. This lets them know that you're actively listening and engaged.
- **Posture** – Sit up straight and lean forward to show your interest.



## ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **Subjects that are off-limits**

Illegal interview questions can open the door for discrimination, even if it appears there's no ill intent. Here are a few examples of questions you aren't required to answer:

- Do you have any disabilities?
- How old are you?
- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Do you have kids?
- What's your military discharge status?
- What religion do you practice?
- Have you ever been arrested?

### **Appropriate responses**

Avoiding an interview question can feel uncomfortable, but there are tactful ways to respond that help keep the conversation focused on the position you're there for.

#### **1. Respond with what you feel the purpose of the question was**

For example, if an interviewer asks if you have kids, you can say something like, "Nothing in my personal life would keep me from being able to perform well in this position."

#### **2. Redirect the discussion to a different topic**

Saying something like, "Would you mind if we talked through job expectations instead?" can pivot the conversation back to job-related questions.

Remember, if your interviewer continues to pursue their question, you can politely respond with "Can you help me understand how this question is relevant to the position I'm here for?" This can help the interviewer acknowledge their misstep and move on to more appropriate questions.