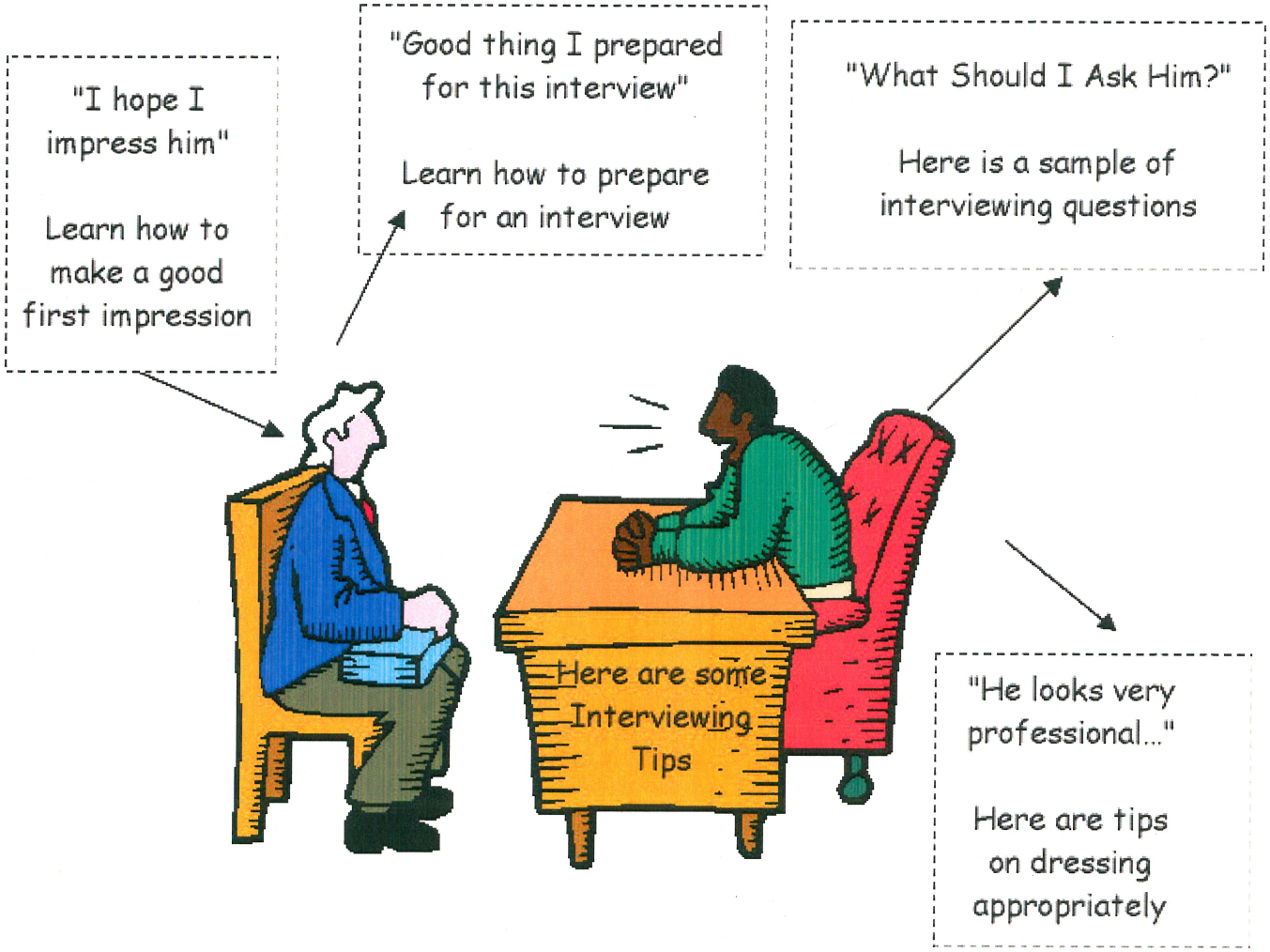
Interviewing Guide



An interview is a formal meeting between a job seeker and an employer. The employer will ask questions to determine whether the job seeker is an appropriate fit for the job and for the company. The job seeker will ask the employer questions to obtain enough information about the job to decide if the job and the company is the right fit.

Do Background Research on Your Employer

Before you even leave for your interview, you can complete much of the hard work. This section will help you prepare to do your best on interview day.

First, it is important to know something about the company or business you hope to be working for. For this, you will need to do a little research.

Imagine this scenario. There are three people sitting in a lobby waiting to interview for the same job. One of the applicants has spent several hours researching the business. The other two have not done any research at all and don't really know much about the company or the position for which they are interviewing.

The Internet is one of the best places to go to find out about a business or company. You will want to become familiar with the company's products or services, and consider how your skills can benefit the business.

Always try to find out the name of the person you will interview with. Ask the person who sets up your appointment.

Questions to think about as you search:

- How old is the company?
- What are its products or services?
- Who are its customers?
- How large is the company?
- Who are its major competitors?
- What is its reputation/industry standing?
- What are its new products or services?
- Where is the company located?
- What training programs are offered?

Nonverbal Communication

Dress for Success

How you dress says a lot about you. Make sure that how you dress in an interview says that you have what it takes to do well on the job.

Learning what is and isn't acceptable in the work-world can be difficult. Different workplaces have different dress codes. What works well in one place may not be acceptable at another. You may call the office to ask what to wear on the first day. When in doubt, you can never be too formally dressed (e.g. a suit) on the first day.

At home you may wear whatever you want. If you do not follow the dress code at work, you may lose your job.

Women

- Conservative blouse
- Skirt or dress pants (slacks)
- Jacket, vest, or sweater
- Dress shoes
- Conservative jewelry or scarf

Men

- Shirt and tie
- Dress pants (slacks)
- Dress shoes
- Jacket or vest

(A tie is a great way to express your personality!)

Do Not Wear:

- Baggy or tight jeans
- Sneakers or hiking boots
- Shorts or mini-skirts
- Anything that shows your navel or chest
- Sweat suits
- Baseball hats
- Large or noisy jewelry
- Strong perfume or cologne
- Chains or piercings, other than ears
- Any gang-related items

Ensure Proper Grooming and Hygiene

Another very important part of preparing for your interview is ensuring proper grooming and hygiene. You've heard the saying, "You never have a second chance to make a first impression." This is especially true in the business world.

- Brush your teeth.
- Clean under your fingernails.
- Get a haircut.
- Wash your hands and face, and comb or brush your hair.

Take Care of Yourself

Taking care of yourself in little ways can make a big difference. You'll want to make sure you do the following things:

- Get a good night's sleep.
- Eat breakfast.

Bring the Right Stuff

- Several copies of your résumé on nice paper
- Professional-looking notepad or notebook with a pen

Arrive Early

You don't need to be more than fifteen minutes early, but don't be late. If you've never been there before, take a trip ahead of time. On interview day, allow extra time in case of traffic or other unforeseen events. If your interview is in a big building, you might need extra time to find the office.

Additionally, go alone. Do not bring your friends or family with you.

Build Your Confidence

It may sound silly, but before you go to your interview, look in the mirror and say to yourself, "I am confident, and I am a good candidate for the job." Really – say it out loud and with a smile! If you can face your own reflection, you can face anyone.

Put Your Best Attitude On!

Your most important tool of nonverbal communication is a genuine smile and a firm handshake

Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your goals and ambitions for the next three years?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?
- Why should we hire you?
- Why do you want to work here?
- How do you handle pressure?
- What motivates you to do well at work?
- Tell me about the last time you made a mistake. What did you learn from it?
- What are your favorite and least favorite classes in school? Why?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What is your most important achievement or accomplishment?
- Would you rather work alone or in a group?
- Give three words your friends would use to describe you.
- Have you ever had a disagreement with a boss? If so, please explain.
- What did you like/dislike most about your last job?
- How would you handle a conflict with a co-worker?
- You've quit quite a few jobs. Why?
- What do you look for in a job?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Tips for Answering Interview Questions

Q: Tell me about yourself.

A: Tell the employer about your skills and interests, especially those relating to the position for which you are applying. Emphasize positive personality traits, such as being honest, dependable, or working well with others. Try to limit the amount of really personal information you give about yourself, such as age, marital status, or political or religious affiliations. This information doesn't have anything to do with your ability to do a job, so it's best to leave it out.

Q: What are your major strengths?

A: It's great if you can rollerblade faster than anyone in your neighborhood, but this is the place to show off your strengths in the workplace. Answer by talking about your skills and strong personal qualities. For example, are you dependable? Do you get work done on time? Do you pay attention to details? Are you comfortable asking for help when you need it? Remember, the goal is to get this job – this is a question where you can really shine.

Q: What are your major weaknesses?

A: Most people don't answer this question very well. The key is to be honest (everybody has weaknesses), while still presenting them in a positive light. Show how you're working to overcome these weaknesses. For example, you might say, "I don't type well, but I've been taking a typing class and have improved quickly."

Q: Why do you think I should hire you?

A: Clearly and specifically point out your related skills and experiences – past employment, education, hobbies, or other training. Tell the employer about related success in other jobs or at school. If you don't have any related experiences, mention that you work hard and learn new skills quickly.

Q: Why did you leave your last job?

A: It's best to be truthful, but remain positive. Be sure not to blame others for your leaving. The employer is more likely to identify with your past employer rather than you, so watch what you say about past employers, supervisors and company policies. Keep this answer relatively brief.

Q: Scenarios: What would you do if...?

A: There is no one right answer to these questions. The point is to show that you can think through problems, and that you have good judgment and high integrity. To prepare for such questions, think about times when you have solved a problem. You could answer, "Something similar happened to me once." Then you could tell what you did.

It is important to ask questions during your interview . . .

1. To answer any job-related questions you might have
2. To decide – and to show – how interested you are in the position

An interested candidate always has a few good questions to ask a potential employer.

Questions for Students to Ask Employers

- What are your performance expectations?
- How would you describe a typical day on the job?
- Is there a dress code? If so, what is required?
- How many people are in this department?
- If selected for this position, what is my start date?
- Who would be my supervisor?
- What type of training can I expect?
- Is there any other information about this department that I should know?

In addition, it is always good to prepare questions to help break the ice when you arrive.

- What is your position?
- How long have you been with the company?
- What do you most enjoy about working with this company?
- What are three skills that you need to be successful in your job?
- What education did you need for your job?
- What can I work on in school to help me get a good job?

Interview Tips and Suggestions

- **Use formal titles** such as Mr., Mrs., Ms., Doctor, etc.
- **Show enthusiasm.** You don't need to be happy all the time, but a positive attitude and excitement about a job will go a long way.
- **Remember names.** It is always polite to repeat someone's name as you are introduced. If you don't catch someone's name, ask them to repeat it.
- **Do not chew gum.**
- **Sit up straight.** Your body language says a lot.
- **Shake hands firmly.** Your handshake says a lot about you. Make eye contact. Don't squeeze too hard, but don't have a limp hand either. If your palms are sweaty, dry them on a tissue.
- **Speak clearly.** Make eye contact as you speak.
- **Smile!** Relax and try to have fun.
- **Follow up your interview with a thank-you note.**

Thank-You Notes

Aside from the fact that it's polite, sending a thank-you note is one way to make a strong final impression. Below is a sample thank-you note.

March 20, 2006

Dear Mr. Hall,

Thank you for meeting with me and taking time to discuss the position of Oompa Loompa Supervisor. I am very impressed with the quality of customer service you expect from your employees at the Willy Wonka Factory.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions. I can be reached at (612) 428-1979.

Sincerely,

Justin Case

Thank-You Note Tips:

- Your thank-you note can be typed or hand-written, but make sure it is legible.
- Keep the note short and friendly.
- Mention something you saw or talked about.
- Check over your note for grammar and spelling mistakes.
- Sign your full name.
- Send within 24 hours.

Envelopes:

Just in case it's been a while since you last addressed an envelope, please use the example below.

You →

Justin Case
1234 5th Avenue S.
Minneapolis, MN 55432

stamp

Other Person →

Mr. Casey Hall
The Willy Wonka Factory
1001 Wonka Lane
Minneapolis, MN 55428

20 Ways to Strike Out at an Interview

- Inability to express oneself clearly (poor diction or grammar, too quiet)
- Sloppy appearance
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm (passive and indifferent)
- Over-emphasis on money (interested in only the best dollar offer)
- Talking negatively about past employers
- Poor eye contact
- Telling jokes (especially potentially offensive jokes)
- Asking no questions about position
- Vague responses to questions
- Over-aggressive, conceited, or a know-it-all
- Lack of career planning (no goals)
- Lack of confidence and poise
- Unwillingness to start at bottom, expecting too much too soon
- Making excuses
- Lack of maturity
- Lack of courtesy (rudeness)
- Failure to express appreciation for interviewer's time
- Talking too much, especially about personal life
- Overstating accomplishments
- Exhibiting a "what can you do for me" attitude