



Career Transition Series

A Brief Guide to Interviewing



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*Finding Exceptional Talent.
Building Exceptional Organizations.*

Contributors

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Anita Shuper is a writer, researcher, and business consultant. With a background in the arts, science, and business, including an MBA from the Rotman School of Management, she has written on topics ranging from language to lasers to local entrepreneurship. Anita regularly contributes her communications expertise to projects and programs in not-for-profit and startup organizations. Her current focus is developing career management resources for students and executives.

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Point of View

Interviews win job offers. Your resume opened the door, convincing the employer that you are a candidate worth meeting. Now, you have the opportunity to demonstrate that you are indeed the right person for the job. It gives both you and the employer a chance to get to know each other and assess whether there's a good fit. The hiring process is not trivial for employers; it takes time and costs money. It's in their best interest to hire the right person, not just any person. So, they tend to take interviews seriously, and so should you.

While your experience is significant, it's not enough. Potential employers can assess you based on your behavior at any point in the process, from scheduling the meeting to introducing yourself to how you answer questions to following up. Don't underestimate the importance of your behaviour.

Since interviews are usually face-to-face (though telephone and video interviews are common), communication is enriched with various non-linguistic cues and clues about each other's interests and reactions. Pay attention to how you carry yourself and how the interviewer responds to you verbally and non-verbally.

Interviewing takes preparation and practice. It's unlikely that you will ace an interview without any preparation. Being prepared makes you more confident and competent in an interview and signals your interest and knowledge to the interviewer. It becomes pronounced quickly if you walk into an interview cold. Practicing your answers to typical interview questions and understanding the usual interview process will help keep you focused.

Getting to the interview stage is essential in the job search process; don't take it lightly. Looking the part, acting the part, and most importantly, being the part will win you the job.

Bill Holland

W5H

Why?

Interviewing is the gateway to getting an offer for the job you want. You might have the perfect background and a stellar resume, but the job will likely go to someone else if you don't perform well in the interview. Interviewing allows you and the potential employer to learn more about each other and determine a fit. It will enable the employer to probe beyond what they've learned about you from your resume, getting a fuller story about who you are and what you do. It's a chance to showcase your work experience and your personality.

What?

The top three things you need to do are: (1) have the right attitude, (2) make a plan and (3) take action. A good attitude will put you in the right frame of mind, a plan will keep you on track, and executing that plan is the key to success.

Who?

Many people might be interviewing you individually or in a panel format. The hiring manager or someone from HR is most likely to be involved. Find out as much as possible about who will be interviewing you, what they do in the organization, and their influence on the hiring decision.

When?

It's up to the hiring organization to decide when to have your interview. Try to be as accommodating as possible. Within reason, you are expected to make yourself available when it's convenient for them. If you aren't willing to be flexible at this point, it signals that you are not serious about wanting the role. As for when to start preparing for your interview, don't leave this to the last minute. When you hear the news that you've been granted an interview, you should start thinking about and planning your approach. Furthermore, brushing up on interview skills is not bad, even when you're not actively looking for work.

Where?

Interviews generally occur at the potential employer's organization, but they could also be held somewhere offsite or by telephone or video. You must be professional and polished in your performance, whether in person, in a private office, or in a public café.

How?

It's all about execution. With a plan in place, the "how" is a commitment to doing it. In this guide, we've set out the following goals for you to start working on (1) preparing, (2) practicing, and (3) performing. If you focus on these at a very minimum, you will be off to a good start. It's up to you to supplement the activities we suggest with others that make sense for you. There's no shortage of resources in bookstores and online to keep moving you forward.

Attitude

It's expected to be somewhat nervous about an interview. After all, you'll be "performing" for an audience. Learn to use this anxious energy to your advantage rather than letting it negatively affect your performance. Much of this comes with experience, but it also comes with practice, preparation, and attitude.

Attitude comes into play well before your actual interview. A good attitude will give you confidence to recognize that you are a good candidate for the job and will perform well. After all, you got the interview for a reason – the employer saw a potential fit. Remind yourself of this as you prepare for your interview. In this preparation, you can continue to build your confidence, and it will show during your interview.

Cultivating a positive attitude in general is in your best interest. As with anything, approaching your job search with the right frame of mind will set you up for success. If you think you'll fail, you likely will. With a good attitude, you're more likely to succeed. Furthermore, even if you don't get the job, the right attitude will help you bounce back from the disappointment and motivate you to continue your search.

Plan: Creating SMART Goals

With the right attitude, the next step is to make a plan. Having a roadmap to keep you focused and on track is essential. Without a plan, you'll engage in aimless activities and wonder why you're not reaching your ultimate goal of finding a job.

A complicated plan will just prevent you from getting things done, so keep it simple. Overplanning invariably leads to underdoing. However, to be efficient and effective, you must spend some time upfront identifying your goals and creating a workable action plan.

An excellent way to approach your goals is to make them SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-driven.) On the following pages, we review a number of goals and provide some advice to help you:

1. Prepare
2. Practice
3. Perform

Execution: 1. Prepare

The job interview is arguably the most important aspect of a successful job search. However, most people don't prepare adequately for interviews. By trying to prepare, you'll not only perform better, but you'll also stand out from the competition. Don't worry about "over preparing" – it's better to err on the side of too much preparation than not enough.

Part of the preparation will be familiarizing yourself with the different interview formats. The most common is meeting one-on-one with the hiring manager. There are also panel interviews in which you will simultaneously meet with more than one representative from the hiring company. Depending on your comfort in each situation, this may be more or less daunting than a one-on-one interview. The interview itself can be formal or informal, conversational or structured. Try to find out beforehand what to expect, give yourself an edge, and start preparing as soon as possible.

Execution: 2. Practice

Practice all of the actions related to the interview, including introducing yourself, shaking hands, making eye contact, and saying goodbye. The more comfortable you become with these details, the more natural you'll appear in the interview.

The practice you should be doing is mostly around answering questions. Pay attention to content, delivery, and body language when practicing your answers. In this guide, you will find a list of commonly asked interview questions, both general ones and behavioural based ones. Familiarize yourself with as many questions as possible, and practice different answers. The more you practice, the better you'll perform.

Behavioural questions are particularly important to practice. You'll rarely be able to succinctly and confidently answer them unless you've done some preparation and training. They are designed to elicit responses that describe how you handled specific situations in the past. This line of questioning hypothesizes that past behaviour predicts future behavior. Your answers will give the interviewers a window into how you would approach specific challenges and situations.

Execution: 3. Perform

In a job interview, you want to make the best impression possible – and you want this impression to last. It's not just about how you interact with the interviewer – it's also how you interact with others you may come across, including the receptionist. It's how you carry yourself in the elevator and even the restroom. Be mindful of your deportment at all times without seeming affected. If you don't already have one, you want to develop a natural, pleasing deportment.

Performance is about looking and acting the part; much of that comes from the preparation and practice you've done in the previous two steps. Your performance is critical, from what you wear to what you say and how you say it. Be courteous throughout the interview. Thank the interviewer for their time and interest, but don't belabour this with gushing gratitude. Be engaging and dynamic without going overboard. There's nothing wrong with being expressive and showing your personality, but keep it appropriate. Keep your cool and keep it professional. Being able to adjust your interaction appropriately comes with experience and practice. Most importantly, end on a high note.

Sample Interview Questions

General

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your strengths/weaknesses.
3. Why do you want to work here?
4. Tell me about your work/leadership/management/communication style.
5. What are your career goals?
6. How would your boss/colleagues describe you?
7. Why are you the best person for this job?
8. What are your compensation expectations?
9. Why do you want to leave your current job?
10. Tell me about your professional development.

Behavioural

1. Tell me about a time you went the extra mile in a work project.
2. Tell me about when you had to deal with a tight deadline.
3. Tell me about a time when you dealt with a demanding customer.
4. Tell me about when you had to accept a decision you disagreed with.
5. Tell me about when you took the initiative to get a job done.
6. Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership.
7. Tell me about when you dealt with a demanding boss or supervisor.
8. Tell me about a time when there was a significant change in your organization.
9. Tell me about a time when you had to handle a negotiation.
10. Tell me about when you had to resolve a conflict between colleagues.

Top 10 Mistakes

1. **Being late.** In addition to setting an alarm, do whatever you can to avoid being late. Know where you have to go, how you'll get there, and how long it will take.
2. **Being unprepared.** Even if you only have a day to prepare, spend some time learning about the position, company, and interviewers. Rehearse your pitch and answers to typical interview questions.
3. **Being rude.** There is no excuse for being rude to anyone. Word travels fast, so be as pleasant and friendly to the receptionist as you would be with the CEO.
4. **Not making appropriate eye contact.** Shifty eyes might make you appear nervous and untrustworthy. Staring, on the other hand, can be disconcerting. Proper eye contact will serve to ease the conversation.
5. **Rambling on.** Answer the interviewer's questions clearly and concisely. Preparing your answers in advance will help keep you focused and on track.
6. **Being arrogant.** Of course, you want to acknowledge your accomplishments, but give credit where it's due. You can't be too modest, but arrogance will do you no good.
7. **Bad mouthing.** Whether it's your boss, colleagues, company, or parking attendant, refrain from speaking ill of anyone. It's unprofessional and reflects poorly on you.
8. **Talking about compensation.** Unless the interviewer mentions the topic, it's not the time or place to discuss compensation. At this stage, you want to focus on the job and what you can bring to the company, not what they can do for you.
9. **Not looking the part.** Find out in advance what the typical style of attire is at the company. Err on the conservative side and make sure you're also well groomed.
10. **Not following up.** Many people follow up with a thank you email after an interview. Don't differentiate yourself by failing to do so.

Titles in the Career Transition Series

A Brief Guide to Executive Branding

As an executive, it's essential to establish and develop your brand. Nobody else will do it for you! In this guide, we'll introduce you to the "5 Cs" of executive branding: clarity, consistency, constancy, credibility, and confidence.

A Brief Guide to Job Search Networking

Networking is an integral part of your job search strategy. It's also easier than most people think! In this guide, we'll get you started on some essential networking activities, including building your base network, preparing your pitches, getting set up on LinkedIn, and having face-to-face meetings.

A Brief Guide to Writing Your Resume

Resumes open doors. They can also close them. To be considered for the opportunities you want, it's up to you to make a great first impression with your resume. In this guide, we'll get you started on writing your chronological resume, online resume, and one-page biography.

A Brief Guide to Interviewing

While resumes open doors, interviews get offers. You must demonstrate that your skills, attitude, and personality make you the right person for the job. In this guide, we'll get you started on preparing for a winning interview.

A Brief Guide to Job Offer Negotiation

Negotiating is both an art and a science. People who are uncomfortable about negotiating need more confidence because they need experience. In this guide, we'll start you on how to best prepare and practice for a win-win job offer negotiation.

A Brief Guide to Executive Onboarding

Getting the job is excellent, but succeeding in it is what matters. Whether or not your new organization has a formal onboarding program, consider yourself in charge of the process. In this guide, we'll get you started on several critical onboarding activities to set you up for success.

Start Mandrake's FREE! Career Transition Program by [clicking here](#).