

Interview Skills

WHEN YOU APPLY FOR A JOB, you probably are competing with several, if not dozens, of other candidates. The interview process gives you the chance to set yourself apart from the other candidates by showing why you are the right person for the job. In this unit, you will learn more about the interview skills you need to land the job you want. By practicing those skills, you will have an advantage over candidates walking into an interview unprepared.



Objective:



Describe interview skills.

Key Terms:



critical thinking skills
interpersonal skills
interview
interviewee
interviewer
nonverbal communication
verbal communication

Preparing for an Interview

An **interview** is the process in which an employer evaluates a candidate for a job. It involves an interviewer and an interviewee. The **interviewer** is the company representative in charge of hiring an individual. In contrast, the **interviewee** is the candidate applying for the job. The interview process allows the interviewer to learn more about you, beyond what is on your application or résumé, to determine whether you would be a good fit for the company.

SKILLS

When you go to a job interview, your task is to make a good impression on the interviewer in order to earn a job offer. Several interview skills help you demonstrate that you are the right person for the job.

Verbal Communication

Most jobs require good communication skills, and interviewers want job candidates to demonstrate their skills. **Verbal communication** is the exchange of information using words. During an interview, use proper grammar. Avoid using slang words and phrases. Answer questions in complete sentences, and avoid repeating words such as “um,” “like,” and “you know.” Answer questions thoroughly, but keep each response less than two minutes long.

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is the exchange of information without words. It includes body language, eye contact, tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures. Nonverbal communication can convey confidence, even if you feel nervous. Have good posture when standing and sitting. Greet the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake. Avoid using excessive gestures. Try not to wave your hands around when you talk. Also, do not point at the interviewer or fidget in your seat. Make eye contact when speaking to the interviewer. Speak clearly, but not too loudly.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Interview Attire

The clothes you wear to work depend on the type of work you do. You might wear a uniform at a fast food restaurant, jeans and a polo-style shirt in a retail shop, or slacks and a button-down shirt in a business office. However, even if you would wear jeans or shorts on the job, you should wear nicer clothing for the interview. Your clothing, accessories, and appearance help the interviewer form a first impression about you, so you want to look professional.

Visit the following websites to watch videos about what clothing is appropriate for job interviews. You may conduct additional research online, as well. Create a small poster illustrating some “Do’s and Don’ts” for interview attire. Print clothing photos from the Internet, or clip pictures from magazines or catalogs. Include at least one outfit that would be appropriate for a job interview and one outfit that would likely make a bad impression on the interviewer. Share your poster with your classmates, and explain why you chose the items you selected.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbPIKbqeY64>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4kT85WlbCM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TTagM9eHOA>

Professional Appearance

Having a professional appearance makes a good first impression on an interviewer. Dress appropriately. Business attire is usually preferred, even if the actual job allows casual clothing. When in doubt, err on the side of formality. For example, a knee-length skirt or slacks are preferable to jeans or shorts, even if the other employees wear jeans. Be properly groomed, which means having neatly styled hair, a clean body and clean clothing, trimmed or manicured fingernails, and no body odor or excessive perfume or cologne.

Part of a professional appearance includes being on time. Get directions ahead of time, and know where you are supposed to go. Also, allow plenty of time for transportation issues. For example, your bus may be late, or you may run into traffic.

Preparedness

Preparedness is another key interview skill. You can show that you are organized if you are able to find documents quickly without having to rummage through a messy purse or briefcase. You should be able to provide a résumé, even if you sent one when you applied for the job, as well as a list of references and work samples, when appropriate.

Be ready to answer common interview questions. For instance, research common questions, and practice answering them. Focus on questions about the company. Interviewers often ask if you have any questions. It is wise to have a few questions in mind, although questions about salary and benefits are not appropriate during the first interview.

Critical Thinking

Some common questions are designed to test your critical thinking or interpersonal skills. **Critical thinking skills** are the abilities needed to solve problems by making assumptions based on known facts. For example, the interviewer may ask, “How many helium-filled balloons would it take to lift my desk off the ground?” It may be impossible to come up with the correct answer, but the interviewer is probably more interested in hearing your thought process. Talk your way through the problem, using the facts you do know, to come up with your best answer.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are the abilities needed to interact with others. These types of questions help the interviewer gauge how you get along with others. For example, the interviewer may say, “Tell me about a time you had a conflict with a co-worker. How did you resolve it?”



FIGURE 1. Be prepared to provide the interviewer with a copy of your résumé, even if you submitted one when you applied for the job.

Follow Up

The ability to follow up after an interview is a skill that leaves a lasting impression on a potential employer. Send a letter soon after the interview to thank the interviewer for his or her time. It is acceptable to call to follow up once to ask if the job has been filled. Do not call more than once, however, as the interviewer may consider it “badgering.” Keep in mind that some job searches take weeks or months to complete.

PRACTICE INTERVIEWS

It is important to practice your interview skills. As a result, you should be ready when you have a real job interview. List your skills on paper, and give examples of how you use those skills. For instance, you might list interpersonal skills, such as “I get along well with others,” and “I like being part of a team.” Also, you might list personality traits, such as “creative” and “outgoing.” List any of your skills and qualifications that are necessary for the particular job. For example, you may write that you will graduate in June or that you took a textiles class at the community college.

Write

Writing down your skills and qualifications before the interview gives you a chance to organize your thoughts. You would never take out this paper and read from it during the interview. However, you will be less likely to stammer through your answers or forget a key point you wanted to mention if you have listed and practiced your answers ahead of time.

Speak

Practice aloud. Ask a friend or family member to role play in a mock interview. Choose an outfit that would be appropriate. Practice greeting the interviewer and shaking hands. Then practice answering common interview questions. Many examples may be found online at <http://career-advice.monster.com/job-interview/interview-questions/100-potential-interview-questions/article.aspx>. At the very least, you should be prepared to answer questions about your strengths and weaknesses and why you want the job.

In addition, practice asking questions based on your company research. Ask your friend or family member for feedback on what you could do better, and then do a second mock interview to try to improve your skills.

Watch

It may be helpful to watch, instead of just listening. For instance, practice answering questions in front of a mirror. Videotape your mock interview, and then watch it without sound to study your body language, gestures, and facial expressions. Does your body language say that you are enthusiastic and interested, or does it say that you are bored and have a negative attitude?

Prepare a Letter

Prepare a sample follow-up letter that can be customized for each interview. Ask a friend or family member to proofread the letter, so it will be ready to send when you have a real job interview.

Summary:



An interview is the process in which an employer evaluates a candidate for a job. Most jobs require good verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and interviewers want job candidates to demonstrate their skills. During an interview, use proper grammar. Avoid using slang words and phrases. Have good posture when standing and sitting. Greet the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake. Make eye contact with the interviewer, and speak in a clear voice. Having a professional appearance makes a good first impression on an interviewer. So dress appropriately, and be properly groomed. Preparedness is another key interview skill. Be organized, and be ready to answer common questions.

It is important to practice your interview skills. As a result, you will be ready when you have a real job interview. List your skills and qualifications, and practice talking about them. Ask a friend or family member to hold a mock interview and to evaluate you. Look into a mirror, or watch a videotape of yourself to observe your body language and expressions during the mock interview. Prepare a sample follow-up letter that can be customized for each interview.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are the different types of communication?
2. Describe a professional appearance.
3. What should you do to prepare for an interview?
4. What are critical thinking skills, and why are they important in an interview?
5. Why is it helpful to videotape a practice interview?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Speak to a businessperson who routinely conducts interviews to hire new employees. Ask him or her for tips on what job candidates can do to make a good impression. In addition, ask for examples of things job candidates have done that immediately eliminated them from consideration for the job.

Web Links:



Tips for Success

http://www.worksmart.ca.gov/tips_interview.html

Uncomfortable Interview Questions

http://msn.careerbuilder.com/Article/MSN-2722-Interviewing-Isnt-that-illegal-How-to-answer-uncomfortable-interview-questions/?sc_extcmp=JS_2722_advice&SiteId=cbmsn42722&catid=iv

Interview “Rules”

<http://www.howtonailaninterview.com/>