

# Prepare for an Interview

**H**IRING a new employee can be a long process. After the employer reviews all the résumés or applications from potential employees, he or she may choose a few candidates who have the skills and education necessary for the job. The next step is often an **interview**—a formal meeting between an employer and a job applicant with the primary purpose of assessing the job applicant’s qualifications. In this unit, you will learn more about the different types of interviews as well as the elements of a successful job interview.



## Objectives:



1. Identify types of interviews.
2. Identify elements of a successful job interview.

## Key Terms:



behavioral interview  
interview  
panel interview  
screening interview  
traditional interview

## Types of Interviews

An interview provides employers with the opportunity to meet job candidates and to find the individual best suited for the position. Interviews also provide the job applicants with information about the position for which they are applying.

## SCREENING INTERVIEW

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A **screening interview** is a brief, preliminary interview with a job applicant. It is often conducted over the telephone by a human resource professional to determine the applicant's basic job qualifications. If the applicant meets the basic requirements for the job, he or she may be invited for another interview.

## TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

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A **traditional interview** is a one-on-one interview conducted by the employer with the job applicant.

## PANEL INTERVIEW

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A **panel interview** (group interview) involves more than one interviewer. Panel interviews often involve two or more interviewers who question the applicant together or individually.



FIGURE 1. A panel interview involves more than one interviewer.

## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

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A **behavioral interview** is an interview in which the interviewer asks behavior-oriented questions that require the applicant to recall specific examples of past behavior at a previous job. For example, the person conducting the interview may ask the applicant to give an example of how he or she dealt with a particularly stressful situation at a previous job.

## Elements for Success

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If you are applying for a job, you should do a little homework and should be prepared for a job interview. Research the company to learn about its products, services, philosophy, size, and clientele. Ask for a copy of the job description so you will know what skills and duties are expected. Practice your interviewing skills, and prepare some questions of your own about the job responsibilities and advancement opportunities at the company.

Get accurate directions to the interview site. It is helpful to take a cell phone and the phone number of the interviewer in case of an emergency on the way. But make sure your phone is turned off during the interview.

When you go to the interview, take a copy of your résumé, a list of references, and a portfolio, if you have one. You may want paper and a pen to make notes during the interview. Some interviewers may ask to see your driver's license, Social Security card, or birth certificate.

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Practice responding to common interview questions to ease nervousness and to be better prepared for the interview. Some common interview questions include:

- ◆ What kind of job do you desire?
- ◆ What are your strengths?
- ◆ What are your weaknesses?
- ◆ Why did you leave your previous job?
- ◆ Why should we hire you?
- ◆ Where do you see yourself in five years?
- ◆ What would your former boss/teacher say about you?

## APPEARANCE

Dress for success because your appearance makes a first impression on the interviewer. In general, dress as though you are going to church, not as if you are going on a date. Shower and style your hair. Also, make sure your clothes look neat, ironing them if necessary.

No tattoos or piercings should be visible, except earrings for women. If you have multiple piercings, remove the jewelry for the interview. If and when the job is offered, you can ask about the company's policy regarding visible piercings in the workplace.



## FURTHER EXPLORATION...

### ONLINE CONNECTION: Professional Answers

Some interview questions are intentionally vague. For instance, the interviewer may ask you to tell a little about yourself. The question is not specifically about your work history or skills, but you should try to answer from a professional standpoint.

Visit the following Web site to watch a short video explaining how you can answer interview questions professionally, rather than personally, to make a better impression on your interviewer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCQdloL8HV0&feature=related>

## Guidelines for Women

Women should wear a suit, dress, or blouse with a skirt or pants in conservative neutral colors with neutral-tone nylons. Shoes should have moderate heels and closed toes. Women should wear minimal jewelry, with no more than a watch, one conservative ring, and one small set of stud earrings. Makeup and perfume should be kept to a minimum. Applicants should make sure their fingernails are neatly trimmed. If they are polished, a neutral shade is recommended.

## Guidelines for Men

Men should wear a suit or dress pants with a white or neutral-colored long-sleeve shirt. Shirts should be tucked into pants, which should be held up by a belt. Men should wear a conservative tie and dress socks and shoes. Applicants should wear little aftershave or cologne and should make sure their nails are clean and trim. Men also should keep jewelry to a minimum, but a watch and one conservative ring are acceptable.

## INTERVIEW TIPS

Go alone to the interview, arriving on time or a little early. Shake hands firmly and make eye contact with the interviewer. Listen carefully and make your answers clear and concise. Use proper English, not slang. In addition, avoid sarcasm and negative remarks.

### During the Interview

During the interview, be conscious of your posture and body language. Sit up straight and try not to fidget. Do not chew gum or answer calls or text messages. Show an interest in the job and in the company. Discuss what you can do for the company, not what you hope the company can do for you. Be prepared to give real-life examples that demonstrate your problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills. If you have a portfolio, use it as a tool to showcase your skills and accomplishments.

### Follow-Up

After the interview, smile, shake hands firmly, and thank the interviewer for his or her time. It is acceptable to ask the interviewer when you might hear from him or her regarding a deci-



**FIGURE 2.** Begin and end an interview with a firm handshake, making eye contact with your interviewer.

sion. You may ask the interviewer if you can follow up with a phone call in a few days. However, if you say you will call, be sure to do it.

Within 24 hours of the interview, you should send a formal thank-you letter to your interviewer. Thank the interviewer for his or her time, and reiterate your interest in the position.

## Summary:



An interview provides employers with the opportunity to meet job candidates to find the individual best suited for the position. Applicants should take steps to make a good first impression on an interviewer. Practice answering common questions, wear appropriate clothing, and begin and end the interview with a smile and a firm handshake. A follow-up thank-you letter reminds the interviewer that you are interested in the job and provides a favorable impression.

## Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are the different types of interviews?
2. What research should an applicant do before a job interview?
3. What items should an applicant take to an interview?
4. What tips should an applicant consider regarding appearance?
5. What should an applicant do within 24 hours of an interview?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:



Write a sample thank-you letter to the interviewer. Remember to thank the interviewer for his or her time, and reiterate your skills and interest in the job. Trade letters with a classmate, and offer constructive criticism.

## Web Links:



### Acing an Interview

<http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/a/aceinterview.htm>

### How to Dress for Success

<http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/ht/interviewdress.htm>

### Job Interview Tips

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco20045.htm>