

INTERVIEW PREPARATION GUIDE

Compliments of ALEX-Alternative Experts, LLC

The purpose of this guide is to help prepare you for (and take some of the anxiety out of) one of life's most common stressors – **The Job Interview**. We believe that preparation is vital to success and a better chance at a job offer.

Preparing for the Interview

Preparation is the key to successfully navigating the interview process. This section will provide you with guidance on what to know about the company before you walk in the door, what to wear (and what NOT to wear), and what to take with you.

What to Know About the Company

Researching the company you are about to interview with is crucial to presenting yourself professionally. The internet is usually the best place to go for a corporate overview. Know what products and/or services they offer, who their main competitors are, and something about their industry in general. It is also a good idea to check for any recent press releases about the company (usually listed on the company's website). Taking the opportunity to congratulate the interviewer on the company's latest contract win, or a recent award, will show that you did your homework and it will make a big impression.

Your Appearance

What you wear is an important part of your presentation. The best way to plan your wardrobe is to know as much about the client as possible. It is always better to be over-dressed than under dressed, so follow these guidelines:

1. A dark suit is appropriate for most positions for both men and women. Bright colored blouses or shirts and ties can be okay, but make sure that your outfit doesn't speak more loudly than you do. Your suit should be clean and pressed - avoid wearing fabrics that wrinkle easily.
2. Ladies - necklines and hemlines should be conservative.
3. Gentlemen - facial hair should be trimmed and neat.
4. Avoid wearing too much jewelry or makeup, and avoid cologne or perfume all together.
5. If the environment is casual, dress slightly better than you would if you were planning to go out for dinner. Even if you are interviewing in a dressed-down environment, like a warehouse, avoid jeans and t-shirts and opt instead for khakis and a collared shirt.

What to Take With You

Don't go to an interview empty-handed. It is a good idea to invest in a nice briefcase or day planner that you can use to carry things you will need, as well as to collect and organize business cards, marketing material, or other items the client may give you while you are there.

You should bring:

- Several copies of your resume
- Work samples or a portfolio, if appropriate
- A notepad and pen or pencil
- Directions to the client site
- The name and phone number of the person with whom you are scheduled to interview

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Arriving at the Interview

- Plan to arrive 15 minutes early. Be aware of the time of day and direction you are driving in order to prepare for traffic. It will help you to stay relaxed if you aren't worried about being late.
- The interview starts the moment you walk in the door. Be polite to the reception and/or security personnel. They WILL talk to the interviewer about your attitude and demeanor while you were waiting.
- If you must bring your cell phone into the building with you, **turn it off**. You can turn it back on as soon as you leave the building.
- Offer a firm handshake and a sincere smile to the interviewer.

The Interview Itself

- Small talk prior to the interview is appropriate, but let the interviewer lead the conversation. If he or she moves away from small talk and into interview questions quickly, be prepared to respond.
- Be confident, and show that you are interested in the position. Be relaxed and sit naturally, but don't slouch in your chair. Be attentive to the interviewer's questions.
- Know your resume inside and out, and be prepared to answer questions about gaps in employment, any certifications you may have, reasons for leaving prior positions, your education, etc.
- If the interviewer asks a question that you do not understand, ask for clarification.
- Be ready for behavioral interview questions like, "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of how you...". Prepare five or six stories to use for the most common behavioral-style questions.
- Prepare a few questions of your own to ask the interviewer. This will show that you are involved in this process, and that you are as interested in gathering information on them as they are interested in gathering information on you! Your research of the company will pay off here.
- Remember to make eye contact. Avoid looking around the room constantly while you are talking—it can convey nervousness and a lack of confidence.
- Don't fidget. Playing with your hair, clicking a pen, or tapping on the table are distracting to the interviewer, and may make more of an impression than your skills.
- Sell your skills—now is not the time for modesty or shyness.
- Let the interviewer know that you are interested in the job without being overly aggressive. Be sure to mention the added value that you can bring to the position.
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time at the end of the interview. Once again, be polite to the reception or security personnel on the way out of the building.

Top 10 Interview Questions

1. What are your strengths/weaknesses?
2. Why should we hire you?
3. Why do you want to work here?
4. What are your goals?
5. Why did you leave (or Why are you leaving) your last job?
6. Where do you want to be in five years? Ten?

7. What can you do for us that others cannot?
8. Tell me about a time that you had to work under tremendous stress and pressure.
9. What are your salary requirements?
10. Who was your favorite manager or supervisor, and why?

20 Other Interview Questions You May Encounter

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What kind of personality do you work best with? Why?
3. What is your proudest achievement?
4. How would you establish credibility quickly with a new team?
5. Who made a real difference to you in your career? Why?
6. What do you like to do?
7. Give me an example of an idea you had and implemented at work?
8. What are your lifelong dreams?
9. What do you want to be when you grow up?
10. How would you describe your work style?
11. Do you like to read? What's the last book you read?
12. What was your least favorite thing about your last job?
13. What can you tell me about your last boss?
14. What are three positive things your last boss would tell me about you?
15. What negative thing would your last boss say about you?
16. How do you think I rate as an interviewer?
17. Do you have any questions for me?
18. What do you know about our company? Our industry?
19. If you were to get this job, what goals would you have in mind?
20. Give me an example of a time you went above and beyond at work.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Interviews should always be a two-way conversation. By asking questions, you are taking an active part in the interview and showing that you are interested and engaged in the process. Asking questions also allows you to take part in the flow of conversation and can help you to build a rapport with the interviewer. Some questions you might ask:

- Why is this position open at this time?
- Please describe a typical day for someone in this position.
- What challenges might I face in this position?
- To whom would I report?

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- What are this company's long term goals?
- When do you expect to make a hiring decision?

Some Tips for Asking Questions

- Don't cross-examine the interviewer or ask rapid-fire questions (you may come off as too aggressive). Let your questions naturally fall in the flow of the conversation.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer when he/she is answering your question. If the answer leads you to another question, jot it down in your notebook and refer to it when appropriate.
- Ask questions that are relevant to the job, the company, and the industry. Some of your questions should come from the research you have done while preparing for the interview.
- Write out a list of questions BEFORE the interview. Bring the list with you.
- Ask about the personnel structure of the organization so that you can have an idea of how many layers of management there are, and how many employees at the company would be in your peer group.
- Try to ask questions that are open-ended. "Yes or no" questions can abruptly end the flow of conversation.
- It is appropriate to ask the interviewer how he or she got where he or she is today, as long as you do not become too familiar.
- It is appropriate to ask about the corporate culture, dress code, and the office environment in general.

Common Interview Mistakes to Avoid

Some people look great on paper to an employer, and ruin their chances in an instant by saying or doing the wrong thing. Avoid these common mistakes that could cost you the job:

- Arriving late for the interview
- Dressing inappropriately
- Chewing gum
- Talking too much
- Lack of preparation for the interview
- Not knowing anything about the company
- Asking about compensation or benefits
- Not knowing your own resume, skills, certifications, education, etc.
- Not asking any questions, or asking too many
- Bad-mouthing a former employer, supervisor, spouse, friend, etc.
- Taking a call on your cell phone (it should stay in your car or be turned off)
- Giving answers that seem too rehearsed or stiff
- Appearing very nervous or ill-at-ease