

Interview Tips Part 1: About Interview Behavior

Attire, body language and manners count during interviews. After all, interviewers are regular people like the rest of us, easily impressed by good behavior and just as easily offended by inappropriate behavior.

Yet, surveys show that job candidates' interview manners and other professionalism are on the decline. For example,

- According to Vault.com, nearly 80 percent of employers surveyed indicated that interviewees' manners had declined. Some candidates surveyed thought that certain inappropriate behaviors were okay, like removing one's shoes or bringing a pet.
- Among other bizarre behaviors, FacilitatorGuy reports that a candidate ate a hamburger and french fries in the interviewer's office, and even wiped up ketchup with her sleeve. Another interrupted the interview to phone his shrink for advice on how to answer specific questions.
- Job Searching Guide Alison Doyle, who has also worked as a hiring, human resources representative, said that one of her interviewees unbuttoned his shirt and started to drop his drawers to show her the scar from a boat propeller, as proof that an unemployed period wasn't his fault! Alison stopped him from mooning her and didn't offer him the accounting job. She also didn't offer it to "the young lady in a bright red skirt so short and tight, that she could hardly sit down!"

On the next pages are tips for acting professionally before, during and after interviews, to avoid offending interviewers and increase your chances of landing a job. These interview tips are based on good manners in the United States. Good manners are appreciated everywhere, but what constitutes them may differ among other countries.

You might think that some of the interview tips are no-brainers. If so, that's good. It means that you are already on your way to completing successful interviews. But, as you've read above, weird stuff really does happen! Consequently, these interview tips try to cover it all.

Interview Tips Part 2: How to Act Before Interviews

- Do your homework: [Research the company](#) and study before you interview, as your interviewer will likely ask what you know about the company and why you want the job. It also helps you to formulate questions about the company and job. Interviewers typically expect you to ask [such questions](#).
- With a friend, relative or by yourself, practice answering the other common questions interviewers ask. (See attachment for samples of common questions.)
- Collect and neatly arrange your important papers and work samples in a nice briefcase or portfolio. This makes you look organized and professional. Remember to pack relevant documents such as extra resumes and reference lists, immigrant work-authorization papers, [letters of recommendation](#), and information required on job applications. Bring at least one pen and pencil, and a notepad too.
- Practice good hygiene, comb or brush your hair, and dress appropriately. Even if you know that the company dress is business-casual, dress up anyway. Males should wear coat and tie. Females should wear business suit (skirt or slacks are fine) with hose and close toe shoes. Both should make sure shoes are clean and polished/shined. It shows professionalism and respect, and most importantly, that you know how to dress for interviews.
- Unless otherwise instructed (e.g., to fill out a job application), arrive five to ten minutes early for the interview. This shows that you are eager and punctual. If you're not at least five minutes early for an interview, you're five minutes late! But don't arrive more than ten minutes early, as it might be inconvenient for your interviewers. Definitely don't be late!
- Don't bring uninvited guests like pets, children or significant others.

Turn off your cell phone, pager, PDA alarms and other devices that might interrupt your interview.

Interview Tips Part 3: How to Act During Interviews

- Smile, immediately offer a firm handshake, introduce yourself, and say something like, "I'm pleased to meet you." or "I've been looking forward to talking with you." Be sincere and avoid informal greetings you might use to say hello to your friends. Take the polite, conservative route.
- Read the mood. If the interviewer is formal, then you probably should be, too. If the interviewer is casual, then follow along while remaining courteous and professional. In either case, try to appear to be relaxed, but not too relaxed. It's not a good idea to put your feet up on the interviewer's desk!
- Wait to be told to take a seat or ask if you may, then say thank you. This shows good manners.
- If it's possible without making a commotion, scoot your chair a little closer to the interviewer's desk or take the chair closest to the desk, like you're ready to dive right in. This shows interest and confidence. But don't invade the interviewer's personal space, a perimeter of about two feet by U.S. standards.
- Sit with good posture. If you don't know what to do with your hands, keep them folded in your lap. This is another indication of good manners. Avoid crossing your arms over your chest, as it subliminally demonstrates a closed mind to some.

- Even formally-trained interviewers are regular people like you, so they'll expect you to be a little nervous while sitting in the "hot seat." Still, try to avoid obvious signs like fidgeting.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Avoid staring or you might make the interviewer uncomfortable, but don't look away too often either. To some, failure to maintain a comfortable level of eye contact indicates that you are lying, reaching for answers or lacking confidence.
- Don't eat, drink, chew gum or smoke, or even ask if it's okay. But if the interviewer offers coffee or other beverages, it's okay to accept. It's probably better to say no thanks to snacks (unless you're at an interview meal), so you don't accidentally drop crumbs in your lap, be forced to talk with your mouth full, and all that other stuff your mom told you not to do with your food.
- Speaking of which, if you are attending an interview meal, do follow all the good eating manners your parents taught you. For example, put your napkin in your lap, don't order anything complicated and messy to eat like ribs or crab legs, avoid bad-breath foods like garlic and onions, chew with your mouth closed, keep your elbows off the table, and order only moderately-priced items from the menu. Don't order booze, even if your interviewer does. Let your interviewer pick up the tab and be sure to thank him or her for the meal.
- It's okay to [ask questions](#) to better answer the questions the interviewer asks you. But withhold the bulk of your questions until the interviewer asks if you have any, which is typically toward the end of the interview. Avoid asking the frivolous just because interviewers expect you to have questions. Instead, ask about important matters, such as job duties, management style and the financial health of the company. It's not a good idea to ask questions about vacation, sick days, lunch breaks and so on, right off the bat. Ask about the lesser matters of importance during follow-up interviews.

Typically, you'll negotiate salary, benefits, perks and such in a follow-up interview. Regardless, don't bring it up until asked, yet [be ready](#) to discuss it at anytime.

Sample interview questions of the common type are listed below. Answers are included. But perhaps suggestions for tailoring your responses is a better way to put it, since specific answers are impossible to provide. Practice answering these sample interview questions out loud to yourself or ask a friend or relative to help you.

Don't feel that you have to answer right away. Interviewers know that you're nervous and expect you to think a bit, so do think carefully before you answer. But don't hesitate too long or it'll appear that you're stalling. Interviewers will ask open-ended questions to see where you'll go with them, so try not to ramble while you're thinking of a real answer.

Sample Interview Questions with Suggested Ways of Answering

Q. Tell me about yourself.

A. This is the dreaded, classic, open-ended interview question and likely to be among the first. It's your chance to introduce your qualifications, good work habits, etc. Keep it mostly work and career related.

Q. Why do you want to leave your current job? (Why did you leave your last job?)

A. Be careful with this. Avoid trashing other employers and making statements like, "I need more money." Instead, make generic statements such as, "It's a career move."

Q. What are your strengths?

A. Point out your positive attributes related to the job.

Q. What are your weaknesses?

A. Everybody has weaknesses, but don't spend too much time on this one and keep it work related. Along with a minor weakness or two, try to point out a couple of weaknesses that the interviewer might see as strengths, such as sometimes being a little too meticulous about the quality of your work. (Avoid saying "I work too hard." It's a predictable, common answer.) For every weakness, offer a strength that compensates for it.

Q. Which adjectives would you use to describe yourself?

A. Answer with positive, work-oriented adjectives, such as *conscientious*, *hard-working*, *honest* and *courteous*, plus a brief description or example of why each fits you well.

Q. What do you know about our company?

A. To answer this one, research the company before you interview. It's a good idea to conduct company research before you interview, so you can step up to the challenge and answer such questions intelligently. At minimum, know what a company's products and services are, why they interest you, and how you can help support them. Employment is a two-way street. Make sure it's a company for which you want to work, and you'll be well-prepared to answer such questions. Find out everything you can about the company, including

- Benefits
- History

- Culture
- Advancement opportunities
- Financial status
- Plans

Naturally, you may ask about some of these topics during interviews. But it's a good idea to find out all you can beforehand, to help you formulate specific questions and answers, and show that you've done your homework.

Q. Why do you want to work for us?

A. Same as above. Research the company before you interview. Avoid the predictable, such as, "Because it's a great company." Say why you think it's a great company.

Q. Why should I hire you?

A. Point out your positive attributes related to the job, and the good job you've done in the past. Include any compliments you've received from management.

Q. What past accomplishments gave you satisfaction?

A. Briefly describe one to three work projects that made you proud or earned you pats on the back, promotions, raises, etc. Focus more on achievement than reward.

Q. What makes you want to work hard?

A. Naturally, material rewards such as perks, salary and benefits come into play. But again, focus more on achievement and the satisfaction you derive from it.

Q. What type of work environment do you like best?

A. Tailor your answer to the job. For example, if in doing your job you're required to lock the lab doors and work alone, then indicate that you enjoy being a team player when needed, but also enjoy working independently. If you're required to attend regular project planning and status meetings, then indicate that you're a strong team player and like being part of a team.

Q. Why do you want this job?

A. To help you answer this and related questions, study the job ad in advance. But a job ad alone may not be enough, so it's okay to ask questions about the job while you're answering. Say what attracts you to the job. Avoid the obvious and meaningless, such as, "I need a job."

Q. How do you handle pressure and stress?

A. This is sort of a double whammy, because you're likely already stressed from the interview and the interviewer can see if you're handling it well or not. Everybody feels stress, but the degree varies. Saying that you whine to your shrink, kick your dog or slam down a fifth of Jack Daniels are not good answers. Exercising, relaxing with a good book, socializing with friends or turning stress into productive energy are more along the lines of the "correct" answers.

Q. Explain how you overcame a major obstacle.

A. The interviewer is likely looking for a particular example of your problem-solving skills and the pride you show for solving it.

Q. Where do you see yourself five (ten or fifteen) years from now?

A. Explain your career-advancement goals that are in line with the job for which you

are interviewing. Your interviewer is likely more interested in how he, she or the company will benefit from you achieving your goals than what you'll get from it, but it goes hand in hand to a large degree. It's not a good idea to tell your potential new boss that you'll be going after his or her job, but it's okay to mention that you'd like to earn a senior or management position.

Q. What qualifies you for this job?

A. Tout your skills, experience, education and other qualifications, especially those that match the job description well. Avoid just regurgitating your resume. Explain why.

Q. Why did you choose your college major?

A. The interviewer is likely fishing to see if you are interested in your field of work or just doing a job to get paid. Explain why you like it. Besides your personal interests, include some rock-solid business reasons that show you have vision and business sense.