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Preparing for the job interview

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Preparing for your job interview

The job interview serves as an opportunity to see whether the employer and the applicant are compatible. In preparing for the interview, applicants should try to understand the employer's point of view while remaining authentic. Applicants also have the opportunity to see whether the employer and the company culture reflect their own hopes and expectations.

Before the interview

- Analyze your goals and skills:
Strengths and weaknesses
What do I bring to the table? How do I want to work?
- Draft and practice how you will introduce yourself (90–120 sec.) with reference to the position
- Re-read the job advertisement several times
- Research the company
- Develop your own expectations of the position and come up with questions
- Ask yourself what motivates you: Why don't I want to do the same work at a different company?

During the interview

- Is it a telephone, video or in-person interview?
Prepare accordingly.
- If you know the company's dress code, dress accordingly
- Listen attentively
- Speak specifically to one person at a time – direct technical answers to the engineer and administrative answers to the HR representative
- Ask the questions you prepared or questions relevant for assessing whether you would like to accept the position, should you receive an offer

After

- Note the name of your interviewer
- Request an email with information about further proceedings (timeline of the application process)

See page 2 for comprehensive information.

1. My goals and skills

(optimal candidate = open, motivated, trustworthy)

Personality

- Know your strengths and some examples thereof
- Know your weaknesses and how you overcome them
- Authenticity – critical for all parties to have a fair opportunity to see whether you are compatible with the company / company culture (workplace satisfaction)

Motivation

- Commitment & enthusiasm for the position
- Learning aptitude / work motivation
- Ability to identify with the task
- Skills necessary for the position:
specialist knowledge, interpersonal skills, methodological expertise and personal competence

2. Research on the company

(Why am I the right fit for this company? Who is my counterpart? How will the interview proceed?)

- Large, medium-sized or small enterprise
- Private or public sector
- Start-up
- Head office, branch location, product range, turnover/profit, press or social media reports
- Management, employees, development opportunities
- Company culture and history, market position

3. Preparing your own appearance

Presenting yourself

- Compile significant professional skills, character traits and experience (I am, I can, I would like ... – work experience, education, ...)
- Practice your self-presentation (feel free to lay out the application documents before you and make reference to them)

Traveling to in-person interviews

- Plan in enough time
- Prepare for the location and the meeting (arrive at least 5 minutes but at most 10 minutes early)

Job interview run-down

- Time frame: 30 min. to 1 hour (duration can indicate interest & chance of success)

Important during the interview:

- Listen attentively (remember names!)
- Recognize the intention of the questions
- Take time to consider your responses; ask follow-up questions, if necessary
- Think about what you want to achieve with your answers

Greeting and introduction

- Small talk and ice breakers: “Did you get here all right?” → brief answers
- Initial contact, appearance, self-presentation, behavior
- Make sure to: offer a firm handshake, keep eye contact
- Keep your body open and both feet on the floor

Company introduction

- Listen attentively, don't ask questions yet
- Remember some aspects for later questions

Introducing yourself

- Introduce yourself in 1-2 minutes
- Share your motivation for applying
- Focus on the job advertisement with reference to your own skills
- Mention your competences and aptitude – more detailed questions are possible later
- Draw links to the company
- Share personal, social background if relevant

Working conditions

- Typical workday (applicant may be asked about their own expectations)
- Desired salary (may differ by state or industry – do some prior research, e.g. graduate surveys, average wage reports, salary comparisons)
- Consider company pension / company car / other incentives

Questions from the applicant

- Keep questions relevant. Don't ask questions just for the sake of asking questions; be sure to draw ties to the work
- Be sure to ask all your questions so you can accurately decide if the employer and company culture line up with your own expectations
- Ask about the next steps

Conclusion

Typical job interview questions

Introduction and professional suitability

Presentation of the company and position

Tell us about yourself

Questions about why you applied and your personality (strengths, weaknesses, achievements) / gaps

Why have you applied for this position?

Background: Checks your motivation and interest in the position, what your motivation is and how convincing are you that this is your first choice and not just a necessary solution or compromise.

- Prepare well; your response is critical
- What sets me apart?

Why are you the right candidate for us?

Background: Tests your self-perception and self-representation, and whether you can present convincing arguments.

- Prepare your response well (see self-presentation, know your own strengths)
- What problem can I solve and what achievements can I reference?

What expectations do you have for yourself / of us / of the position?

Background: Provides further proof of your motivation, shows how well-prepared you are and how realistic your expectations are.

- Offer a varied response
- Make sure you don't contradict yourself
- Make clear that you are already prepared for the position

What would you like to have achieved in 3/5/10 years?

Background: Signals your commitment, motivation, forward planning

- Share career prospects
- Explain your expectations regarding professional development as a motivated and confident employee

Where else have you applied?

Background: Shows sincerity of your application, esteem for the company

- Don't talk about specific companies or any rejections you may have received
- You may mention a specific offer if you are genuinely considering it
- Potential employer with whom you're speaking is the most important in this context

Gaps: I have a question about the period from X to Y ...

- Be honest, brief and factual. Do not become defensive.

- List and explain reasons, what strategies you used to overcome this period and to prevent another gap in your CV

Questions about the company / organization

How familiar are you with our products / market position / services?

How did you learn about our company?

Background: Checks how prepared, convincing and knowledgeable you are as well as your appreciation of your potential employer and where you looked for your information

- Preparation is useful
- It's helpful if you can apply this to yourself, but don't reveal too much about your current work

How do you imagine your work and tasks at this company?

Background: How intensively have you given thought to the potential position? How realistic are your expectations? What does this say about your character traits? Your motivation?

If the company requires it, would you be prepared to move to another city or country?

Background: This is an indicator of loyalty and flexibility.

- Don't say yes right away. You may want to ask where exactly is meant to get a better idea of specific incentives and how these align with your personal goals.

In your opinion, what makes a good supervisor / colleague?

What does your ideal working environment look like?

Background: This shows what your benchmark is for appraising colleagues or supervisors and how you address difficult questions.

- Shows appreciation, respect, self-awareness and loyalty.
- Never speak poorly of someone.
- Draw comparisons to internships / volunteer work / side jobs rather than to university professors.

Applicant questions

What questions do you have for us? What would you like to know?

Background: This switches the roles, but also indicates the applicant's level of motivation.

- Don't ask about anything that has already been cleared up during the previous parts of the interview, or that you could have researched ahead of time.

Possible questions:

- How does your initial training plan look? Who is my contact?
- Who would be my direct supervisor? Would it be possible to meet them before starting work?

- How do the individual parts of my work relate to one another (e.g. sales, marketing, service ...)?
- Is the advertised position a new one?
- How does the position fit into the company's structure and hierarchy?
- What share of my job would business travel have?
- What opportunities are available for continuing education?
- How much is the salary? Are there any extra benefits?
- How are working hours regulated?
- How many days of paid leave would I receive per year?
- How will your selection process continue / when will I receive a decision?

Inappropriate topics

- Political opinions, union activities, religious affiliations
- Private plans (marriage, family planning, leisure time activities, personal interests)
- Questions about spouses' / parents' / siblings' professions
- Previous illnesses
- Pregnancy
- Private financial circumstances

Possible responses include:

- Factually stating that the desired information does not play a role in fulfilling the requirements of the position (unless the work involves working with hazardous materials during pregnancy – then the employer **MUST** be informed!)
- Ask humorously if the employer is asking the question to show how child or family-friendly they are.
- Respond in a friendly but assertive manner that this sort of question is inappropriate.

It is important to note that such questions can reveal important things about company culture and may be relevant in deciding for or against a position there.