

Preparing for the interview

Research your prospective employer

Researching a prospective employer can help you make a good first impression at your job interview.

One of the most important things to do in preparation for an interview is to research the company with whom you are hoping to land a job. The simple act of taking the time to learn about the company will make a great impression on the interviewers since intelligent questions can be prepared from the gathered information. Researching information on any company can be accomplished using three different approaches.

The first method of researching a potential employer is through the internet and the company's website. Thorough reading of all the available information can provide excellent material for questions to ask during the interview. Many companies now have a "careers" section on their website. These sections often contain items such as descriptions of health benefits, vacation time, work environment, and position responsibilities. Learning this general information in advance can save time during the interview process and allow for more detailed questions about the open position.

The last and most direct method of gathering information on a prospective employer is to go to the prospective employer itself. Most companies are happy to provide potential applicants with information and brochures about their organization. Often, it is even possible to schedule appointments with current employees, such as managers, to ask informational questions about their organization. Before any information gathering appointment, make sure to look up all the information available about the company by one of the previously-mentioned methods. Since time is valuable, preparing intelligent questions even at this pre-applicant stage will leave the prospective employer with a great first impression. This first impression can be improved upon by sending a prompt "thank you" card.

All interviewers really enjoy interviews with job candidates that have prepared for their interviews. A prepared candidate allows the interviewer the extra time to ask and be asked more specific questions about the position applied for and the company itself. Otherwise, the interviewer ends up reciting all the general information that is readily available either in brochures, at the library, or on the internet. The whole point of researching a company before an interview is to have the best, most informative interview possible.

What should one bring to an interview?

Be sure to bring anything that is requested. The interviewer may ask you to bring your resume, portfolio, or samples of previous work. Make notes for yourself if you have to and put them on the door, on your steering wheel, etc. Just don't forget, because 'Oh! I forgot!' is not a good excuse for an interview."

Bring a notepad or notebook, a good pen, and a portfolio or pad holder. The resume and the reference list should be printed on good-quality paper. Be sure to bring extra copies of both, in case they want to give them to other people. Even though they may have copying access, it's always great to say, "I made extra copies, should you need them".

Some companies will ask you to fill out an application form when you come in for an interview, if you haven't already done so. You should bring notes with you on all the information that you might need to fill out the form, including the addresses and phone numbers of your previous employers, the dates that you worked in your previous jobs, and the salaries that you earned.

There are also some items that you should not bring to the interview. Those include gum, cigarettes, sweets, coffee, and drinks. If you have a phone with you ensure that it's switched off. Not on silentOFF.

And don't forget the intangible things you should bring - a good attitude, enthusiasm, and a smile. It's normal to get nervous before and during an interview, but take a few deep breaths if you need to, and focus your mind on the positive, and you'll be off to a good start.

Showcase your skills

Getting an interview for a coveted job opening is an exciting and important step on your career path. As you plan for the special day, keep in mind that you have just one shot to sell yourself to the person who will make the hiring decision. Here are some key things you can do to showcase your skills without coming across as a braggart:

1. **Look your best.** Select an outfit for the occasion that coordinates with the position you are applying for. In most business offices that means a dark suit with a white shirt and few accessories. Your shoes should be clean and polished, stockings should not have runs, the skirt should fall to the knee or below, and the jacket should fit comfortably around your shoulders and cuffs. Be sure the shirt, or blouse, is not low-cut. Keep makeup to a professional minimum; it should accent, not emphasize, your natural features. Wear a comfortable but up-to-date hairstyle that suits your face.
2. **Feel good.** Get a good night's sleep before the interview. Bags under your eyes or the inability to concentrate will not help your application. You want to look fresh, bright, and alert. Eat breakfast so your stomach won't get upset, or worse, make rumbling noises. Relax before the interview so you won't come across as stressed or uncertain.
3. **Watch your step.** Arrive a few minutes early, leaving time to review your notes and questions about the company and the position. Be polite to the secretary or receptionist that greets you. When ushered into the interviewer's office, walk confidently and hold your head up to display good posture. Shake hands if indicated and sit relaxed but not too casual in the chair that is offered.
4. **Be careful with body language.** Make eye contact for just a few seconds at a time. Males who hold eye contact may be viewed as aggressive, while women who do may be seen



as flirtatious. If seated or walking close to the person, remember the three-foot personal circle that many executives like to maintain. Don't fidget or appear apathetic. Face forward and avoid toying with papers, purse, or other objects.

5. **Be prepared.** Know something about the company so you can offer comments, suggestions, or ask questions. Ask about the job description because you care about making a good fit with the company and want to find a meaningful position. When given the opportunity, explain how your skills will serve the company's interests. Be truthful when asked about your past, but look for ways to turn a potential negative into a positive.

For example, when asked why you stayed at a certain job only six months, you can explain that staying longer would not have served the company's interests or advanced your career.

Look and feel enthusiastic, and demonstrate interest in the position to show that you are the most qualified candidate. Thank the interviewer for the meeting, and follow up in a day or two with a mailed card of appreciation. Following steps like these will show the employer that you are the person for the job.