



# Employment Interviews

Looking for a job is a full-time job. Many hours of work go into a successful job search campaign. The interview is a critical step toward the goal of employment. It's at the interview that the job is won or lost. The best test of any job search is the number of interviews you're offered. If you're consistently being interviewed, you should expect job offers. If you're not getting interviews, you need to reevaluate your job search strategy.

An employment interview is simply a meeting between you and a potential employer to discuss your qualifications and see if there is a "fit." The employer wants to verify what they know about you and talk about your qualifications. If you've been called for an interview, you can assume that the employer is interested in you. The employer has a need that you may be able to meet. It's your goal to identify that need and convince the employer that you're the one for the job.

Interviews can be stressful, but when you're well prepared there is no reason to panic. An interview generally lasts from 30 to 60 minutes and most questions fall into standard categories.

## Preparation

Preparation is a key to success in a calculated job search campaign. Preparation will help win the interview and will improve interview success. Begin by gathering all information and documents you may need for the interview. Bring extra copies of your resume, typed list of references and letter(s) of recommendation. You may also want to bring school transcripts, licenses and certifications. If you have them, work samples are also powerful tools (e.g., designs, drawings and writings). Finally, bring a pen and pad of paper for taking notes.

The more you know about the job, the employer and the industry, the better prepared you'll be to target your qualifications. Up to this point you should have been gathering some of this information. Now is the time to intensify your research and expand your knowledge. There are many sources of information. Ask the employer for a position description. Research employer profiles at any Minnesota WorkForce Center, the Chamber of Commerce or local library. Network with anyone you know who works for the company or for a related company.

The next step is to match your qualifications to the requirements of the job. A good approach is to write out

your qualifications along with the job requirements. Think about some standard interview questions and how you might respond. Most questions are designed to find out more about you, your qualifications or to test your reactions in a given situation. If you lack experience or skills in a required area, think about how you might make up for those deficiencies.

## The Interview

The purpose of an interview is to become acquainted and to learn about one another. The employer wants to learn how you "fit into the organization," but it's also an opportunity for you to evaluate the company. Employers use a variety of interview formats. There are series of interviews, panel interviews, phone interviews or the traditional one-on-one interviews. Sometimes staff from the personnel or human resource departments will conduct an initial screening and the hiring authority will conduct the actual interview. Whatever the form or process, the interview is a basic effort to learn your qualifications.

During an interview it's important that you be yourself. It's advised that you get a good night's sleep and plan your travel to arrive in plenty of time. However, you should present yourself for the interview no more than 15 minutes early.



## Interview Questions

The interview is a sales meeting and you are both the salesperson and the product. The basic question in every interview, whether it's asked or not, is "Why should I hire you?" All other questions center on this one issue. Basic interview questions can take a variety of forms. Generally, questions will ask about you, your qualifications, experience, skills and motivation. If you've prepared for the interview and are confident about your qualifications, none of these questions should be difficult.

Listen carefully to each question asked in the interview. Take your time in responding and make sure your answers are positive. Express a good attitude and show that you're willing to work, eager to learn and are flexible. If you're unsure of a question, don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Sometimes a good strategy is to close a response with a question for the interviewer.

Focus on your qualifications and look for opportunities to personalize the interview. Briefly answer questions with an example of how you responded in a similar situation from either your life or previous job experiences. Avoid getting too personal or dwelling too long on non-job related discussions.

Show your potential to the company. Support your answers with examples from your experience. Avoid "yes" or "no" responses to questions.

Use caution if you're questioned about your salary requirements. The best strategy is to avoid the question until you've been offered a job. Questions about salary asked before there is a job offer are usually screening questions that may eliminate you from consideration.

Keep in mind that the interview isn't over when you're asked if you have any questions. Come prepared to ask a couple of specific questions that again show your knowledge and interest in the job. This isn't the time to ask about pay or benefits.

## Closing the Interview

Close the interview in the same friendly, positive manner in which you started. If you want the job— say so. Summarize your qualifications again before leaving. When the interview is over, leave promptly. Do not overstay your time.

## After the Interview

Think about the interview and learn from the experience. Evaluate the success and failures. The more you learn from the interview, the easier the next one will become. You will become more confident.

Finally, write a "thank you" note or letter to each person who took part in the interview. Thank the employer for their time, restate your interest in the job and remind them of your intent to follow-up. Mail the letter the day of the interview.

## Additional Tips

- Maintain good eye contact throughout the interview.
- Don't be a clock watcher.
- Don't discuss illegal or discriminatory subjects such as race, religion, age, national origin, equal rights or gender.
- Be aware of nonverbal body language.
- Dress a step above what you would wear on the job.



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For additional job search assistance,  
contact your local Minnesota WorkForce Center.

[www.deed.state.mn.us](http://www.deed.state.mn.us)  
1.888.GET JOBS (1.888.438.5627)  
1.800.657.3973 (TTY)

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