

INTERVIEWS:

STEP-BY-STEP JOB INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Takeaway Points

- When an employer calls you to schedule an interview, be sure to thank the caller and confirm the interview date and time before you end the call.
- Formulate and practice reciting a clear and concise summary of your unique skills and qualifications that you could deliver in about two minutes.
- Make sure you have permission from those you wish to use as references before the interview and alert them of a potential call.
- Always emphasize your strengths and how they relate to the job when an interviewer asks what you can do for the company.

By: Team Pongo

You've landed a job interview. Now you need to make sure you're ready for it. Follow our handy checklist to help you take the right steps before, during, and after a job interview to maximize your chance of landing the job.

When You Get 'The Call'

Things to remember when an employer phones to schedule a job interview:

- Be positive and enthusiastic about the opportunity to interview.
- If you're caught off guard, be honest (for example, "Forgive me, but I've sent out several resumes this month. Could you refresh my memory about the position you're referring to?").
- Write down the date and time of the interview you have scheduled.
- Write down the **Name**, **Title**, and **Department** of the person you'll be meeting.
- Ask about parking lots or public transportation and where to enter the building—then write it down.
- Ask if there is anything specific the interviewer would like you to prepare or bring to the meeting.
- In closing, be sure to thank the caller and confirm the interview date and time (for example, "Thanks again, Ms. Lee, I look forward to meeting you on Monday the 16th at 9:00.").

Before the Interview

Congratulations, you've scheduled an interview. Now it's time to do your homework:

- Look closely at the company's web site to get a feel for its culture, business goals, products or services, financial reports, and challenges.
- Search the Internet for news or information about the company. Don't overlook blogs in your search.
- Formulate and practice reciting a clear and concise summary of your unique skills and qualifications that you could deliver in about two minutes. Avoid making it sound as if it's a "canned" speech. Ad-libbing some of it can't hurt, as long as you're clear and thorough.
- Prepare and practice answers to typical interview questions.
- Make a list of questions to ask during the interview.
- Write down examples of past successes that you can discuss in the interview.
- Contact your three references and alert them that you'll be interviewing, so they may get a call.
- Look up the exact building location online and print out a map and driving directions or public transportation route, with planned contingencies for possible delays.
- Do a "dry run" if possible – physically go to the interview site so you'll know exactly where it is and how long it will take you to get there (Hint: If it's a workday, check out what people are wearing as they enter or exit the building).

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“Don’t forget that you’re creating an impression from the very first smile to the final handshake.”

- Plan your attire and accessories and make sure everything is clean. Unless the company explicitly tells you to dress more casually, wear a suit. Present your most polished image; your “real” style can emerge once you’re hired.

Things to Take with You to the Interview

Carry a professional-looking briefcase or organizer that contains all the items you might need during the interview:

- Company address and directions.
- Bus or train schedule, if applicable.
- A photo ID (e.g. passport, green card, driver’s license).
- Detailed dates of employment and salary history, if needed to complete the job applications. **Note:** Don’t provide the salary information unless it’s mandatory.
- Interview agenda with names of interviewers (if they’ve provided one).
- List of names and dates of people you talked with already at the company (e.g. recruiter, phone screener, hiring manager).
- Name, title, and phone number of person to ask for upon arrival.
- Pen and paper.
- A copy of the job description.
- List of at least five questions you plan to ask the interviewers about the company or position.
- Three copies of the resume and cover letter you sent to the employer, printed on quality paper.
- Three copies of your list of pre-qualified references.
- Samples of related work you’ve done in the past.
- Food (something small, quick, and filling in case of an extended interview).
- Medication, if applicable.
- Comb, breath mints, lipstick, tissue, lint remover, or anything else that will help you feel confident and make the best possible presentation.

During the Interview

Don’t forget that you’re creating an impression from the very first smile to the final handshake. Follow these guidelines:

- Silence your cell phone and keep it out of sight.
- Treat each person you meet in a friendly, respectful manner (i.e., if you’re rude to the receptionist, you can bet the hiring manager will hear it “through the grapevine”).
- Stand and shake hands with each interviewer who enters the room.
- Listen attentively and ask questions where appropriate. Take brief notes.
- Be prepared to present your “elevator speech” – the short summary of who you are and the value you can bring to the organization.
- Present your skills in positive terms (i.e., emphasize your strengths and how they relate to the job).
- Ask for a business card from each interviewer, or write down their names and verify spelling (this simplifies follow-up, thank you letters, etc.).
- Don’t ask about salary or benefits in a first interview unless the interviewer initiates the topic.
- Ask when you can expect to hear from them again.

INTERVIEWS: NEGOTIATE WITH CONFIDENCE

Did you know?

Pongo's Interview Tips video program provides 12 how-to videos for every stage of the interview, plus printable checklists and interview guides.

- ❑ Ask whether it's OK to contact them for a status update if you haven't heard by a certain date they indicate they will take the next step in the process (and ask how they prefer to be contacted).

After the Interview

At this point, most candidates just sit back and cross their fingers. Your best course of action is to remain proactive. Take these steps to keep yourself in the running and add to the favorable image you've been building:

- ❑ Send a thank you note ASAP (definitely within 24 hours) to each person you interviewed with.
- ❑ Follow through on any promises you made during the interview (e.g., sending information you said you would provide).
- ❑ Make sure to contact them on the agreed-upon date to inquire about their decision making.
- ❑ Don't give up hope! The hiring process can take many weeks!

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