

Career and Employment Services Interview Guide

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upcoming interview at
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Introduction

In this guide, you'll find helpful tips to prepare for your job interview, stand out as a qualified candidate and secure the job offer. You can also visit gtc.biginterview.com to learn more and practice your interview skills.

Types of Interviews

Most interviews begin with casual conversation, introductions and an overview of the role, followed by the actual interview and a recap/thank you. It's important to be cordial to everyone you interact with throughout the process – from the receptionist to parking lot attendants to the interviewers.

Here are common types of interviews:

Phone – Telephone conference without visual aspects.

In-Person – Physical meeting generally at the employer's site.

Panel – Multiple interviewers meeting with you at the same time.

Group – Also known as "speed interviewing," multiple candidates are interviewed at the same time.

Demonstration – Candidate is asked to perform a task to demonstrate a skill.

Virtual – Video conferencing via an internet connection. The interview takes place remotely, often using technology like video conferencing and other online communication platforms.

Tips for virtual interviews:

- Familiarize yourself with the different technologies like Zoom, Skype, etc.
- Maintain an upright posture when addressing recruiters. Avoid slouching. Your face should be in the upper half of the frame.
- Be sure you are looking directly at the camera when answering questions. This shows confidence and gives the impression that you are looking at the hiring manager directly.
- Instead of a traditional handshake, start off with a head nod and smile. Connectedness is enhanced through facial expressions, smiles and affirmative head nods.
- Ensure the background/surrounding area is clean, organized and professional or use a plain virtual background.
- Avoid auditory distractions, including TV, phones, open windows, street noise and housemates, including pets, by silencing or separating yourself during the interview.

Preparing for Your Interview

Do your research – know the employer’s products, services, customers, competition, mission and vision statements.

Review the job description – understand the job requirements prior to the interview. Your answers to interview questions should pertain to information in the job description.

Know the answers to these questions:

- What is the organization’s mission, goal and purpose?
- What does the “About Us” section of their website say?
- Are they in the news?
- What are the employer demographics (size, locations, organizational structure, etc.)?
- What does the Human Resources section of their website say about the hiring process, benefits, etc.?
- What information can you glean from their LinkedIn or Facebook pages?
- What do employees think about their employer? Sites like glassdoor.com list worker impressions.

Research the interviewer – Conduct an internet search of your interviewer(s) on social media and in the news to learn more about them.

Know where you’re going – Map out directions and parking and do a dry-run of the route if you are unfamiliar with the area.

Be fully prepared – Program the organization’s number in your phone in case you need to contact them, but be sure to turn your phone off or leave it in your car before entering the facility. Bring a padfolio with a notepad, pens, extra resumes and your questions for the employer.

Dressing for Your Interview

A good rule of thumb is to think about what people in the organization typically wear and go one level up: dress like their supervisor.

Here are some guidelines based on career fields:

Trades – Industry-appropriate work wear (if a demo is expected) or one level up (dress shirt/polo and khakis or dress slacks), clean and pressed.

Medical – Button-up collared dress shirt or blouse, sport coat, dress pants or dress skirt, clean and pressed, no scrubs.

Management/Office – Full suit in navy, gray or black, tie, button-up collared shirt or blouse, clean and pressed.

Tips for choosing your interview look:

- Opt for more professional/conservative attire and colors – black, blue, gray, no fancy patterns, keep it plain.
- Closed-toe, no-heel or less than 2-inch-high heel shoes, polished.
- Avoid shorts, short skirts, sandals, flip-flops, leggings or t-shirts. Cover tattoos or unconventional piercings if the employer’s culture is conservative or unknown.
- Clean and polished appearance – omit or limit accessories and use of cologne/perfume, avoid smell of food or smoke, fresh breath is a must, but no gum or mints in the interview.

Interview Questions & Strategies

When responding to questions, it's important to focus on the employer and their needs. Your answers should come from the perspective of "what can I do for you" and you should avoid asking "what's in it for me" – until they offer you the job. In addition, be clear and direct. Answers should be concise, not evasive or overly wordy. A 90-second to 2-minute response is standard for each question.

Most Common Questions

Tell me about yourself – Limit personal information (do not mention unrelated hobbies, family, age, pets, travel, sports, etc.). Focus on professional accomplishments and skills. Connect your background directly to the requirements of the position you are interviewing for.

What is your greatest weakness? – Think of a "weakness" as an opportunity to keep growing and learning. Keep it skill-based and avoid negative personal characteristics or habits. Choose a "weakness" that is not central to the position and discuss how you're trying to improve it. Turn a "weakness" into a strength. *Sample response:* "I may take a little longer to finish a project because I pride myself on being error-free and paying attention to detail."



Traditional Questions

These are legacy interview questions that have been used since the inception of interviewing. Characterized by broad, general types of questions.

Examples:

- Why do you want to work here?
- What do you know about this organization?
- What's your greatest strength?
- Where do you see yourself in the next five years/ten years?
- What motivates you?
- What decisions are most difficult for you to make?

Behavioral Questions

These are example-based questions that require you to focus on personal experiences and situations. The candidate must recall specific instances that address the topic of the question. Topics include: leadership, challenges, human relations, initiative, teamwork, etc.

Examples:

- Tell me about a mistake that you made. How did you address it?
- Describe a challenging goal that you set and explain how you achieved it.
- Give an example of a time when you had to quickly make a decision.
- Give an example of a time you assumed a leadership role but weren't asked to do so.
- How have you previously used your analytical skills to determine a solution to a problem?
- Have you ever had to work with a difficult manager or coworker? How did you respond?

STAR Method & Example

Try this formula when answering behavioral questions:

Situation: Describe the specific situation you encountered.

Task: Describe the task you needed to accomplish.

Action: What was your role in this situation? How did you accomplish the task?

Results: What was the positive result of your action?

Example Question: “Tell me about a time you had a conflict on a team project.”

Example Answer:

Situation/Task: I was managing the creation of our new corporate brochure, and we were on a very tight deadline because we had to have brochures printed in time for a big upcoming trade show. I was in charge of delivering on time, and I had to manage team members from marketing, sales, graphic design and product management. The designer that was assigned to the project was very talented, but unfortunately missed a deadline that I assigned. When I approached him about it, he blew up at me.

Action: I was taken aback by his response, but I remained calm. I acknowledged that the deadlines were tight and explained again the reasoning and the importance of having the brochure ready for the trade show. He relaxed a little when he saw that I wasn't attacking him. He told me about all of his other competing projects and how overwhelmed he was. I asked him if there was any way that I could help him come up with a solution. Eventually, we agreed that it would help if his manager had a better understanding of how important and time-consuming this project was. We decided we would speak with her together. She ended up assigning some of his other projects to another designer, which took some of the pressure off of him.

Result: As a result, the designer was able to focus on the brochure and meet the deadlines.

He apologized for his blow-up and thanked me for my help. We successfully completed the brochure in time for the trade show and received numerous compliments from both our own sales reps and potential customers. Our trade show presence led to \$300,000 in new sales leads, and I believe the new brochure played a key role in that.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

- How do you describe the department's/organization's culture?
- What are the top priorities for the department/organization?
- What are your goals for this position in the first year?
- How would you describe the organization's management philosophy or your own?

What to do After the Interview

Write a thank you letter – immediately send a handwritten letter or personalized email to the interviewers following your interview. The thank you letter demonstrates appreciation, keeps you in the forefront of the interviewer's mind, and puts you one step above the rest. If you interview with a panel, each thank you should be personalized.