

Interviewing

The essential guide to a winning interview, including:

First impressions
The Employer's Perspective: What do employers REALLY want to know?
How to target your answers
Learn how to tell a good story
Preparing for the big day
And more!

v.2.10

Information provided as a service to our customers courtesy of:

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Congratulations, you have an interview! Now What?

All the hard work that you have put into your resume and cover letter has paid off and an employer wants to interview you. You now have the opportunity to convince the employer that you are the best fit for the job and for the company.

If you have a great resume and are fully qualified for the position, how important is the interview? No matter how good you look on paper, if you aren't able to interview successfully, you won't get the job. The interview is your chance to stand out from the other candidates.

This workshop will help you prepare for and be successful in your interviews. Before you know it, you will be getting business cards printed up for YOUR NEW JOB!

The Interview Workshop package includes the following sections:

1. Know what to expect
 - Interview formats
 - Types of interview questions
 - Research
 - The employer's perspective
2. Preparing for Interview Questions
3. How to respond to difficult questions
4. Being prepared for inappropriate questions
5. Preparing for the Big Day
 - Appearance
 - What to Bring
 - Non-Verbal Communication
 - Questions to ask the Interviewer
6. Follow Up and Thank you Letters
7. Job Offers
8. Negotiations
9. Appendix
 - Sample interview questions
 - STAR worksheets

Know What to Expect

Interview Formats

Employers use a variety of interview formats or styles to evaluate and select their candidates. Some are more common than others. Regardless of which type of interview they utilize, your goal is the same – to present your qualifications as best as you can and demonstrate that you are the best choice.

Remember the Employer's Perspective!

Managing Broker, Small Real Estate Firm

"For me, I think it has been enthusiasm that has won me over to people. In my interviews, there hasn't been a broad field of candidates. I usually do enough pre-screening so that by the time I am meeting with a candidate I am pretty sure I will be hiring them. That being said, there was a guy who I hired who was a disaster. I wish I hadn't hired him. And he was NOT enthusiastic."

When you are contacted by the representative of the employer to schedule an interview, ask the scheduler what format you can expect.

- Will it be in person or over the phone?
- Will it be structured or unstructured?
- Will there be one person or several at the interview?
- What are their names and roles at the agency / company?
- How long should you plan to be at the interview?
- Is there anything else I should know about the format of this interview?

1. Telephone Screening Interview

The telephone interview is used to weed candidates out in a rather quick amount of time. This is a good reason to have a dedicated place in your home for your job search. Also, be sure that your voice mail message is appropriate for a job search just in case you are not home to receive an employer's call.

- ▶ Dress as if you are going to a face to face interview.
- ▶ Place yourself somewhere free of distractions. No trains, other phones ringing, kids running in and out of the room or dogs barking.
- ▶ Expect the interview to last from 15 to 25 minutes (most will last about 15 minutes).
- ▶ Have three to five questions prepared to ask the interviewers.
- ▶ "Smile & Dial": The interviewer will know that you are smiling!

2. Selection Interview

Conducted by the decision-maker(s), the purpose of this interview is to explore the candidate's qualifications and to assess the comfort level of the candidate with regards to the work environment. There may be numerous interviews at this stage and different people from the organization may attend including peers and managers.

As the number of candidates is "whittled down," you may be invited back to speak with the same person and/or with other managers or members of the work group. Your ability to establish rapport and present yourself as the right person for the position is critical. Even if there is only one decision-maker, the opinions of others will be sought and will probably have an effect on the outcome. When you are invited to interview with a number of people, it is important that you present yourself effectively to each one of them.

3. Panel Interview

In a panel interview, the candidate can expect to meet with 2 or more employees of the company. The "panel" might include supervisors, peers, and/or subordinates. At the conclusion of the interview, the panel compares impressions and opinions about the candidates, and comes to a consensus decision about the final candidate.

4. Work Sample Interview

This interview is done to allow the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate his or her marketable skills. It could be the place for a graphic artist to display his/her portfolio. A salesperson may be asked to make a sales presentation. An office worker may be asked to complete a business letter using a specific type of computer software program.

5. Group Interview

This rarely used form of interview is where an employer interviews a number of candidates at once. This type of interview is often used when an employer is trying to determine how well you interact with others in a group environment. To perform successfully you should consider your position before contributing, listen and support other opinions, show courtesy and tact; remain composed, and keep a focus on the goal and on time limits.

6. Luncheon Interview

This type of interview assesses how well you can handle yourself in a social situation. Company representatives may include the hiring manager, human resources staff, and one or more peer employees. Choose your meal selection carefully. Do not order alcohol. Select healthy and easy things to eat so you can answer questions and pay attention to the conversation.

7. Stress Interview

A stress interview introduces you not to an interviewer, but to an interrogator. The interrogator will ask you a number of offensive questions that are designed to deliberately make you uncomfortable (i.e., "Would you like to have your boss's job?" or "See this pen I am holding? Sell it to me."). This is usually a test of how you will handle stress on the job.

- ▶ Keep your cool.
- ▶ Take your time in responding to the questions.
- ▶ Don't take it personally.

Four Types of Interview Questions

1. Direct

- Often answered with a "Yes" or a "No" response.
- Examples:
 - Can you work this schedule?
 - Can you perform the essential job functions?

2. Problem Solving

- Example:
 - For a Receptionist Applicant: There are three telephone lines that you have placed on hold. You are talking with the person on the other line. There are two sales people at your desk to see the manager. How would you handle this situation?

3. Open-Ended

- Generally the response to these questions is a NOT "Yes" or a "No".
- Examples:
 - What type of supervisor do you prefer?
 - What motivates you?
 - What are your strengths and weaknesses?
 -

4. Behavioral / Situational

- Behavioral questions are beneficial to employers because they can learn how you handled yourself in past work situations.
- The best indicator of how you will perform on the job is how you performed in the past: ***Past performance predicts future performance.***
- An employer determines what qualities and skills are needed and will develop questions to discover if the candidate has those qualities and skills. Instead of asking how you **would** behave, they will ask how you **did** behave. The interviewer will want to know how you handled a situation, instead of what you might do in the future.
- **Remember:** the employer is asking you to share a specific example from your past; not general statements about how you typically handle such situations.
- Examples:
 - Give us an example of a time when you made a mistake. How did you respond and what was the result?
 - Tell us about a time when you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker. How did you handle it and what was the outcome?

Ineffective Response: In general, when a conflict arises with a co-worker, I tend to approach it by talking first to the co-worker, and if that doesn't work, I ask the supervisor to mediate.

Ineffective Response: Hmm. I can't think of a time when I have had conflict with a co-worker. I am really easy-going and people typically do not have a problem working with me.

Effective Response: Actually, I experienced a bit of a miscommunication with a co-worker last year. When I was working as a shift supervisor at the café...

Meet John

John is an aspiring lawyer interviewing for a front desk support position at a busy law firm. He is entering into his last semester in college, and has been accepted to law school in the fall. His work experience includes Café Supervisor, River Raft Guide, Student Intern, and Volunteer at a Domestic Violence Shelter. Throughout the interviewing packet, John's approach will help to illustrate the techniques and exercises suggested for your interview preparation.

Research

Let's use the example of John interviewing for a Front Desk Reception position in a busy law firm. To prepare, he first did a great deal of research.

- ✓ Read and re-read the job description, highlighting all the essential skills and abilities.
- ✓ Study the company website: read Mission and Values, About Us, learn about the product and services, etc.
- ✓ Search for articles and press releases related to the firm, competing firms, and industry news.
- ✓ Review the company's financial prospectus or annual report if available.
- ✓ Talk to "insiders;" gather information from anyone who has worked at the firm, been a customer of the firm, or knows anything about their reputation.
- ✓ Online research sources such as [Vault Reports](http://www.vaultreports.com) (www.vaultreports.com) and [Yahoo! Finance](http://biz.yahoo.com/ic) (http://biz.yahoo.com/ic).
- ✓ Observe: park outside the business and observe the clients and staff that come in and out. Visit the lobby (if appropriate) and observe the culture and their approach to customer service.
- ✓ Other ideas?

The Employer's Perspective

No matter what the industry or position, employers need to know two things:

1. Does this candidate have the **ABILITY** to do the job?
 - Do you have the required knowledge, skills, and ability?
 - Do you have the aptitude and flexibility to learn?
 - Do you have work experience that reinforces your ability to do the job?
 - Do you have training / education that reinforces to your ability to do the job?
 - Will you contribute to the success of the organization?
 - Do you have good work habits?
2. Will this candidate **FIT** in well with the team / company?
 - Will you get along well with the supervisor?
 - Will you be able to effectively participate on teams?
 - How well do you handle inter-personal problems?
 - Are you self-motivated, dependable, and reliable?
 - Are you a good reflection of the company image?

- Is your presentation appropriate?
- Is your attitude positive?
- Are you excited to do the job?
- Who do you know? Is your network a good fit for my company?

If that's what the employer really wants to know, why don't they just ask? In order to understand your FIT and ABILITY, employers will try to learn about you in a variety of ways but not necessarily ask you these questions directly. Most of the questions require a Yes/No response and anyone could say, "Yes".

Preparing for Interview Questions

Visualize a wildly successful candidate on the job

Once John felt very comfortable about the essential job functions and the company culture, he **visualized** a person being **very successful** in the role of Front Desk Reception at a busy law firm.

What characteristics, skills, and qualities does this person have?

- Multi-tasker
- Friendly
- Ability to provide good service to individual lawyers; proactive
- Ability to work with diverse populations
- Knowledge of law firm operations
- Good Communicator: verbal, written, phone
- Discreet; ability to work with confidential information
- Professional Image
- Organized
- Scheduling
- High Quality Customer Service
- Problem Solving
- High Energy
- Other Qualities?

John can expect that the interviewer will ask for examples that demonstrate his behavior related to at least some of the characteristics and skills listed above. He will brainstorm examples from his past experiences. For example:

1. *Multi-tasking / Organization / Scheduling / Administrative Skills*

For this group of similar skills, John has decided to develop a specific example about his supervisory responsibilities at the café. In a food service setting, with 20 young people on staff, he had to simultaneously assist customers, place vendor orders, maintain a schedule, process timecards, anticipate needs for the next day, etc.

2. *Diverse Populations / Confidentiality*

For this group of skills, John plans to share a specific example about his volunteer experience at the Domestic Violence Shelter. He will demonstrate his empathy and understanding for individuals coming from difficult circumstances and disadvantaged populations, and let them know that he has demonstrated extreme discretion after assisting a high profile community member through a moment of crisis.

Prior to arriving at the interview, John will prepare **5-10 specific examples**. He will draw from his experiences as a supervisor at the café, volunteer at the domestic violence shelter, student and intern at the university, organizer of his ten-year class reunion, and seasonal river raft guide. All examples will show the skills, qualities, and characteristics that he thinks demonstrate his ability to do the job and fit in with the firm.

Remember the Employer's Perspective!

Manager of Certification & Reliability, Large Solar PV Manufacturer

"In today's competitive market, it's essential to be prepared. Research information about the position and company for which you are interviewing. Have many specific work examples well thought out to show how your actions and efforts have led to real, positive results in your former work experience. Balance the need to listen as well as talk. There's nothing worse than a blabber mouth or someone who only answers in terse replies."



Let's apply this exercise to your job search.

Before you go through this exercise at home, research the job, company, and culture thoroughly. Review the job description, company website, and news articles. Observe and talk to "insiders" whenever possible. Adopt the "employer's perspective" before visualizing a wildly successful candidate.

Target Position: _____

A wildly successful _____ (Target Position) has the following skills, qualities, and characteristics:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____



Select two skills/qualities from the list you created above.

You can also group your skills and qualities like John did with *Multi-tasking / Organization / Scheduling / Administrative Skills*.

<p>Skill/Quality (or group)</p> <p>#1: _____</p>	<p>Hint: Employers often ask questions to find out how you approach the following:</p>
<p>Can you think of an example from your work, volunteer, or educational experiences that demonstrates your abilities in this area? Jot down a couple of details below.</p>	<p><i>Adaptability / Flexibility</i></p> <p><i>Problem Solving</i></p> <p><i>Relationships</i></p> <p><i>Communication</i></p> <p><i>Conflict Resolution</i></p> <p><i>Integrity</i></p> <p><i>Leadership</i></p> <p><i>Listening</i></p> <p><i>Motivation / Motivating Others</i></p> <p><i>Organization</i></p>
<p>Skill/Quality (or group)</p> <p>Group #2: _____</p>	<p><i>Project Management</i></p> <p><i>Sales</i></p>
<p>Can you think of an example from your work, volunteer, or educational experiences that demonstrates your abilities in this area? Jot down a couple of details below.</p>	<p><i>Setting Goals</i></p> <p><i>Prioritizing</i></p> <p><i>Stress Management</i></p> <p><i>Teamwork</i></p> <p><i>Values Diversity</i></p> <p><i>Lessons Learned / Mistakes</i></p>

Sample Question #1: “Please tell us a little about yourself.”

First Impressions Count!

This is a common first interview question. It may be asked in different ways but you should be ready to address it succinctly and make a powerful first impression.

Here are a few tips:

- ▶ Limit your answer to 2-3 minutes.
- ▶ Your answer should be 100% relevant to the position.
- ▶ DO NOT include personal, private, and family information.
- ▶ Practice, practice, practice.
- ▶ Do your homework: understand what qualities the ideal candidate might possess.

Consider including the following ingredients in your answer:

- 1. The past:** A snapshot of your **background**- what educational background or industry do you come from, what positions have you held, what goals have you achieved? (1 minute or less)
- 2. The present:** A snapshot of **who you are and what you have to offer today**. How have your experiences changed you, how did your past experiences position you for the new opportunities that you are seeking, what skills do you enjoy using that will benefit the company, why are you in transition right now? (1 minute or less)
- 3. The future:** How does this company and position allow you to achieve your **long term goals**? Communicate this for the employer; let them know how important this opportunity is for you and how it ties together your experiences, talents, and passions. (1 minute or less)

Sample Response:

EMPLOYER: *“Good Afternoon, John. Thank you for joining us today. As you know, we are interviewing candidates for Front Office Reception in our busy law office. So, tell us a little about yourself.”*

CANDIDATE: *“Thank you so much for inviting me here today. As I’ve indicated on my resume, I have extensive experience providing service to customers at the café, and absolutely loved talking to the ‘regulars’ downtown. In addition to customer service, I spent the last 3 years supervising the staff which included scheduling up to 20 employees. I was also responsible for addressing special requests and concerns*

from our customers. I am currently enrolled in my final year of college, and have been accepted to law school in the fall. I have worked full time while attending school at night throughout my undergraduate studies, and plan to continue that schedule. I am very interested in a support position within a law firm so that I can be exposed to the rewards and challenges of a career in law. I look forward to applying my customer service and organizational skills to the lawyers and their clients in this office. Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk with you about the position today; I really appreciate your time."



Choose a job title that interests you and develop your own response.

Job Title: _____

"Tell us a little about yourself."

(Background)

(Today)

(Longer Term Goals)

(Appreciation)

Remember the Employer's Perspective!

Organizational Development VP, Large Financial Services Firm
"My pet peeve is when a candidate fails to grasp the big picture of the role, responsibilities, and duties for which they are being considered."



Turn to your neighbor and take 3 minutes each to practice your introduction. When introducing yourself, practice your handshake and make eye contact!

Story Telling Time: The STAR Approach

There's an art to telling a good story. Take your relevant examples to the next level in the interview by telling a story so that the employer:

- ▶ views you as being very well organized and a good communicator
and
- ▶ remembers you because of your engaging stories!

When preparing your examples for the interview, organize your story using the STAR approach:

1. **Set the Stage:** Briefly mention the experience that you are referencing
2. **Task / Situation:** Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. Provide enough detail for the interviewer to understand.
3. **Action:** Describe the action you took. **Keep the focus on you.** Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did - not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what ***you did***.
4. **Result:** What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Sample Question #2: Let's consider how John can demonstrate his ability to work with diverse populations and confidential matters:

"The lawyers at this firm are working with clients who come from a wide variety of backgrounds. They are ethnically and economically very diverse. The lawyers will expect you to handle completely confidential information. Give us an example of a time when you handled confidential information while working with diverse populations. How did you handle those sensitive situations?"

Sample Response: Use the STAR Model to respond to this question.

1. Set the Stage

“Actually, I have experienced something very similar. While volunteering as an on-call crisis counselor at the Domestic Violence Shelter, I was responsible for meeting clients in the emergency room or police station immediately following a violent incident.”

2. Task / Situation

“I never knew exactly who I would be meeting at the hospital or station; our clients came from all corners of the community and had very diverse ethnic, family, educational, and economic backgrounds. My job was to assure them that they were safe, and inform them of their options. I remember one incident very clearly because the client I met at the police station was a high profile member of the community.”

3. Action

“While it surprised me to find that person in that situation, I realized that this person deserved the exact same empathy, support, and discretion as every other client. I assisted with the process of filing charges and seeking medical care, and with the transition to the experienced full time counselors in our office to continue services. After that evening, I never spoke of the details.”

4. Result

“Several years later, I received a letter from the client thanking me for my presence that evening, and letting me know that they have since relocated to a different community and moved on from that relationship, made significant donations to neighboring DV agencies, and has begun volunteering in the local community providing the same service! I am thrilled that my actions impacted that person’s life in such a positive manner, and keep that letter as a reminder of the small things that we can do to make a difference in others’ lives.”



Apply the STAR model to your examples. (You can find an additional blank worksheet in the appendix for you to work on outside of the workshop.)

Skill / Quality #1 _____

What is one question that the interviewer might ask to evaluate your skills? _____

1. Set the Stage

2. Task / Situation

3. Action

4. Result



Turn to your neighbor and take three minutes each to share the story you wrote about above.

How to Respond to Difficult Questions

Employers will sometimes ask questions that call for you to share mistakes, conflicts, and weaknesses. These are often the hardest questions to answer. Aren't you supposed to talk only about how great you are in an interview? How can you tell the truth about your blunders without blowing the entire interview?

Your best defense is preparation. Hoping that you will not be asked these questions is not a plan for dealing with them!

When reflecting on some of your negative experiences, choose examples that fit the following criteria:

1. Keep it small
2. Keep it in the past
3. Choose something that does not provoke an emotional reaction from you like anger, frustration, disappointment
4. Choose something that is already solved (or a solution is in progress)

Examples of difficult questions include:

- Tell us about a time you had to deal with an irate customer. What action did you take and what was the outcome?
- Give us an example of a mistake you've made.
- What are your weaknesses?
- Have you ever experienced a conflict with a co-worker or supervisor?
- Tell us about a time when you failed to complete a project on time.
- Tell us about a time when a miscommunication led to lost profit or customers.

Sample Question #3: Let's re-visit John while he prepares for his interview with the law office. In case the interviewer asks him about an example of conflict with a co-worker, he has prepared the following story:

Sample Response

1. Set the Stage

While working as a supervisor at the café, my responsibilities included managing the schedules of up to 20 college-aged employees.

2. Task / Situation

A former supervisor, who had returned to the café on a part-time basis approached me about giving her “much deserved preference” on the schedule. In other words, she wanted no opening or closing shifts because they entailed a lot of “annoying” duties.

3. Action

I had to be very clear that she was re-hired with the understanding that she would be available for the opening shift; that was clearly communicated to her during her return interview. Additionally, it would have put a great burden on the other openers, as they would all have to pick up extra shifts. I let her know that as a part of the team, she would need to follow through on her commitments, and her former role as supervisor would not affect this need. We agreed on a compromise wherein she would be first to select her opening shifts each week; that is a privilege that comes with seniority at the café.

4. Result

She was grateful for the opportunity to have some control over her schedule, and reliably followed-through on her commitment and responsibilities. She also seemed more comfortable from that point forward collaborating with me on ideas and special projects. I feel that she respected my decision and knew that it was made for the benefit of the entire team.

Remember the Employer’s Perspective!

HR Manager, High Tech Industry

“I have a hard time with candidates who do not take a moment to think first and reflect before formulating their responses to difficult questions”

Over the course of this answer, John demonstrates skills and qualities such as conflict resolution, leadership, integrity, compromise, and team work.

Sample Question #4: Tell us about a time when you made a mistake or a bad decision. How did you respond and what was the outcome?

Sample Response

1. Set the Stage

"Last summer, when I worked as a river raft guide for tourists on the Colorado, I made a mistake that was actually very embarrassing for me!"

2. Task / Situation

"I was assigned to take an out-of-state group up the canyon to a drop-off point that I had never been to before. I was certain that I knew where I was going, so I refused directions as I was packing up the bus. (Typical guy, right?) Over an hour later, I had to acknowledge that I was completely lost! While this was frustrating for me, the delay had the potential to ruin the entire rafting trip for our customers. By the time I got back on course, we were too late to put in and finish the course before dark. I had indeed ruined their day, not to mention wasting their money!"

3. Action

"I was mortified. These folks traveled a long way for this experience, and I was not going to allow my mistake to ruin it for them. I had the next day off, but decided to work (unpaid) for the day in order to take the group back up the canyon and guide their trip. We actually had a fantastic time. To show them how sorry I was, I stayed a few extra hours to build their campfire and made the entire group my world-famous campfire calzones!"

4. Result

"I'm pretty sure they had a memorable trip. I heard from a co-worker that the entire group has reserved their spots on the river this year, and requested me as their guide!"

Remember the Employer's Perspective!

HR Manager, Hospitality / Entertainment Industry

"One candidate who really stood out in an interview was prepared and effectively responded with concrete examples when interviewed using behavioral interviewing techniques. They



**Tell us about a time when you made a mistake or a bad decision.
How did you respond and what was the outcome?**

1. Set the Stage

2. Task / Situation

3. Action

4. Result

Is this example...

- Something small or minor?
- From the past?
- Something that doesn't provoke an emotional reaction within you?
- Something that is already solved (or a solution is in progress)?



Turn to your neighbor and share your response to the above exercise.

Sample Question #5: Tell us about two of your weaknesses.

Please resist the temptation to select a “strength” and present it as a weakness; (ex: “I’m a perfectionist”... “I tend to work too hard”.... I am too passionate about my work”...)

Instead, select two to three sincere weaknesses that relate to the job in some way. Let them know that you recognize it as a weakness, and what you are doing to overcome it. Demonstrate your self-awareness, your understanding of the needs of the employer, and your pro-activeness in overcoming the weakness.

Sample Response

“I understand that there will be opportunities at this job to present information to groups. I have never been a confident public speaker; in fact, the very idea of it used to bring me to tears! In order to overcome that fear, I have taken several steps. I have volunteered to teach a gardening class, I have joined the local chapter of Toastmasters, and I am signed up for a public speaking class at the community college...”

Sample Question #6: Where do you see yourself in five years?

Employers ask this question in order to get a feel for your motivation and ambition. Do you have goals related to your professional development?

Instead of trying to fit the company with whom you’re interviewing into your five year vision, it might work better to think about the things that keep you interested, engaged, and motivated to stay with a particular company or position. Discuss these things as part of your five year vision.

Sample Response

“I thrive on challenge and variety in my job. In five years, I see myself being in a position that will allow me to be involved with setting and achieving company goals, and solving problems by being an active member of an innovative team. If I understand the job description and the goals of your company correctly, this position would be a great match!”

Sample Question #6: Were you ever fired from a job? And if so, why?

CARDINAL RULE: Do not speak negatively about your previous employers no matter what the circumstances or situation.

Share an honest answer, but not one that will cause the potential employer to assume that you are a trouble maker. Don't spend too much time on this answer; address the employer's concern and move on to the strengths that you have to offer.

If you are still very emotional about the circumstances of your separation, prepare and practice this answer!

Sample Response

"Upon reflection, I realize that I didn't take the time to fully understand my boss's expectations. From that experience, I've learned to ask certain questions ahead of time rather than make assumptions about the boss's ideas. I'm glad I had that experience, and I'm ready to move on..."

For even more ideas on how to answer questions related to your personal employment barriers, consider attending LCWC's *WorkNet A Career Journey 2010*. Register at www.larimerworkforce.org.

Sample Question #7: Please explain the gaps in your work history.

The best way to answer this question is to be honest. Were you busy and active during these periods? Were you volunteering? How did you keep your skills sharp? It doesn't really matter what you did, as long as you have an explanation that is presented in a positive manner. Hiring managers understand that people lose their job or have life circumstances that take them out of the workforce.

Here are some suggestions for how to explain what you did while you were out of the workforce.

Sample Responses

- I worked on several freelance projects while actively job seeking.
- I volunteered for a literacy program that assists disadvantaged children.
- My aging parents needed a temporary caregiver and I spent time looking after them.
- I spent time being a stay-at-home parent and volunteering at my daughter's school.
- I took some continuing education classes and seminars.

Be Prepared for Inappropriate Questions

“Are they allowed to ask me that!?”

It’s a good idea to educate yourself on some of the common mistakes that employers make in an interview. In most cases, it is not their intention to ask inappropriate questions; sometimes they aren’t as prepared as they should be. Instead of being offended, try to understand the purpose of the question so that you can provide them with a legal answer for their illegal question.

Subject	Illegal Question	Related Legal Question
National Origin/ Citizenship	✗ Are you a U.S. Citizen?	✓ Are you authorized to work in the United States?
	✗ Where were you/your parents born?	✓ What languages do you read, speak, or write fluently? (This question is OK, as long as this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.)
	✗ What is your “native tongue?”	
Appropriate response: <i>“It sounds like you are interested in knowing whether or not I am legally authorized to work in the United States. I assure you that I am; in fact, I brought my ID with me today.”</i>		
Age	✗ How old are you?	✓ Are you over the age of 18?
	✗ When did you graduate from college?	
	✗ What is your birthday?	
Disabilities	✗ Do you have any disabilities?	✓ Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodations? (This question is OK if the interviewer thoroughly described the job.)
	✗ Please complete the following medical history.	
	✗ Have you had any past or recent illnesses or operations? If yes, list and give dates.	
	✗ What was the date of your last physical exam?	NOTE: As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you may be required to undergo a medical exam. Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on the exam results.
	✗ How’s your family’s health?	
✗ When did you lose your eyesight?		

Appropriate response: *“You probably noticed that I walk with a cane. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to reduce your concern that this will ever result in a problem with my job performance or the company goals. If I understand the essential job functions accurately, I can expect to stand and address customers approximately 50% of the time. I am very comfortable with that expectation; in fact, at my last job, I performed the following physical activities regularly.... Can I answer any of your questions related to the essential job functions?”*

Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ How tall are you? ✗ How much do you weigh? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are you able to lift a 50lb weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job? (Questions about height and weight are not legal unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of the job)
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? ✓ What type of training or education did you receive in the military?
Marital/ Family Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ What is your marital status? ✗ Who do you live with? ✗ Do you plan to have a family? When? ✗ How many kids do you have? ✗ What are your child care arrangements? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? ✓ Travel is an important part of the job. Would you be willing to travel as needed by the job? ✓ This job requires overtime occasionally. Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary?

(The above three questions are OK as long as ALL the applicants are asked them)

Appropriate response: *"It sounds like you need someone who you can depend on to be here everyday, on time, with very few exceptions. At my last job, I was designated "key holder" due to the fact that I dependably arrived at the shop 15 minutes earlier than my scheduled shift."*

Remember the Employer's Perspective!

Organizational Development VP, Large Financial Services Firm

"I am impressed when a candidate demonstrates good eye contact, active listening, and asks clarifying questions."

Preparing for the Big Day

Appearance

There is not one set of rules concerning how to dress appropriately for an interview. How you will dress for an interview depends largely on your target position. There are however some general guidelines to dressing for a successful interview.

1. Research, Research, Research! Researching the company *prior* to your interview will give you an idea of how you would be required to dress on the job. Ask the person who schedules your interview what would be appropriate dress. Know the culture.
 - Guideline: dress one step above what you observe potential co-workers wearing.
 - Consider visiting the lobby (if appropriate) or the company parking lot to observe the dress and culture of employees
2. Wear clothes that are clean, pressed, comfortable and neat. This includes your shoes. If you are comfortable in what you are wearing, you will feel more confident.
3. Present a professional image. With jewelry - less is more. Pay attention to personal hygiene: hair, nails, makeup.
4. Don't wear fragrances, in this day and age you never know if someone that is interviewing you will have an allergic reaction to what you are wearing.

Dressing appropriately won't guarantee that you will get the job, but it will be a good start. If you look and feel attractive, have a positive attitude and are well groomed, you will feel more confident and make a good impression on the interviewer.

What to Bring

1. 3-5 Copies of your Resume

An employer may have questions about your employment history or your experience. It will be more convenient to refer to your copy rather than guess from memory or ask to see the employer's copy.

2. A Career Portfolio

It is not necessary to offer the employer the entire portfolio, but you may want to have copies of selected, relevant pieces to leave with the employer.

- ▶ Resume
- ▶ Letters of Recommendation
- ▶ Samples of previous positive work evaluations
- ▶ Certificates of Achievements
- ▶ Any other marketing tool that is related to the job

3. Notepad and Pen

Your interview is an open-book test. You are encouraged to bring in some (very brief) notes related to the examples & stories you've prepared as well as the interviewer questions you would like to ask. Be prepared to write down each interviewer's name so that you can prepare thank you notes, and don't be afraid to jot down keywords from multi-part questions to ensure that you are answering the question in its entirety.

4. 2-5 Questions to ask the Interviewer

5. Driver's License, Social Security Card, and any other required documentation, licenses, or certifications as needed for situations when Human Resources want to meet with you and get your personnel paperwork underway.

6. A confident positive attitude!

You have a lot of competition out there. The employer has probably spoken to several other candidates who possess the ability to do the job. They will hire the candidate who wants the job the most, and will be an enthusiastic contributor. Smile, and have fun!!

What Not to Bring

- × Cell Phone
- × Gum
- × Cigarette Smoke Odor
- × Coffee, soda, or water bottle
- × Visible piercings (when not appropriate)
- × Cover tattoos (If deemed not appropriate)
- × Excess bags, large purse, unnecessary belongings

Non-Verbal Communication

Being very well prepared to answer tough questions is very important, but you also need to consider what your non-verbal communications are saying!

College Journal reports that, according to some studies, "Body language comprises 55% of the force of any response, whereas the verbal content only provides 7%, and paralinguage -- pauses and sighs given when answering -- represents 38% of the emphasis."

The evaluation of your nonverbal communication will start as soon as you walk into the company's lobby and continue until the interview is finished. If your nonverbal communication skills aren't up to par, the quality and preparation you dedicated to your answers will be compromised.

- ▶ Make eye contact with the interviewer for a few seconds at a time.
- ▶ Smile and nod (at appropriate times) when the interviewer is talking, but, don't overdo it. Don't laugh unless the interviewer does first.
- ▶ Be polite and keep an even tone to your speech. Don't be too loud or too quiet.
- ▶ Don't slouch.
- ▶ Relax and lean forward a little towards the interviewer so you appear interested and engaged.
- ▶ Don't lean back. You will look too casual and relaxed.
- ▶ Keep your feet on the floor and your back against the lower back of the chair.
- ▶ Pay attention, be attentive and interested.
- ▶ Listen.
- ▶ Don't interrupt.
- ▶ Stay calm. Even if you had a bad experience at a previous position or were fired, keep your emotions to yourself and do not show anger or frown.
- ▶ Not sure what to do with your hands? Hold a pen and your notepad or rest an arm on the chair or on your lap, so you look comfortable.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Based on the research you have conducted of the industry, company and the position, develop several questions to bring with you to the interview. You can have them written down on a pad of paper in your briefcase or folio and refer to them when the time is appropriate.

Sample Questions:

1. How would you describe the corporate (company) culture? (i.e., dress, energy level, etc.)
2. What are the current challenges or goals for the company?
3. How has this opportunity become available?
4. What would a typical day (or week) look like?
5. What qualities are you looking for in a person for this position?
6. In six months, how will you know that you have hired the right person?
7. What is the next position(s) that this job typically leads to?
8. Assuming I was hired and performed well as a _____ for a number of years, what possible opportunities might this lead to?
9. What skills are considered most useful for success in the job I am applying for?
10. How long have you been with the organization and what do you enjoy most about your work?
11. What do you see as this position's greatest challenge at the present?
12. What are your immediate objectives and priorities for this position?
13. What level of support does this position receive in order to meet the objectives?
14. What characteristics do you value most in an employee?
15. Where does this position fit within your organization?
16. How does this position contribute to the organization's mission?
17. How is performance measured and how is successful performance rewarded?
18. Would it be possible to meet and talk with the people in the department?
19. Tell me about the training I would receive?
20. How does this organization support professional growth?
21. What are the company's growth plans for the next five years?
22. If you could waive a magic wand and have the perfect person for this position, what would he/she be like?

Follow Up Letters and Thank You Notes

- ▶ Write a thank you letter (either hand written or typed) to each person that interviewed you no later than 24 hours after the interview, even if you thought things didn't go well.
- ▶ Be brief and to the point. Note the job for which you interviewed, and also list the date of your interview.
- ▶ Always send a written thank you letter to a person by name and title.
- ▶ When thanking a potential employer, restate your interest in the position and the company.
- ▶ The thank you letter is again an opportunity to sell your qualifications. Briefly include any pertinent information you failed to mention earlier. Be sure to reemphasize your most important qualifications and skills for the job. Note anything they mentioned in the interview that you can enhance or you felt may not have been discussed fully. If there are multiple people, such as a panel interview, send a separate thank you to each person, or send a single thank you to a key person for distribution. When sending more than one thank you letter, it is more effective to vary each letter.
- ▶ Offer to come in for another interview or to provide more information if needed.

Sample Thank You Letter

June 29, 2009

Dear Mr. Johnson,

Thank you for taking the time to discuss the Front Desk Reception position with me. It was a pleasure meeting you and the entire panel. I would consider myself very lucky for the opportunity to assist your team and learn the ropes in your firm. My proven track record for service to diverse customers, organization, and resourcefulness seems to be a strong fit for your office. If I can provide you with any additional information about my qualities and abilities, please don't hesitate to call. I know your time is valuable; I am very appreciative of the time you dedicated to my qualifications.

Sincerely,

John Q. Smith

Job Offers

Some companies make an employment offer in writing with a starting date and salary commitment. However, most job offers are made over the phone or in the second interview.

- ▶ Consider responding in writing to an offer if there is not an official contract to be signed to eliminate any ambiguity as to what is expected of you, and what your wage, benefits and retirement will be. In accepting, send a letter as soon as possible. If the offer being accepted was made over the phone or verbally in the interview, repeat the offer in writing, as it was understood.
- ▶ You may receive an offer while waiting to hear from other firms. Delays may be gained by asking the employer making the first offer whether a time extension is possible, or just let them know that you would like to have a conversation with your spouse or family before accepting offers.
- ▶ If you are going to refuse an offer, do so promptly. Use good public relations when refusing an offer because you might find yourself wanting to work for that firm in the future. In addition, your new organization might be doing business with that firm, and you will be meeting many of the same people.

Remember the Employer's Perspective!

President, Small Agricultural / Produce Sales Agency

"One candidate stood out from the competition when they requested additional time for transition from their previous employer. I knew that there was good commitment to their career and respect for their former employer. I hired this individual based on that experience."

If you don't receive a job offer...

Even if you don't land the job, an interview can still be a success. All it takes is a follow-up telephone call to the interviewer. It's vital to maintain a positive attitude and carefully phrase your request to give the impression that you're seeking help and are not being a nuisance. Here are some examples:

- ▶ What elements in my background did you find appealing?
- ▶ What skills or experiences would you have liked for me to have had?
- ▶ Can you suggest other positions within your organization for which I might qualify?
- ▶ What would you suggest I do to be more successful in future interviews?

Constructive criticism not only helps you improve your interviewing skills, but also sends the message that you're still interested in working for the company. Following up also makes good networking sense because it can lead to other employment opportunities, both inside and outside that company.

NOTE: While some companies may be forthcoming about your interviewing abilities during your inquiry, others may not. Most companies are going to stick to the line that "a more qualified candidate was hired" and probably will not deviate by giving more information.

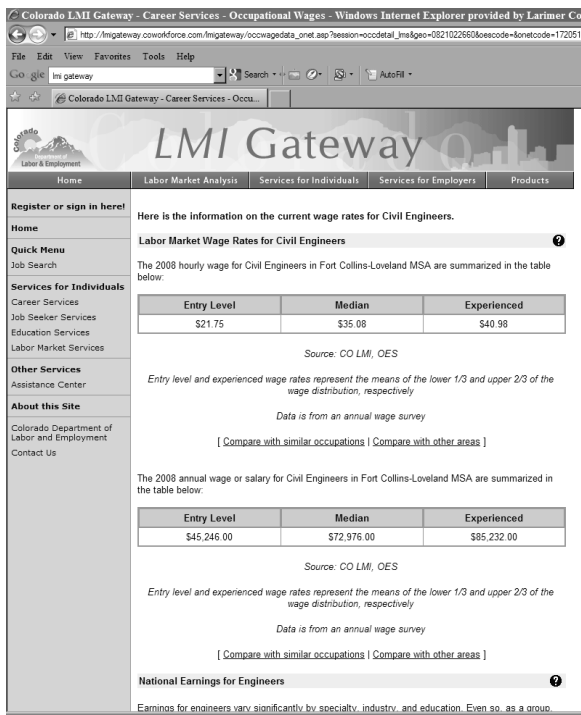
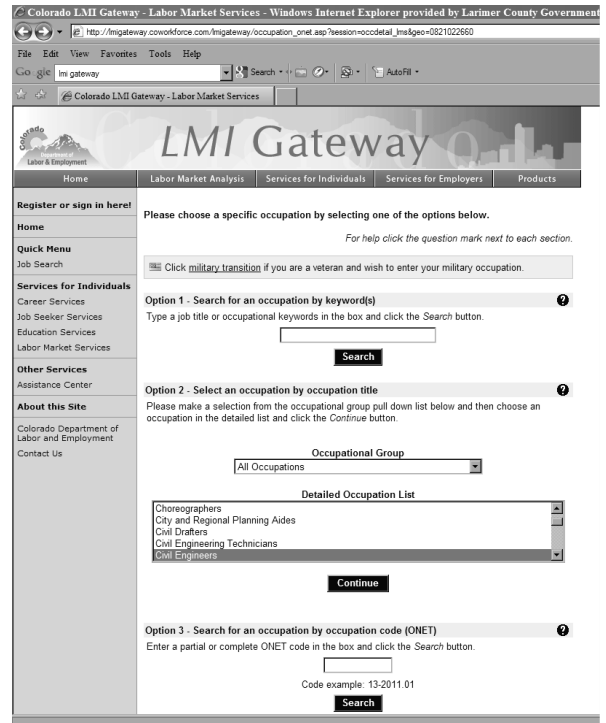
If at first you don't succeed...

Every interview, whether it leads to a job offer or not, is an opportunity for learning and personal growth. Keep your chin up! Your hard work in preparing for interviews will pay off. Keeping a positive attitude about the interviewing process though often difficult will shine through in your interview.

Negotiations

If asked for your salary requirements verbally or in writing, do your homework.

1. Go to the LMI Gateway (Labor Market Information) produced by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. <http://lmigateway.coworkforce.com/lmigateway/>
2. Click on **Labor Market Information**, and then click **Occupational Profile**.
3. Select the appropriate county or Workforce Investment Area.
4. Search for the job title that most closely resembles your new job responsibilities, and continue to the labor market information.
5. From this page, you can display more information about this occupation, and choose **wages** from the list that follows. This page displays the Entry Level, Median, and Experienced average income for that occupation in our region.
6. You are now prepared to tell the employer:



"Based on my research, a Civil Engineer with 10+ years professional experience can expect to earn between \$30-\$40 per hour, and I am comfortable working within that range..."

Other Salary Resources:

O*Net

<http://online.onetcenter.org/>

Research wages by occupation and geographic area.

Bureau of Labor and Statistics

<http://www.bls.gov/bls/blswage.htm>

Wages by occupation and geographic area.

www.salary.com

A current leader in online salary surveys.

www.payscale.com (requires signing in)

Payscale.com allows you to compare not just your current salary but also allows for evaluations of job offers, kind of a "what-if" scenario simulator.

<http://salary.nytimes.com/>

GlassDoor.com

GlassDoor.com provides salary information that has been posted anonymously by readers. In order to view information, you have to post information. In addition to salaries, the site provides company satisfaction ratings and approval rating for top executives.

www.vault.com

Actual salary information collected from employees at specific companies. Search by industry. Paid membership required to access information. Includes variable compensation and benefits information.

Appendix

Additional Interview Questions

If there is something on this list that you dread being asked, go ahead and prepare an answer ahead of time! Look for opportunities to tell stories, and remember that the employer is trying to discover evidence that you have the ability to do the job, and that you will be a good fit with the agency.

1. Tell me a little about yourself?
2. Name two of your strengths.
3. How do you respond to pressure?
4. Can you work this schedule?
5. Can you perform the essential functions of this position?
6. What are your salary requirements?
7. How would you describe your present (or past) responsibilities?
8. What type of supervisor do you prefer?
9. Name two of your weaknesses.
10. Tell me about a time when you persuaded team members to do things your way.
11. What are you looking for in your next position?
12. What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?
13. What would your peers or subordinates say about you?
14. Tell me about a time when you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.
15. How have you handled a situation in the past that required taking care of an irate customer?
16. Could you tell me about a time when you were responsible for handling an emergency situation and what the outcome was?
17. Tell me about a time when your efforts to complete a project on time were not successful.
18. For a receptionist applicant: There are three telephone lines that you have placed on hold. You are talking with a person on the other line. There are two sales people at your desk to see a manager. How would you handle the situation?
19. Why should we hire you?
20. Is there anything else we should know about you
21. For a sales position applicant: You have just finished your presentation for two representatives of a new client company. The first representative says the company needs your product but the second representative follows up by saying the company can't afford your product. What would your response be?

22. You say that you are flexible. Why did you say that?
23. Do you manage time well?
24. You mentioned that you had a conflict with another employee. What happened and what did you do to resolve the problem?
25. Why did you say you like to work in a team environment?
26. How would others describe you?
27. Why are you interested in this company?
28. Describe yourself in one word.
29. What's the single most important thing you can contribute to our organization?
30. What are your goals, personal and professional?
31. Where do you see yourself (What are your goals) in 5 years?
32. What is your favorite book? Movie? Website?
33. How do you deal with stress or conflict?
34. Describe your personality.
35. What work assignment did you like least in your past job?
36. What are things that bother you most about people?
37. Name three things that you like and dislike about your current position.
38. What would you like to be able to do better? How are you achieving this goal?
39. What is your most memorable accomplishment?
40. What would you say about your organizational abilities?
41. If you did not have economic or practical considerations and could have any job or jobs you wanted what would they be?
42. What kind of books do you like to read? Tell me about the most current book you read.
43. What chores or responsibilities do you dislike the most?
44. Identify one event that has frustrated your career growth.
45. Have you ever been terminated from a job? What were the reasons?
46. How do you spend your time outside of work?
47. What kind of people do you find most difficult to work with?
48. What kind of people do you work with best?
49. Who or what in your life has influenced you most with regard to your career objectives?
50. What do you think are the most important characteristics of the manager of the future?
51. What motivates you?
52. Who do you turn to for help when making decisions?
53. What work environment is optimal for your satisfaction and productivity?

54. Tell me about a time when you demonstrated your expertise with _____
(fill in the blank based on one of the key requirements of the job).
55. Tell me about your job experiences.
56. Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
57. Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
58. Tell me about a time when you wrote a report that was well received.
59. Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.
60. Tell me about a time when you had to make an important decision with limited facts.
61. Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
62. Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a difficult situation.
63. Tell me about a time when you were tolerant of an opinion that was different from your own.
64. Tell me about a time when you were disappointed in your behavior.
65. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an irate customer.
66. Tell me about a time when you were creative in solving a problem.
67. Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
68. Tell me about a time when you prioritized the elements of a complicated project.
69. Tell me about a time when you got bogged down in the details of a project.
70. Tell me about a time when you had to fire a friend.
71. Tell me about a time when you hired (or fired) the wrong person.

Use this worksheet to develop another relevant story for the interview:



Apply the STAR model to your examples.

Skill / Quality #1 _____

What is one question that the interviewer might ask to evaluate these skills? _____

1. Set the Stage

2. Task / Situation

3. Action

4. Result

Use this worksheet to develop another answer to a difficult or negative question.



What is one difficult question that the interviewer might ask you?

1. Set the Stage

2. Task / Situation

3. Action

4. Result

Interviewing Workshop Evaluation

Date: _____

Facilitator: _____

Please rate your workshop facilitator in the following areas	Disappointing	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent
1. Organized and prepared	1	2	3	4	5
2. Knowledgeable about the topic	1	2	3	4	5
3. Effective presentation style	1	2	3	4	5
4. Responsive to questions and comments	1	2	3	4	5

5. How did you hear about this workshop?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> LCWC website
<input type="checkbox"/> Referral from LCWC staff person
<input type="checkbox"/> A friend shared the information
<input type="checkbox"/> Email from LCWC
<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment Insurance | <input type="checkbox"/> Online posting (LinkedIn, online calendars)
<input type="checkbox"/> Posted flyer – location? _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper
<input type="checkbox"/> DHS
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |
|--|--|

Please rate how useful the workshop was in the following areas	Not Useful	Minimally Useful	Neutral	Somewhat Useful	Very Useful
6. Understanding the importance of researching a company prior to interview	1	2	3	4	5
7. Methods of research when preparing for the interview	1	2	3	4	5
8. Understanding the interview process from the employer's perspective and anticipating their questions	1	2	3	4	5
9. Answering common interview questions	1	2	3	4	5
10. Preparing questions to ask during an interview	1	2	3	4	5
11. Preparing for the interview: interview formats, attire, what to bring, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

12. This workshop was helpful to me because:

13. Other comments:

Do Not Write on This Page