

SECTION 12.3 THE JOB INTERVIEW

The job interview is an important hiring tool used by potential employers. Interviewers will interview many candidates to find the most suitable person for the position. Potential employees have a chance to “sell themselves” and to show the interviewer that they are the most suitable person for the position. Appearance, punctuality, and demeanor are important, as well as being fully prepared. Research the company and industry and practice answering and asking appropriate interview questions.

Study Questions

After studying Section 12.3, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What are the steps to an effective job interview?
 - What are the differences between closed and open-ended questions?
 - What are the follow-up steps for a job interview?
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Preparing for the Job Interview

If an employer likes a cover letter and résumé, an applicant may be asked for a job interview. At the **job interview**, that applicant meets with the employer to discuss qualifications for the job. This is the applicant’s opportunity to “show his or her stuff” in person to a potential employer. Do everything possible to make the interview a success.

This first impression to a potential employer will make the strongest statement about an applicant. Résumés and cover letters (cover message) will be remembered if the interviewer likes what he or she sees in the interview. The following key points will help applicants make a great first impression:

- **Punctuality:** The first rule of business etiquette is to arrive at the interview on time. Punctuality for the interview indicates that the applicant will be punctual on the job. Plan to arrive a bit early, in case something slows you down.

- **Appearance:**

Applicants that look neat and clean give the impression that their work will also be neat and clean. Applicants don't have to wear expensive clothes to have a good appearance. They should wear clothes that are clean and appropriate for the job for which they are interview-



Figure 12.5: A man and a woman wearing appropriate interview clothes.

ing. For example, when interviewing for a job in an office, women might wear a modest dress or pants suit and a blouse while men might wear pants with a shirt and tie. For a position at a quick-service restaurant, women might wear pants and a blouse, while men might wear pants and a polo shirt or other collared shirt. If a student is applying for a back-of-house job, he or she should wear checks and a chef coat so that the interviewer knows that the applicant is serious and has appropriate clothing. In all cases, avoid T-shirts, jeans, sleeveless or midriff tops, tennis shoes and sandals, and excessive jewelry, makeup, and strong perfume. Remember: The key is to avoid wearing anything in excess. Figure 12.5 shows job applicants dressed appropriately.

- **Good personal hygiene:** When applying for a position in the restaurant or foodservice industry, the most important point to remember is that applicants will be working with food and people—preparing, serving, and removing food or greeting guests in a restaurant and foodservice operation. In the restaurant and foodservice industry, cleanliness and neatness are absolutely essential. Good personal hygiene is no less important in any other job sought. Employers expect employees to be clean and neat in their appearance every day on the job, too.
- **Positive attitude:** If applicants smile and are enthusiastic, it suggests that they will do their work with that same attitude. Remember, the ability to smile and stay calm under pressure is necessary for a successful career in any area, but particularly in foodservice. Applicants should not worry if they're a little nervous during the interview. Most interviewers will see through the nerves and determine that the applicant is a person who takes a serious attitude toward work.
- **Good manners:** Good manners are the basis for business **etiquette** (EH-tah-kit). Saying “Please,” “Thank you,” and “Excuse me” all show good manners. If an applicant is considerate and thoughtful, the behavior implies that he or she will also act that way around coworkers and customers; excellent customer service is expected in the restaurant and foodservice industry.

When meeting the interviewer, applicants should smile, extend their hands, and exchange a friendly greeting. (See Figure 12.6.) Unless asked to do otherwise, applicants should always call the interviewer “Mr.” or “Ms.” They should wait until the interviewer invites them to sit down and then sit up straight in the chair—don't slouch or sprawl out. Avoid nervous fidgeting, such as playing with hair, drumming fingers, or tapping a pen. It's best to sit still, look alert, and pay attention to what the interviewer is saying. Practice effective listening skills. If applicants bring someone with them to the interview, they should have that person wait outside.

Remember to learn basic facts about the company before the interview. This research shows a serious interest in working for the company and in the job. Also, the potential employer may ask an applicant

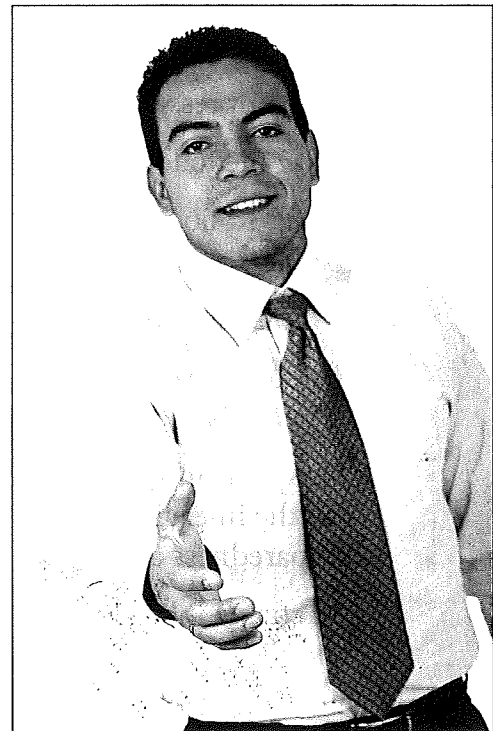


Figure 12.6: When meeting the interviewer, smile and extend hands to the interviewer.

what he or she knows about the company. Applicants should know the company size and reputation, its key products and services, and names of its competitors. This information can be found in a school library/media center, the community library, local chambers of commerce and business associations, and often online.

Some key business publications that are helpful for finding company information include *Fortune Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Barron's*, *Forbes*, *Dun & Bradstreet*, and the *Thomas Register*. Community newspapers are also good sources for information about local businesses. The school or community librarian can help access these services.

The Interview

Most job interviews last about an hour, depending on the job level. Most interviewers try to help applicants relax and feel comfortable. The potential employer will ask questions to get to know the applicant better and to see whether the applicant's talents would be a suitable match for the job available. The potential employer has a job position to fill and wants to hire someone capable of doing the job or learning it quickly. The interviewer also wants to know whether the applicant will fit in with the restaurant or foodservice team and the organization as a whole.

Think of the interview as a chance to visit a workplace, to learn more about an interesting job, and an opportunity to meet new people. It's important to make a good impression, but it's also important to be true to self.

Bring the following to the interview:

- Portfolio, including résumé
- Names, addresses, and phone numbers of three people as references, personal and professional
- Birth certificate or valid passport; Social Security card; driver's license or state-issued ID; green card or proof of ability to work in the United States

An applicant who is unsure about what work documents to bring should call the interviewer. A potential employer will be impressed by an applicant's preparedness and attention to detail.

Practicing interviewing skills with a friend is a good way to prepare for the real interview. A friend, family member, or teacher can play the role of the employer and ask sample interview questions. Give each question serious thought and come up with an answer that is honest and complete. Practicing before an interview will help answer questions quickly and accurately during the actual interview.

Although no correct or incorrect answers to interview questions are possible, some responses are more appropriate than others. The first question the interviewer may ask is, “*Why don’t you tell me a little about yourself?*” The appropriate response is to talk about accomplishments, experience, and qualifications. Practice a three-minute statement that presents capabilities. Table 12.3 lists some examples of personal characteristics that applicants might use to describe themselves during an interview.

Here is an example:

“My name is Anna Johnson. I am looking for a job that will get me started in my professional foodservice career. Currently, I am a junior at Easton High School enrolled in a program that teaches both food preparation and business management skills. For the past three years, I have been a server in our school cafeteria, the Cram Café, where I also work as a kitchen helper. The chef has even used some of my original low-fat dessert recipes. I am a good team player, and I am dependable. My grades are above average, and I really enjoy working with people. My goal is to be a restaurant manager some day. That’s why I thought this position as a part-time server at the Red Robin Café would be a great opportunity to move up the career ladder.”

Table 12.3: Personal Characteristics

accurate	able to remain calm under pressure
communicate well	dependable
energetic	entertaining
enthusiastic	good attitude
hard worker	good computer skills
high standards	leader
like people	responsible
sense of humor	tolerant
trustworthy	willing to learn and take instructions

Interview Questions and Answers

Although interviewers might ask many different kinds of questions, they all can be categorized as closed questions or open-ended questions. **Closed questions** can be answered with a simple yes or no or with a brief, factual statement. **Open-ended questions** encourage job applicants to talk about themselves,

making them feel more comfortable and giving the interviewer important information and valuable insight about the applicant.

Although **closed questions** often provide interviewers with the information they need, they don't lead anywhere. **Open-ended questions**, on the other hand, are usually thought-provoking, requiring applicants to develop in-depth responses and become actively involved in the interviewing process.

A **closed question** can be turned into an open-ended question by simply adding one or two key words, such as *what* or *how*. For example, instead of asking an applicant "Can you work on weekends?" a better, open-ended question might be "What hours can you work?" Rather than asking "Do you like to travel?" an interviewer can ask, "How do you feel about traveling?" Creating and answering interview questions are skills that must be developed. Just like any other skills, interviewing techniques improve with practice.

Following are some examples of typical interview questions:

Why do you want to work for this company? Why do you want to be a _____ in this company?

Reply: Talk about why the job or the company interests you. Avoid any reference to money.

What contributions can you make to this company?

Reply: Talk about your qualifications and skills and how they will benefit the company.

How did you hear about us?

Reply: Mention either the newspaper, Internet, a friend, a relative, or a teacher.

The next three questions are relevant if you have previous work experience:

How many jobs have you had during the past three years?

Reply: State how many jobs you've had.

What exactly did you do on your last job/current job?

Reply: Talk about your responsibilities, duties, and achievements.

Why are you leaving your present job? Why did you leave your last job?

Reply: Be honest, but don't speak ill of your previous employer or job responsibilities. Appropriate responses depend on your situation. You could say that the previous/current job allowed you to work part-time, and you're now ready to commit to full-time employment. You could also say that you are now ready to take on more responsibilities, but those opportunities were not available with

your current/previous employer. Other reasons include layoffs, reduction in work hours, or the employer was not able to accommodate your school schedule.

If we hire you, how long do you think you would be able to work here?

Reply: If you're looking at a part-time job for one semester, say so. If you're looking for full-time, permanent employment, say you hope to stay with the organization for a long time.

What are your favorite subjects in school? Why?

Reply: Name your favorite subjects and tell why.

What subject do you find most difficult?

Reply: Here is one example: "World history was my worst subject. It really bored me, and my grades showed it. But I knew a D would hurt my overall grade average, so I found a senior to tutor me in exchange for typing her term papers. By the end of the semester, I was able to pull a B." The interviewer is trying to determine your ability to persevere under less than favorable circumstances. Everyone has difficulty learning things sometimes, but a person with ambition will find a workable solution. That's what the potential employer is looking for in a good employee.

Did you participate in any school activities? Why or why not?

Reply: Name the activities. Joining school activities shows that you're a sociable person. If you had to work after school and for this reason you were not able to join any activities, say so. Be sure your answer reflects that you do work well with others.

Do you plan to continue your education?

Reply: Continuing your education is not limited to college. It can include taking additional courses in food preparation, for example, or a willingness to participate in on-the-job training. Your answer should reflect that you want to gain as much knowledge and training as possible to advance in your restaurant and foodservice career.

How many days of school or work did you miss during the last year?

Reply: While regular attendance and punctuality are extremely important in any workplace, restaurant and foodservice operators in particular depend on employees who show up for work every day and on time. Someone who is absent for several days at school or work may not be dependable on the job. If you have been absent for many days at school or work, have a reasonable explanation prepared.

Other questions interviewers may ask include questions about salary, what motivates an applicant to do a good job, and whether the applicant has ever been fired from a job. For questions regarding salary on previous jobs, tell the truth. If the interviewer asks what salary an applicant is looking for in this job, the applicant should be diplomatic, saying that they have no set figure in mind, or ask the interviewer what salary is usually offered to someone with similar qualifications.

If the applicant has ever been fired from a job, they shouldn't panic. A possible reply goes something like this, "While I usually can work with everyone, this particular boss and I just weren't a good match, in spite of my efforts to work out the problems." Applicants should always remain positive about the reasons they are no longer with an employer. Avoid talking negatively about previous managers and coworkers.

The interviewer is not allowed to ask about your race, national origin, gender, religion, marital status, age, physical or mental disabilities, or sexual preference. Asking these questions is illegal and discriminatory.

Before ending the interview, the potential employer will ask whether the applicant has any questions. This is the chance for applicants to show that they have confidence in themselves and to make sure the job is a good match for personal and professional goals.

Here are some questions applicants might consider asking the interviewer:

- Is this a new position or would I be replacing someone?
- Was the person who previously had this job promoted? (This is very important for a full-time job. The object is to discover whether the company is promoting employees or whether there is a high rate of employees leaving the company because they are unhappy.)
- Could you please describe a typical workday for me?
- If you hired me, when would you expect me to start working?
- How long would it take for me to be trained for the job?
- When do you plan on filling the position? If the interviewer says a decision will be made within one or two weeks, ask whether you may call to inquire about the decision.

Avoid asking questions about salary, vacation, bonuses, or holidays. Salary is a sensitive issue. Wait for the interviewer to bring up the subject. Ask the interviewer what the standard salary is for someone with similar qualifications. It's a good idea to have a general idea of the salary range for the job before going to the interview. Find this information at a school or community library. Although applicants should not begin the discussion, they should leave the interview knowing the overall salary range

When the interview is ended, smile, shake the person's hand, and thank the interviewer for taking the time to explain the job. If an applicant wants the job, this is the time to say so. For example, "This would be a great opportunity for me—I hope you give my qualifications serious consideration. I know I'd work well with your restaurant and foodservice team." Even if you know you don't want the job, it is important to observe business courtesy.

[fast fact]

Did You Know...?

CNN reports that the most common interview mistakes are dressing inappropriately (51 percent), badmouthing the boss (49 percent), appearing uninterested (48 percent), arrogance (44 percent), and insufficient answers (30 percent).

Follow Up After the Interview

Before leaving, gather contact information from the interviewer and follow up on the interview. A simple thank-you note can make an applicant stand out from the crowd of job seekers. Figure 12.7 is a sample thank-you note. It's a good idea to write the thank-you note as soon as possible. This proves to the employer that the applicant really wants the job. Sending a thank-you note by email is a good idea but also send a handwritten one by regular mail.

The note should be short, confirm a desire for the job, reinforce qualifications, give a time for follow-up with a phone call, and offer to meet with the potential employer again to answer any additional questions. Ending the letter with a sentence that encourages the potential employer to call is a good marketing idea. Most people read the beginning few sentences and the last sentence before reading the body of any letter.

The follow-up phone call should be on the day promised. Here is a sample follow-up phone call:

Remind the person who you are.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Brown. This is Rosé Hernandez. How are you today?"

State the reason for your call—what position you applied for.

"Ms. Brown, I'm calling to follow up on our meeting last Thursday regarding the part-time server position. It sounded like the ideal job for me."

Find out if the potential employer made a decision.

"I was wondering if you had made a decision yet."

If you got the job, write down the answers to the following questions:

“When would you like me to start working, and what time should I be there?”

“What should I bring with me?”

“Where should I go on my first day?”

“Who should I see?”

“I just need to coordinate my bus schedule; do you know how many hours I’ll be working on my first day?”

If the employer has not made a decision, don’t panic.

“I understand. Could you please tell me whether you’re still considering me for the position?”

If you are a candidate:

“Are there any questions I can answer that will show you I’m really the server you’re looking for?”

Ms. Linda Brown
Manager
Uptown Grille
75 East Pleasant Street
Funtown, USA 50094

January 5, 2011

Dear Ms. Brown:

Thank you for meeting with me on Thursday afternoon to explain the part-time server position at Uptown Grille. The responsibilities of the server position, along with the training and flexible hours, would give me a head start in my foodservice career. I definitely want to be a member of your team.

I’m confident that I can quickly learn the service techniques and become a productive member of your staff. My teachers have told me that I am a fast learner and I’m willing to attend your weekend training classes.

If I may, I’ll call you next Thursday to see if you’ve made a decision and to answer any additional questions you may have. Please don’t hesitate to call me at 123-456-7890 if you have any new questions in the meantime. Once again, thank you for considering me for the position.

Sincerely,

Faith Fitzpatrick
110 West 84th Street
Funtown, USA 50094

Figure 12.7: A sample thank-you note.

Advice from the Front

How can you stand out in a job interview? What should you do to impress your potential employers? We asked a few seasoned professionals in human resources departments around the industry to offer their advice on what you can do to go from a candidate to a new employee. Here's what they had to say:

- "Research the company you will interview with to identify not only what they do, but also what their challenges and growth areas are. Then you can convey how you will be part of the solution."
- "I always look for leadership qualities and to see whether the person is a fit with our company's values of service spirit, team spirit, and the spirit of progress."

—Arie Ball, Vice President, Sourcing and Talent Acquisition, Sodexo

- "Inquire about the organization's culture and ask the interviewer why he or she enjoys working with the company. Remember: you're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you. You want to make the best decision now so that you're not job hopping in the future."
- "Prepare a list of professional references with contact information for your prospective employer. Contact those references for permission prior to your interview so they are aware of your job search status."

—Erika Braun, Director of Human Resources, Golden Corral Corporation

- "Always bring a smile and make eye contact. Smiles are a welcoming gesture when walking in to meet someone, like an ice breaker. Eye contact shows that you are interested in what is being said and that the interviewer has your undivided attention."
- "Make sure to dress in a style that's commensurate with the position for which you are applying. Check ahead of time about the dress code of the company you are applying to and dress accordingly."

—Michael Santos, Vice President of Operations and Human Resources,
Fry Cook and Cashier, Micatrotto Restaurant Group

- "Excel at your current job by being a problem solver. Demonstrate this by reducing costs, increasing sales, enhancing customer satisfaction, promoting creativity, and being innovative."
- "Discuss what you can bring to the job that no else can. What impresses me most in the best-qualified candidates is how they can bring their unique qualities to work in a way that will support the team and ultimately the company to make a difference for our customers."

—Jerry Paullson, Senior Director, Talent Acquisition Group, Sodexo