



## Interview | Before Your Interview

Your interview's success depends on the quality of your preparation. Here are six steps to follow as you prepare for your interview:

### Step 1: Do Your Homework

A company is more than facts, products, and statistics. You want to know what it's really like to work there. Spend time on **Glassdoor** company reviews, salary reports, and interview reviews and questions. You can get a good idea of the type of questions you will be asked.

Before the interview, find out:

- Why the position is open. (Is this a new position? How long was the last person in the role? Where they promoted?)
- How long the position has been open. (Has it been hard to fill? Or have they just started looking?)
- The size of the company
- The company's primary business

Use social media, especially LinkedIn and your network, to research the company and the interviewer. Spend a little bit of time on Twitter, too. Search the company and see what employees, customers, and clients are saying about them. You can also find out key information from the recruitment agency or Human Resources.

You may also be asked to take a skill or personality assessment. These assessments are a way to measure how well you match the job. There isn't a way to prepare ahead of time for these assessments, so just relax and be as honest as possible. If you are in the technical or scientific fields, you may also be asked to prove your technical knowledge. Be prepared to showcase your knowledge to an expert in the technology they are seeking.

### Step 2: Know Your Accomplishment Stories

At this point you've probably seen a job description that includes the skills, competencies, and other requirements for the job. You need to show the interviewer that your capabilities are a good match for the job. Prepare a worksheet that lists the job criteria (requirements) expressed as tasks, responsibilities, competencies, skills or traits appear on the job posting. Reflect on your background and experience to select accomplishments that give the best evidence of your capabilities as they



relate to the employer's needs. See below for examples on how to take generic job criteria and turn it into a story worth telling.

Job criteria	Strong accomplishment statements
Creative problem solver	While working at XYZ company, I came up with a consolidated template that streamlined the process by eliminating the need for several clicks when inputting data.
Excellent communication skills	I helped keep a half million dollar account by explaining the order delay and negotiating a new delivery date, which exceeded the customer's expectations.

It's a good idea to prepare more accomplishment statements than you included in your resume. They provide proof that you demonstrated a wide range of skills for previous employers, and you will do the same for your new boss. Don't forget to SOAR! ([Hyperlink SOAR doc](#))

### Step 3: Prepare Questions

Interviewing is a two-way street and should be considered a dialogue. By asking thoughtful questions, you communicate your interest and learn a lot about the job and the company. Consider asking questions such as:

- What is the work environment like here?
- What kind of person does well here?
- How would you describe your management style?
- How are decisions made?
- What is the greatest challenge a new person may face getting started?

Don't ask a lot of questions about vacation time, coffee breaks, and sick leave. It will appear that your main interest is relaxation, not working.



Review **sample questions** to ask at the interview and select the questions that are most relevant to your situation and open position.

## 4: Prepare for Behavioral-Based Questions

In addition to the typical interview questions, you can expect to be asked how you acted in specific employee-related situations. The logic behind these questions is that how you behaved in the past will predict how you will behave in the future.

Questions are open-ended, which means you can respond with as much or little detail as you deem appropriate. Consider using the SOAR framework to provide the best response whenever possible.

Behavioral interview questions usually begin with words like:

- Describe a time when you?
- Give an example of ...?
- How did you handle ...?

General answers are not what the interviewer wants. You must describe in detail a particular event, project, or experience, how you dealt with the situation, and what the outcome was. While you cannot prepare specific answers to behavioral or hypothetical questions, review your accomplishments so that you can demonstrate that you possess the skills in question.

Beyond behavior-based questions, you might encounter any combination of difficult interview questions, some of which may seem inappropriate. Try not to take inappropriate questions personally or be offended – remember, not every interviewer is professionally trained. Responding with humour, or with a question expressed pleasantly and without belligerence, can prevent an awkward impasse.

Review **Difficult Interview Questions and Suggested Responses to help you prepare for your interviews.**

## Step 5: Practice Aloud

This may seem awkward at first, but it's the best way to rehearse your answers. It's one thing to think about what you're going to say, and another to actually say it while observing yourself, or being observed for feedback. You can practice with others, in front of a mirror, video yourself with your mobile device, or use the LHH Interview Center.

While reviewing your practice interview, pay attention to:



- **What you say:** The actual meaning that you convey.
- **How you say it:** Your choice of words, words you omit, and how you build your case. For instance, “I do best in a flexible environment,” is preferable to, “I hated the petty rules and regulations at my last job.”
- **Body language and tone of voice:** Do they support what you’re saying, or contradict it? If you are claiming to be energetic and motivated, speak with conviction and sit forward in your chair. It would be hard for an interviewer to believe you if you rarely talked above a whisper and leaned back or slouched down in your chair throughout the interview.
- **Your communication style:** Be prepared to apply the iSPEAK® techniques. This will help you focus on other people as you strive to analyze their style and adapt your own.

## Step 6: Pack Light

When deciding what to bring to your interview, keep it minimal:

- A portfolio to hold and protect papers
- Tablet, notebook, pen to jot down important information or schedule next interview. We suggest that you don’t take extensive notes during the interview because it prevents you from making good eye contact with the interviewer, which is needed to build rapport. However, capture key words or phrases to help you recall important facts and information. You can expend your notes immediately after the interview, while it’s fresh in your mind.

What about your resume and reference list? Bring them, just in case. The interviewer likely received your resume ahead of time, but if they ask for it, you can give them a copy.

And while you should have a reference list ready if needed, sending it after the fact is a great way to follow up and continue the conversation. See [Develop a Sample Reference List](#) for more.

## Step 7: Evaluate Your Digital Footprint

While you’re doing homework for your interview, the interviewer is also doing homework on you. Make sure you’re sending the right (and most current) message.

- Update your LinkedIn profile with a current photo, job responsibilities, and achievements. Ask for recommendations from colleagues if you haven’t already. Make sure your resume is up to date.



- Check your profile settings on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Turn on privacy settings so that only friends can view your profile, and limit past posts if they were ever made public. Disable the option for people to tag you in pictures and videos.
- Google yourself. Once you've made the updates, see what's out there when you Google your own name. Modify anything that comes up that you'd rather not be seen by the public.

## Interview | Interview Questions

Job interviews can be tough. Anticipating some challenging questions and being prepared to answer them will help put you at ease. Below are some strategies and techniques for answering the most commonly asked interview questions – ranging from career to sensitive issues.

As you go through the topics, think about how you would answer the question first, then check our suggested responses. Your answers might differ (for valid reasons) from those presented here, as each situation is different. Use these suggestions as an opportunity to practice, and as a guideline for your own answers.

Always keep in mind that it's essential that you position your skills, talents, and experience as solutions to the interviewer's needs.

### Background and Skills

- **Tell me about yourself.**

This is your Introductory Positioning Statement. This is also an opportunity to build rapport and give the interviewer a frame of reference. Focus on what you know this employer needs, and select the most relevant material you have. Be sure this is concise (no more than two minutes). Another thing to note: tie this to your personal brand or to the value you bring and use present tense (I am, I do, etc.). Avoid giving just a chronology of the jobs you've held in past 10 years.

- **Why should we hire you?**

Emphasize your unique qualities and value proposition, and relate them to the position whenever possible. Be prepared to back them up with accomplishments and situations where you have utilized these skills. This is where your research comes into play (Google, company website, Glassdoor, and/or OneSource) so you can speak knowledgeably about the organization.

- **How would you describe your work style?**

Your research may have given you a sense of the work style the company believes in. Is the company highly collaborative, directive, or more authoritarian in its approach? If you don't know the company's style, keep your answer situational and refer to examples from your accomplishments that demonstrate your style. If your work style differs significantly from the



organization's, it probably won't be a fit for you. Like many other questions, this one can be turned around: What kind of work styles are predominant in this organization?

- **Give me an example of a difficult decision you've made in the last 2 years and how did you come to that decision?**

Think about any accomplishments that may have been challenging to get to, and draft your story using SOAR. This is an opportunity to showcase your conflict management and problem-solving skills. In selecting material, pick the items most relevant to the needs of the employer who asked the question.

## Goals and Objectives

- **What is your ideal job?**

To prepare for this question, think about what makes you happy and unhappy in the workplace. Emphasize the positives and de-emphasize the negatives; however, a clear understanding of these will help you answer the question. Example: If you're a results-oriented person you may need a fast-paced, action-oriented role and organization. Handling details may be your strength, so a position where you can use this skill may be important to you and the employer. Again, pick the items most relevant to the needs of the employer and the position. Be prepared to talk about examples of the type of work that makes up your ideal job using the SOAR framework.

- **Where would you like to be in your career 3 years from now?**

The interviewer is usually looking to see if your aspirations fit the culture of the organization. This question can also be a way of gauging your level of ambition. If possible, suggest career paths that you know are realistic and reasonable for the organization. You can also turn this question around, asking your interviewer: what kind of career growth is possible? What is the typical career path for someone who has the skills and strengths we've discussed?

- **Describe a career goal you didn't meet. What happened and how did you handle it?**

Clearly identify the goal. Emphasize the steps you took to create success, the obstacles that you had to overcome, and how you attempted to achieve



the intended goal. Emphasize what you learned and how your behavior is different as a result of the experience.

## Education, Training, and Professional Development

- **What are you looking for in terms of career development?**

This question provides insight into how forward thinking and committed you are to your profession. Further, it reveals how informed and strategic you are in managing your career. Be prepared to share the best career option you're pursuing. For example, do you aspire to grow in your role/profession (enrichment), make a lateral move (lateral), or move up (vertical)? Researching the company can help with this one. If the company is fast-growing, they may be looking for candidates who want to grow with the organization. If the company is slow-growing, then longevity in each position may be valued.

- **If I were to ask a former colleague to recommend additional training or professional development for you, what would he or she suggest?**

The interviewer is looking for how you were perceived by your co-workers and what development needs were apparent. A safe way to answer is to note possible development areas you are interested in that relate to the position. Choose one or two areas you'd like to learn more about or develop deeper expertise in that aligns with the employer's needs. This conveys value and benefit to the future employer and avoids raising any concerns about your capability to handle this role.

- **Give me an example of something that was difficult for you to learn, and how you handled it?**

Emphasize how you have taken the challenge of learning something difficult and the steps you used to achieve the knowledge. The interviewer is looking for how you analyzed the situation, developed a plan, and the resources you used to achieve the learning. This is more about problem solving and resource utilization than the acquisition of knowledge.

## Strength, Weakness and Potential Problems

- **What are your strengths?**

This is an opportunity to match your skills and accomplishments to the



requirements of the job. To elevate the credibility of your answer, communicate in a second voice, e.g., “I have been told my strengths are ...” or “Others describe my strengths as ...” Demonstrate the strength by adding a SOAR story, e.g., “My prior managers would say that project management is a key strength. Last year I consistently had 17 projects going at one time with zero missed deadlines.”

- **What feedback do you consistently receive from peers, colleagues, or managers?**

This helps measure your team effectiveness and your relationships with the people you work with. Think about what would be relevant to the person interviewing you; most often they want to know if you will be a good fit within the existing team. Share answers that would help them see you working effectively in their organization.

- Describe relevant themes from many sources, including performance reviews.
- Describe a time when you had a dispute with a supervisor/colleague and how it was resolved.
- This is an opportunity to showcase your conflict resolution skills. Beware of criticizing anyone.

- **Give me an example of a time when your biggest weakness at work kept you from reaching an important objective.**

The question of weakness is common. Avoid the trap of saying you don't have any weaknesses. Instead, substitute the word weakness with areas of opportunity. In the workplace, it's relevant to focus on areas in which you'd like to improve or where you'd like to gain greater expertise and knowledge. Share an area you targeted for development and explain what you did to address it. If you have successfully applied this new knowledge, use the SOAR framework to share an example.

- **Tell me about one of the toughest teams/groups you've worked with. What made it difficult and how did you handle the situation?**

Use this to communicate your power and influence on a team. Don't focus on the team's behavior other than through a brief explanation to frame the rest of your answer. Focus on the actions you took to engage the team and get the work done. Finish by talking about the results, and how the team is better because of your influence. Stay away from answers like, “I told the



boss,” or “I just did it myself,” as those answers imply that you don’t take the initiative to work with the team to resolve issues.

## Salary and sensitive issues

- **What was your salary in your last job and what are you looking for in your next job?**
  - Think about the motivation behind this question. Most often, interviewers think you’ll take this job and leave as soon as you find something more suitable for you, or they may think you’re too expensive for the role’s salary range. Ask the interviewer a direct, concise question to reveal their concern about hiring you. For example, you may say, “What, specifically, is it about my background that makes you say that?” Then you need to provide credible reassurance.
  - It’s also possible that they have a misunderstanding of your past compensation or responsibilities. If so, get them back on track. The key here is to show that you’re a great match for the job and how you can hit the ground running and make an impact right away. If you are truly overqualified for the job, explain what motivated you to apply, so they can hear the excitement you have for the job regardless of the added skills you might have.
- **Why did you leave your last employer?**

This is an opportunity to use your exit statement. This question is usually asked to determine whether you have some problems or flaws that led to your leaving your last position. You need to reassure your interviewer that there are no such problems. Your confidence and tone are nearly as important as your words. This is a predictable question so your answer should be well thought out and thoroughly rehearsed. If your departure was performance or personality related, you need to rehearse your response and make sure your references will support your explanation.
- **What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?**

Again, this is an opportunity to showcase how you are able to recover from mistakes. Use the SOAR format to briefly frame the story, then move quickly to the actions you took, and finally the results of the learning. Acknowledge that everyone makes mistakes and it’s the lessons that make you better.



You can prepare this answer ahead of time so choose a scenario that is relevant for the position.