

Interviewing 101

How to Make
Them Love You
and Pay You Too



DALE CARNEGIE®
TRAINING



Congratulations!

You've put together an awesome résumé and cover letter tailored to your dream job and ideal organization and you've landed an interview. Way to go! You've made it to first base. Now comes the exciting, and often dreaded, part of your job search... the interview.

Why an Interview?

It's one thing to look good on paper. Qualifications, skills, and knowledge are definitely important; however, the ability to relate to others, establish rapport, and demonstrate a positive attitude is a whole different ballgame. Some would argue that it's even more important than the stuff on your resume. Liken it to dating. If a friend told you about someone they think you have a lot in common with, would you ask that person to marry you, sight unseen?

How you "fit" within the organization goes beyond your experience and training. Fit includes your personality, communications skills and style, and even your personal appearance. The interview provides an opportunity for the interviewer to not only check out your qualifications, but to see if you can connect with others and demonstrate good human relations skills.

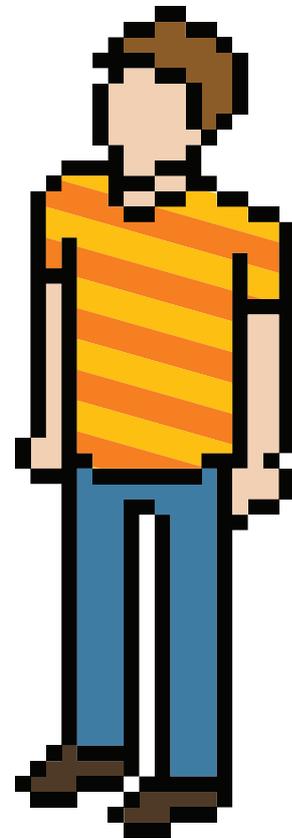
And remember, the interview is a two-way street. Think about the interview as a conversation in which you can showcase your achievements and your interpersonal skills, as well as determine if this organization is a good fit for you. In other words, use the interview as an opportunity to learn about the organization and the team you may be joining to figure out if this job will make you jump out of bed in the morning.





Welcome to Sales

The interview is a continuation of the sales process with the goal of making a sale of a valuable, high priced asset...you. Don't get out of your selling mode. You no doubt want to know what the job will pay, what the benefits are, how many vacation days you get, and if you can wear jeans to the office on Friday, but until the "sale" is made none of those questions are particularly relevant. Don't blow your chances by focusing your conversation on "what's in it for me" type questions before the job is offered. If you don't sell yourself first, the process will end with one of those dreaded rejection letters. Keep in mind that once you make the "sale" and get the offer, there will be plenty of time to get the answers to these questions. Not only that, you'll have more leverage to negotiate because you've "wowed" them and they can't wait to bring you on board.





Google, Google, Google

If you thought you were done with homework, think again. Scoring an interview and standing out from the rest of the candidates has everything to do with research and preparation. To begin with, in order to land an interview, your research should give you clues as to how to customize your resume, your credentials, career goals, and your language to the organization's vision, mission, goals, values, and culture.

Taking time to research the organization, even if it's just "googling" the company, the person or people interviewing you, and the industry in which the company belongs, will arm you with a host of information and make a memorable impression on the interviewer. Doing your homework can achieve the following:

- It can clue you in on what is important to the organization and new projects on the horizon
- It allows you to anticipate questions about your skills and competencies as they relate to the organization
- You can learn about the organizational structure and read up on the key members of the senior management team
- You can read about the interviewing team and discover ways to build rapport and show an interest in the people, the team, and the job
- You can get a handle on the organization's competitors, how they compensate their employees, and the challenges the industry is facing
- It can give you negotiating power when you receive your offer

One final note. Be aware that they have probably done their homework on you. Know what information someone can get on you through a google search and other sources.



Dress for Success

An interview is a business meeting and you only have one chance to make a first impression. Whether your face-to-face interview is at the office or in an alternate setting such as a university career center interview room, a conference room in a hotel, or a restaurant, you should be well dressed and groomed. Also, even if the job is in an industry or environment where casual attire is clearly the norm, dressing professionally provides a favorable impression and is also a display of respect and courtesy.

So use your best judgment, depending on the circumstances, but take the following into consideration:

- Formal business dress for men and women is typically a tailored, dark colored, two piece suit
- Men should consider a solid white shirt and a conservative tie
- Women should wear a blouse or shirt that is not too revealing
- Go easy on the perfume or cologne
- Limit the amount and size of the jewelry and accessories
- Men should be clean shaven
- Wear comfortable but professional looking shoes
- Lose the bulky backpack or messy briefcase
- Don't bring your own water bottle
- Don't smoke or chew gum





The Elevator Speech

For all of the interview types and formats you should be prepared to give an “elevator speech” that makes you stand out from the rest of the pack. An elevator speech is a thirty second answer to the question, “tell me about yourself”. Your response should emphasize your skills, experience, and personal characteristics that make you a good fit for this particular position and that will be of specific interest to the interviewer.

Typically you would begin with an identification of yourself in terms of your educational background or profession. It might sound something like this: “I am a business major with a focus in marketing”. After that, add other details about yourself that make you a good match for the job.

The elevator speech is also an important tool for introducing yourself in networking situations and should always be tailored to the interests of your audience. Compose your elevator speech in writing and practice it until you can do it without rambling and it becomes natural.





The Dreaded Salary Question

No matter what kind of interview you are dealing with, sooner or later the dreaded salary question will come up. More than likely, it will come up during the initial screening in order to eliminate applicants who are out of the salary range being offered. Don't shoot yourself in the foot. Answering this question with an amount is a no-win proposition. If you answer too high, you will be eliminated. If you answer too low, that is what you will be paid.

The best approach is to tell them your salary is negotiable. Express your excitement about the opportunity to work at this organization and emphasize that you are excited to learn more about the position. Don't be bullied into giving a dollar amount.





Preparing for Different Types of Interviews

If possible, find out what kind of interview you will be coming in for and the format. This will determine the kind of questions you will be asked and will allow you to prepare responses that make you stand out from the rest.

There are three common types of interviews you will probably encounter in your quest to land a job: traditional, behavioral (or experiential), and case.

A fourth interview type called situational is similar to the behavioral interview, but behavioral interviews focus on past experiences, while situational interviews concentrate on how you will react when confronted with a particular future situation. More than likely, in the course of a single interview session, you will be faced with elements of each type of interview so let's look at each type and consider the questions you might be asked.





The Traditional Interview: The main goal of the traditional interview is for the interviewer to learn more about you, why you want the job, and why you think they should hire you. Traditional interview questions might include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why have you applied for this position?
- What would you describe as your biggest accomplishment?
What was your biggest failure?
- What would you say your greatest strength is? Biggest weakness?
- Why do you feel you are the best candidate for this job?
- What did you like and dislike about your previous supervisor or boss?
- Give some examples of when you worked on a team and what your specific contribution to the team and the goals were.
- How has your university education prepared you for this position?
- What salary do you hope to be paid?





The Behavioral and Situation Interview: The goal of both the behavioral and situational interviews are to gain an understanding of how you dealt with, or will deal with, certain situations and specific problems. A behavioral perspective asks about your past and a situational interview will focus on future situations and problems.

Behavioral questions might include:

- Describe a situation when you were the leader of a team and some of the others on the team disagreed with you on the approach the team should take to solve a problem. What did you do?
- Was there a time when you had to persuade others to take a specific action? Tell me about it.
- Tell me about a time that you had a difficult professor or supervisor. How did you handle working with that person?
- Describe a time when your creativity led to a new product or solution to a particular problem.

Situational questions might be:

- If you were the leader of a team with a project and encountered a significant roadblock and your supervisor(s) were unavailable, what would you do?
- What kind of supervision do you prefer if you are on a tight deadline?
- What would you do if you had an assignment to complete and didn't have time to gather all the information needed to complete the project?

As you can see, these questions require that you have some real experiences and stories. So, begin to think about your successes, the challenges you have overcome, difficult people you have learned to deal with, teams you have been a member of, and examples of your leadership skills. Then construct compelling, interesting, and succinct stories that might come in handy as you interview. Be sure your stories demonstrate a positive attitude and an ability to get along with others. You never want to talk negatively about others in an interview since it will leave a bad taste in the interviewer's mouth. Practice getting your points across without rambling so your answers come across with greater credibility.



The Case Interview: The case interview is usually used by consulting firms and investment banking companies. Case interviews are designed to assess your problem solving, listening, and communications skills as well as the ability to think quickly under stress and then succinctly and persuasively summarize your conclusions.

The case interview goes something like this: The interviewer will present a business problem facing a particular organization. The problem may or may not be factual and the organization may be fictional but it's often the organization for which you are being interviewed. First the interviewer presents a scenario emphasizing the problem and offers some of the relevant facts important to solving the case. You'll be asked to identify key business issues, ask questions to gather information, quickly analyze the situation, and then "crack the case" by providing a solution to the problem. Generally there is no absolutely correct answer to the case so your success is based upon the thoughtfulness and relevance of the questions asked, the logic of your conclusions, and the poise and interpersonal skills displayed throughout the exercise. Most of these cases will have a fifteen to thirty minute time limit and often the interview will consist of more than one case.

To prepare for this type of interview, research the type of issues the organization is typically faced with. There are many helpful print and web resources geared towards preparing you for the case interview. In fact, some companies that employ these interviews, such as Boston Consulting Group, provide examples on their own websites including interactive cases to solve. Vault.com is an excellent resource for learning more about case interviews and the Harvard Business School has produced a series of cases to practice that are often available in your university business or career center library. Additional tips for approaching the case interview are:

- Familiarize yourself about case analysis so it is not an unknown to be faced at the time of your interview
- Form a case practice group. It's difficult to benefit from analyzing a case without a partner(s) since this is an interactive process in which your interpersonal strengths are as important as your conclusions
- Don't ramble. Practice your analysis without using space fillers such as "uh" and "um" and practice making a succinct summary statement.
- Remember that listening is the most important skill in consulting and handling a case interview



- Silence is okay as you think of questions and solutions, but don't make your pauses uncomfortably long
- Stick to the case and do not get bogged down with minor details.
- Be in tuned to our interviewer's reaction. These can provide clues for when you are going down the wrong path.
- Think out of the box. Creative thinking is a hallmark of a good consultant, so do not be afraid to demonstrate that ability in the case interview.
- Relax and think of it as a business discussion rather than an inquisition

If you are interviewing for a position in investment banking, consulting, or information technology you may be asked to solve logic problems. Like the case interview, the focus is on how you approach the solution. These problems are generally not related to a business situation and most of the problems do have an absolutely correct answer. In fact, you may already have encountered similar problems as part of your standardized college entrance exam. Sometimes, logic questions are part of the initial screening phone interview so be prepared to handle them at the beginning of your interviewing process. In short, practice the old and dreaded... "If one non-stop train leaves Cleveland going east at 55 miles per hour and another non-stop train leaves Pittsburgh at 65 miles per hour headed towards Cleveland, when will they pass?"

In addition to logic problems you might be asked to compute financial and/or probability problems as part of an initial screening or in a subsequent phone interview. Computer science and IT firms such as Microsoft will ask you to demonstrate your programming skills and systems knowledge during an initial or second phone interview. Therefore, it's important to have your laptop and your technical skills primed and ready before such interviews.



Preparing for Different Interview Formats

Given the wide range of communications technology available today, interviews can be conducted in many formats. However, most interviews will be conducted by phone and in person, with a lesser number being done via videoconference.

The Phone Interview: Generally, your first contact with the organization after you have submitted your resume will be a phone call requesting a phone interview. Don't feel you have to take the interview at that moment, but be enthusiastic about and focused on setting a mutually convenient time. Some tips include:

- Set a time when you know you will have privacy and can focus.
- Use a landline instead of a cell phone for clarity.
- Find out who will be on the phone and the position of that person within the organization.
- Confirm the date and time of the call and verify time zones if necessary

Often the first phone interview will be for screening purposes, particularly if you are one of many applicants for a position. The screening interview may be conducted by the person for whom you will work, a secretary, human resources professional, or by a committee or team.

If the screening interview is conducted by a secretary or a member of the human resources recruiting staff, you should plan for general questions about availability, salary expectations, and clarification of items in your résumé. Typically this will follow more of the traditional interviewing format. Be honest and don't offer more information than is asked for.

If the phone interviewer is done by the hiring manager or the team with which you would work, expect that the questions will be more related to your credentials and the responsibilities of the role you hope to land. This is usually a traditional interview, but may also have behavioral and situational questions.



Don't forget to review your resume and application for the position, as questions will often refer to these. Having done your research and reviewed your application materials, you should be able to predict at least some of the questions you could be asked. If you have a weakness or holes in your work experience or training that is important to this position, you'd better be prepared to address how your other attributes can benefit and overcome these.

The advantage of the phone interview is that you can anticipate questions and have notes in front of you as you speak. Use only bullet points to remind yourself of the points you want to make. Never read your answers. The disadvantage of the phone interview is the obvious fact that you can't see the body language of the interviewer which can often serve as a barometer of how you are faring with your answers. Therefore, it's crucial to listen carefully and pick up on any confusion or hesitation. Don't feel rushed to answer a question and always ask for clarification if a question seems vague.

At the end of an interview you will be asked if you have any questions. Remember, stay away from "what's in it for me" questions. This is a good time to show an interest in the interviewer with a question or comment related to how long he or she has been at the organization and what drew him or her to it. Most people enjoy talking about themselves more than listening to others speak about themselves. Also, showing an interest in your interviewer can demonstrate that you are a team oriented individual. Here is where your research into the interviewer comes into play. For example, you might bring up articles that the interviewer has written or successes that have been publicized.

Some career placement experts suggest that we dress in formal business attire for the phone interview and stand rather than sit during the interview. The idea is that when we are dressed for success, we will act more professionally. The rationale for standing is to provide better vocal quality and projection. Smiling and being animated also helps to maintain an enthusiastic tone and come across positively.



The Face-to-Face Interview: You have now passed the phone interview with flying colors and have advanced to the in-person interview. Way to go! This may seem like a no-brainer but don't blow it by arriving late. In fact, plan to arrive at least a half hour before the interview is scheduled but don't seem too anxious by checking in with the receptionist more than fifteen minutes before your appointment. We recommend making a trial run to the location where the interview will be held to be certain you know the best way to get there and can confirm the actual location of the interview.

Typically, for an on-site interview you will receive an invitation and your arrangements will be made via phone. Be flexible and accommodating. You may read or hear a variety of opinions about where in the order of interviewees it is best to position yourself. While it is true the first interviewee is something of a pacesetter for the others to top, it is also true that the last interviewee is the one most easily remembered. Nothing takes the place of having strong credentials, excellent interview preparation, and polished interviewing skills. Make a strong first impression with a handshake, a smile, and eye contact.

On-site interviews are best because you can see your interviewers, often meet the members of the team you want to join, and get a feeling for the organizational culture. Likewise, you will be viewed and judged for your fit by many more people. In fact, remember that not only those who are on your formal interview schedule may also weigh in on the decision to hire you. Therefore, you are really "on camera" or in interviewing mode from the time you walk in the door.

Many candidates with excellent credentials and perfect interviewing skills have lost opportunities because they did not remember that the receptionist who sees you when you arrive, a secretary who takes you into a interviewer's office, and the maintenance person you meet while you are taking a break. All of these people are judging you and could have the ear of the hiring manager. Even when you are taken to lunch or dinner, for some informal time, your behavior is being watched and gauged. So, always remember to keep your best interviewing skills in gear while you are on-site and in the company of potential future colleagues.

Similar to the preparation for the phone interview, research into the organization and interviewers is essential. Study up on anything you can find related to the details of the role you are applying for. Remember to review all of the materials you have submitted in application for this position. Also, print several copies of your résumé to hand to interviewers as requested. If you have additional information to add to your résumé that may have come to mind after the phone interview you could offer a revised edition to all of your interviewers.



The on-site interview could include any or all of the interview types we have described and sometimes you will be alerted in advance that the organization likes to use the behavioral and/or situational type of interview. Usually, if the case analysis type is to be used, you will be forewarned. In addition, an on-site interview may be a combination of one-on-one meetings and a larger group meeting.

A group interview requires a bit of a different approach and knowing the players in advance is of utmost importance. Frequently, the group or panel interview is a courtesy to members of the organization who will work with you either directly as peers or less directly as members of other parts of the organization. Occasionally, the group will also include supervisory personnel and the dynamics may be different than in the peer group meeting. Still other group meetings may consist primarily of personnel who would be senior to you should you be hired.

Remember, regardless of the group, you are always the interviewee and should maintain your sales mode, act as a cordial guest, and be the animated “star” of the meeting. Listen well, answer questions thoughtfully, and engage all of the participants by making eye contact and including them in the conversation. There may be times when you notice only one or two people are asking all of the questions. Still be certain that when you answer, you make eye contact with the entire group.

If the group is assembled classroom style, consider taking questions and responding on your feet to give your responses more energy. Use this opportunity to demonstrate your enthusiasm for the job. Other tips for the group interview include:

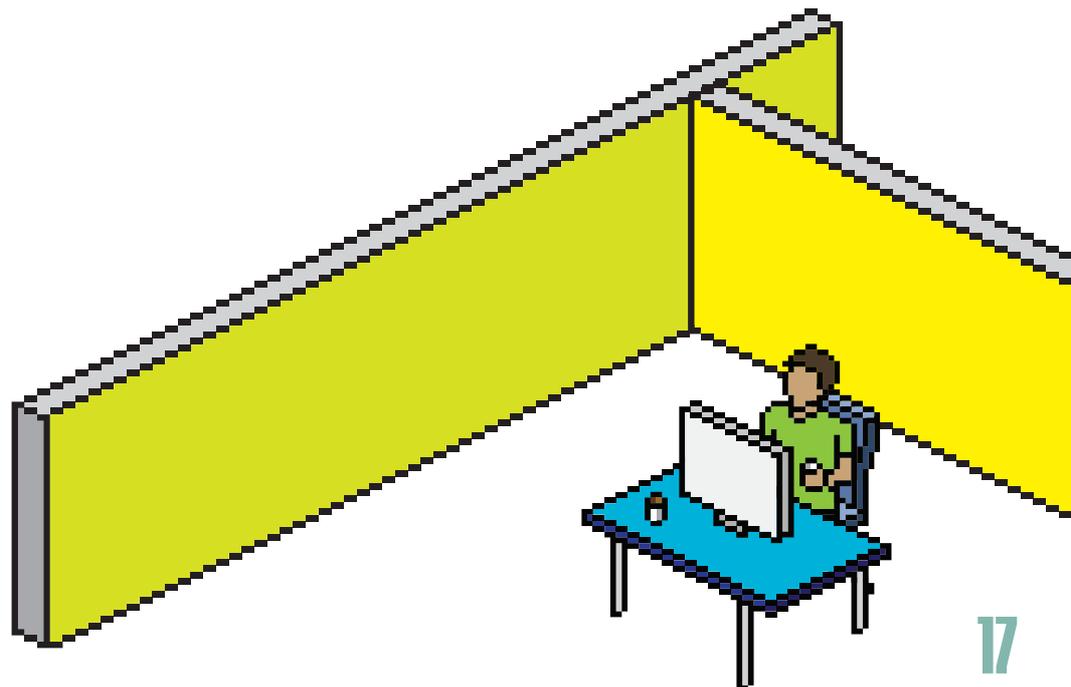
- “Never let ‘em see you sweat”. If you feel you erred on one answer, shake it off. Don’t think about your mistake. Move onto the next question with confidence.
- Smile whenever appropriate and make eye contact with everyone in the group.
- Compliment participants on perceptive questions and make them feel appreciated.
- Be mindful of areas of ‘holes’ in your education, training, or experience that you feel might create a reason for someone to object to your hiring and prepare appropriate responses showing how your other strengths and skill will compensate for those deficits. Remember sales is the practice of overcoming objections.
- If time permits and the group is smaller than a dozen or so, go around to each and shake hands and introduce yourself as they enter the interview room.



After the Interview

Always end the interview with thanks to the interviewers for their time and effort. Make certain that you mention that you are very interested in the position and that you hope to be able to meet them in person in the near future. Finally, ask what the next step will be. If they intend to interview several others and then decide their finalists, ask when they anticipate there will be a decision. Ask if you might follow up by phone shortly after their decision date if you have not heard from them. Often searches progress much more slowly than anticipated and it just makes good sense to know where you stand.

Always send a thank you note to your individual interviewers. This is an extremely important action. If there is time between the interview and their decision, send a handwritten thank you note via snail mail. Personalize the note with specifics related to the interviewer's conversation with you. This is also an opportunity to amend some answers you were not completely satisfied with or provide additional information you may have forgotten. A handwritten thank you will distinguish you from your rivals for the position and will serve as a positive reminder as the interviewers make their decision. If there is only a day or two between your interview and the anticipated decision date, send your thank you notes via email.





The Bottom Line

So here's the deal. Interviewing types and formats have changed over time, but it is still the primary way to land your dream job...

In a Nutshell:

- Prepare, prepare, prepare – for all interview types and formats
- Practice your elevator speech until it becomes natural
- Be on time. Appropriately early gives a good impression.
If you are late, you can kiss the job goodbye
- Dress appropriately and professionally
- Have several copies of your resume on hand
- Show respect for everyone you meet, use good manners,
and demonstrate good human relations skills
- Make a strong first impression with your handshake and eye contact
- Establish rapport with the interviewer. Notice something in
their office you can take an interest in and ask about
- Be relaxed and be yourself but don't be too casual or act
non-chalant
- Use confident gestures and body language, but not too
cocky or smug
- Match the energy level and tone of the interviewer



- Always use appropriate language and the organizations lingo
- Assume you have the job by using “we” when appropriate
- Be honest and sincere
- Ask pertinent questions that demonstrate you’ve done your homework
- Be positive and eager to learn more about the organization
- Don’t speak negatively about past jobs or supervisors
- Be a good listener, don’t interrupt, and maintain eye contact with the person speaking
- Anticipate objections and be prepared to respond favorably instead of defensively
- Be assertive by asking if there are any concerns you can address
- Ask about the next step
- Follow-up with thank you notes to everyone you had significant contact with. Handwritten or email notes are appropriate. Tailor each according to your interview

Interviewing can be scary, particularly when you are unaccustomed to being persuasive, talking about yourself without feeling boastful, and speaking publicly to an audience. However, with each subsequent interview your skills will improve, your confidence will build, and you may actually find interviews to be fun and exciting. We hope that’s the case.





DALE CARNEGIE®
TRAINING

Copyright 2008 All Rights Reserved. Dale Carnegie & Associates, Inc.

About the Author:

Arlene Taich has a PhD in Sociology and completed postdoctoral work in creating and sustaining corporate cultures. She has been a professor, dean and university provost; served as the Director of Executive Development and Succession Planning for Mallinckrodt Corporation and as Regional Human Capital Partner for UnitedHealthcare. She is an executive coach and currently serves as Career Strategist for Graduate and Postdoctoral Scholars at Washington University in St. Louis.

Editor: Abbe Hersing, Director, Instructional Design