



Face to Face Interview Tips

The Basic Steps of an Interview

The first 5 minutes of your interview are very important. The key factors are: your appearance, your grooming, your handshake, your personal presence, your eye contact, your articulation, and, most importantly, your personality. Notice that I did not mention anything about your work experience. That is what got you to the interview in the first place. But it is the "soft factors" that will take you to the next level.

The truth is that most interviewers are seeking individuals who are able to personally present themselves well in a face-to-face interview. They are seeking to recommend those who will be a good reflection upon themselves and their selectivity. So most interviewers naturally gravitate to specific "critical success factors" that have worked for them consistently.

In its simplest form, the interview consists of three distinct steps:

1. **Establish rapport**
2. **Gather information**
3. **Close**

It is vitally important to understand these basic steps in order to be successful in your interviewing. Each step carries with it a different focus and emphasis. Each step has its own protocol and requirements. And successful completion of each step is critical for you to go on to the next step in the process, whether that be another interview or the actual job offer.

It is important to note that there is a dual responsibility for successful completion of each of these steps. The employer has a responsibility to follow through in each step, yet you have a greater responsibility. If the employer fails in his responsibility, the company will potentially fail to hire a qualified candidate. But if you consistently fail in your responsibility, you will fail to be hired. So you need to take personal responsibility for your side of the interview process.

The establishing rapport step is where the vital first impressions are formed. Some employers will claim to be able to make a decision about a candidate in thirty seconds or less. The truth is that you will set the tone for the interview through your physical appearance and initial responses. If you start off poorly, you can recover, but only after a herculean effort. Your personal appearance will speak volumes before you ever utter a word.

Many interviewers are analyzing you in reference to the company culture. Does this person fit in? Would this person represent our company well? Would others feel I made a good selection in recommending? And the small talk is actually big talk, since it will greatly affect how you are perceived in the eyes of the interviewer. It's not necessarily the words you say, but how you say them.

Your verbal articulation and vocabulary will be noted, especially any variance, positive or negative, from the standard. If you have done your interview homework and have fully researched the company, the words will flow smoothly. If not, it will show. This is where your positive attitude and confidence will establish the tone for the interview. And this is the step during which you have the opportunity to make your personal connection with the interviewer.

In the gathering information step, the employer will be asking questions and matching your answers against their critical success factors. While preparation is important, your honesty and



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sincerity in answering should be evident. Most interviewers are keenly aware of when they are being snowed. The questions in this step will usually be probing questions which drill deep into your background, attempting to get past the interview veneer.

In the close step, the interviewer will set the hook for the next step. If you have succeeded to this point, the conversation will center on the interviewer selling you on the company and the next steps in the hiring process. If you have failed to this point, the conversation will center on the football team, the weather, or any other neutral subject which provides for a clean disengage. If your interview was successful, there will usually be an indication of future steps. You may be given further company information which is reserved for only the select few.

No matter what your view of the interview to this point, it is important to personally close the interview by establishing continuity of the process. Understand what the next step will be. "We will be reviewing all of the candidates and getting back to you," is not necessarily a close-out, although it is the standard response when there is no interest. Make certain you understand the next steps and be prepared to follow up on your side. Always pursue each interview as if it were your last. You can always back away from it later if you truly have no interest, but you cannot back away from a company that you failed to impress.

Understanding the basic steps of the interview is only the starting point. You need to be fully prepared for different personality styles, different interview styles, and different questions. You need to master your ability to present the very best you.

Mirroring Personalities

This technique is the secret to successful interviewing. If you read nothing else, read this technique. There is a simple key to success in interviewing that very few people utilize. It is the process of mirroring the personality of the person to whom you are speaking, a process that I refer to as "Personality Matching." It is based upon the proven fact that we like people who are like us. It is the halo effect in action--anyone who is like me must be a good person. Result? Instant rapport.

Any good salesperson is aware of this simple technique. Want evidence? The next time you get a call from a telemarketer, do not hang up. Instead, stick with them a few minutes just to hear their pitch. You will probably know pretty quickly if you are dealing with a "greenie" who is reading from a script or a seasoned professional. If it's a greenie, give them a polite "no thank you" and hang up. But stick with the pro through the entire call. Why? Because now we are going to have some fun.

In the beginning of the call, talk to them in a very quick and upbeat voice, possibly somewhat higher in pitch. If they are good, they will follow right along with you, matching your tempo and pitch. If not, they are still a greenie, operating in their own little world--end the call. But if they follow along, here comes the fun. Gradually slow down your rate of speaking and lower your voice in both volume and pitch. Guess what? The true pro will follow you all the way down. Surprised? Don't be. Just as a telemarketing pro is trained to do this (and at this point may not even be conscious of what they are doing), any good marketing person does the exact same thing. Whatever the industry, the most successful salespeople are the ones who meet you (the customer) at your level.



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In the same way, the best interviewees are the ones who have the ability to meet the interviewers at their level. "Wait a minute, shouldn't that be the job of the interviewer?" No! The only interviewers who have actually been trained at interviewing (Personnel/Human Resources) are usually not the ones who make the final hiring decision. Even some of the best interviewers are totally unaware of this technique or are unwilling to apply it.

So how does one do this "personality matching thing?" First match the voice and then the physical characteristics of the interviewer. In matching the voice, the most important aspect is to match the rate of speaking (tempo), then match the pitch. In matching the physical characteristics, it is most important to match (or at least reflect) the facial expressions, then the posture (sitting back or forward, etc.). Although you should not be trying to "mimic" (like a mime in action), you should attempt to closely match him or her.

To be effective with this technique, you need to first understand your own personality range. For some of us, it is quite wide and variant. For others, it may be narrower. As an example, I consider myself to have a very wide personality range--I am very comfortable in matching both the very flamboyant and the very subdued. Each type is at an extreme end of my personality range. Most people, however, operate in a somewhat narrower personality range. The key is to be able to identify your personal bounds of comfort.

So what do we do if the person we meet with is talking a mile a minute? Should we try to artificially match that person, if it is outside of our personality range? Quite simply, no. To attempt to act like someone we are not would be "faking it." It's better known as being two-faced and in the business world it can be a real killer. Some people end up getting sucked into this trap in order to get the job, then go through a continual living hell as they are forced to fake it for the duration of the job. Don't do it. But you should be aware of what your personality range is and be willing to move fluidly within that range to accommodate the personality of the individual with whom you are meeting.

Personality matching does not mean perfect matching (it never is). It does mean that we should do our best to come as close as possible to matching the other person's personality within the bounds of our own personality range. Keep in mind that there is no "perfect personality" (or perfect anything on this earth, for that matter) since what is perfect to one will always be lacking in some way to another. Perfection is relative to the recipient. Remember that.

As a side note, think about someone you truly dislike. In most cases, it's because the person is outside your personality range, usually in the upper extreme (too loud, too pushy, too cocky, too egotistical, too stuffy, etc.)--they are "too much" of something that you do not embrace in your own personality. If you have a "too much" area in your own personality, you are best advised to bring it under strict control, not only in interviewing, but in your life in general.

If you put into practice this one technique, you will likely increase your chances of success dramatically, and not just in interviewing. Personality matching is a technique that you can use in virtually all areas of human communication.

Interview Tips

Interview Tip 1: Plan Ahead - Do a little homework! Research the company and the position if possible, as well, the people you will meet with at the interview. Review your work experiences.



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Be ready to support past career accomplishments with specific information targeted toward the companies needs. Have your facts ready!

Interview Tip 2: Role Play - Once you have finished studying, begin role playing (rehearsing). Use the general questions provided below in the Interview Preparation Area. Write down answers if it helps to make your presentation more concise. Try to keep your answers to the information your new employer will want to know.

Interview Tip 3: Eye Contact - Maintain eye contact with your interviewer. Show you want the job with your interest.

Interview Tip 4: Be Positive - In particular, avoid negative comments about past employers.

Interview Tip 5: Adapt - Listen and adapt. Be sensitive to the style of the interviewer. Pay attention to those details of dress, office furniture, and general decor which will afford helpful clues to assist you in tailoring your presentation.

Interview Tip 6: Relate - Try to relate your answers to the interviewer and his or her company. Focus on achievements relevant to the position.

Interview Tip 7: Encourage - Encourage the interviewer to share information about his or her company. Demonstrate your interest. Some suggested questions to ask the interviewer are provided in the "Questions You Could Consider Asking the Employer" section.

Interview Dos

- 1) Arrive on time or a few minutes early
- 2) If presented with an application, fill it out neatly and completely. Don't attach your resume unless you're told to do so
- 3) Greet the interviewer by last name if you are sure of the pronunciation. If not, ask the employer to repeat it.
- 4) Project energy and enthusiasm. Smile and shake hands firmly.
- 5) Wait until you're offered a chair before sitting. Sit upright, look alert and interested at all times. Listen carefully and respond succinctly and articulately.
- 6) Look the hiring manager in the eye while speaking.
- 7) Early in the meeting, try to get the interviewer to describe the job and the duties to you so you can focus your responses on your background, skills and accomplishments that relate to the position.
- 8) Be sincere and truthful while focusing on communicating your specific professional achievements that relate to the accounting or finance job opening.
- 9) Keep your answers brief and concise.
Unless asked to give more detail, limit your answers to two to three minutes per question. Tape yourself and see how long it takes you to fully answer a question.
- 10) Include concrete, quantifiable data.
Interviewees tend to talk in generalities. Unfortunately, generalities often fail to convince interviewers that the applicant has assets. Include measurable information and provide details about specific accomplishments when discussing your strengths.



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- 11) Repeat your key strengths three times.
It's essential that you comfortably and confidently articulate your strengths. Explain how the strengths relate to the company's or department's goals and how they might benefit the potential employer. If you repeat your strengths then they will be remembered and—if supported with quantifiable accomplishments—they will more likely be believed.
- 12) Prepare five or more success stories.
In preparing for interviews, make a list of your skills and key assets. Then reflect on past jobs and pick out one or two instances when you used those skills successfully.
- 13) Put yourself on their team.
Ally yourself with the prospective employer by using the employer's name and products or services. For example, "As a member of _____, I would carefully analyze the _____ and _____." Show that you are thinking like a member of the team and will fit in with the existing environment. Be careful though not to say anything that would offend or be taken negatively. Your research will help you in this area.
- 14) Image is often as important as content.
What you look like and how you say something are just as important as what you say. Studies have shown that 65 percent of the conveyed message is nonverbal; gestures, physical appearance, and attire are highly influential during job interviews.
- 15) Ask questions.
The types of questions you ask and the way you ask them can make a tremendous impression on the interviewer. Good questions require advance preparation. Just as you plan how you would answer an interviewer's questions, write out specific questions you want to ask. Then look for opportunities to ask them during the interview. Don't ask about benefits or salary. The interview process is a two-way street whereby you and the interviewer assess each other to determine if there is an appropriate match.
- 16) Maintain a conversational flow.
By consciously maintaining a conversational flow—a dialogue instead of a monologue—you will be perceived more positively. Use feedback questions at the end of your answers and use body language and voice intonation to create a conversational interchange between you and the interviewer.
- 17) Research the company, product lines and competitors.
Research will provide information to help you decide whether you're interested in the company and important data to refer to during the interview.
- 18) Keep an interview journal.
As soon as possible, write a brief summary of what happened. Note any follow-up action you should take and put it in your calendar. Review your presentation. Keep a journal of your attitude and the way you answered the questions. Did you ask questions to get the information you needed? What might you do differently next time? Prepare and send a brief, concise thank you letter. Restate your skills and stress what you can do for the company.

Interview Don'ts

- 1) Don't answer with a simple "yes" or "no." Explain whenever possible.
- 2) If you don't understand a question – or need a moment to think about it - say so. Never pretend to know something or someone when you don't.
- 3) Don't rely on your application or resume to do the selling for you. Interviewers will want you to be convincing.
- 4) Don't make negative remarks about present or former employers. When explaining your reasons for leaving, communicate your rationale professionally.



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- 5) Don't over-answer questions. If the interviewer steers the conversation into controversial – or even illegal – topics, try to do more listening than speaking. Keep your responses non-committal.
- 6) Don't inquire about salary, vacations, benefits, bonuses or retirement on the initial interview.

Below are questions you may be asked in the interview

1. Tell me about yourself? (try to hold your response to 2 minutes)
2. What do you know about our company?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What can you do for us that someone else can't?
5. What do you look for in a job?
6. What skills and qualifications are essential for success in the position of _____?
7. How long would it take for you to make a meaningful contribution?
8. How does this assignment fit into your overall career plan?
9. Describe your management style.
10. What do you believe is the most difficult part of being a supervisor of people?
11. Why are you looking for a new career?
12. How would your colleagues describe you?
13. How would your boss describe you?
14. How would you describe yourself?
15. What do you think of your present or past boss?
16. What were the five most significant accomplishments in your last assignment?
17. What were the five most significant accomplishments in your career so far?
18. Can you work well under deadlines or pressure?
19. How much do you expect if we offer you this position?
20. Why do you want to work for us?
21. What other positions are you considering?
22. Have you kept up in your field with additional training?
23. What are your career goals?
24. What are your strong points?
25. What are your weak points?
26. How did you do in school?
27. What position do you expect to have in 2 to 5 years?
28. If you took the job what would you accomplish in the first year?
29. What was wrong with your current or last position?
30. What kind of hours are you used to working or would like to work?
31. Do you have your reference list with you? (Remember don't give it out unless it is asked for).
32. Can you explain your salary history?
33. What questions didn't I ask that you expected?
34. Do you have any question for me?

Below are questions you may want to ask the Interviewer

1. Why is this position open?
2. How often has it been filled in the past five years? What were the main reasons?
3. What would you like done differently by the next person who fills this position?
4. What are some of the objectives you would like to see accomplished in this job?



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5. What is most pressing? What would you like to have done in the next 3 months?
6. What are some of the long term objectives you would like to see completed?
7. What are some of the more difficult problems one would have to face in this position?
8. How do you think these could best be handled?
9. What type of support does this position receive in terms of people, finances? Etc?
10. What freedom would I have in determining my own work objectives, deadlines, and methods of measurement?
11. What advancement opportunities are available for the person who is successful in this position, and within what time frame?
12. In what ways has this organization been most successful in terms of products and services over the years?
13. What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?
14. How is one evaluated in this position?
15. What accounts for success within the company?
16. These questions are presented only as interviewing guidelines. They are meant to help you prepare for the interview. Some questions may or may not be appropriate for your interviewing situation.
17. By practicing your responses to some of these questions, hopefully you will not be taken off guard if asked one of them. Most importantly, relax, go with the flow, and before you know it, you'll be in your next job.