

JOB SEARCH TOOLKIT:

Tools & Techniques You Need for a Successful Job Hunt

The following section is entitled: **Chapter 9: Preparing for Job Interviews**

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The full text of the Job Search Toolkit is available at: ***FirstFind.org>>Look for a Job.***

Chapter

9

Preparing for Job Interviews

Once you have scheduled a job interview you should start to prepare. You never know what questions you will be asked in an interview, but you can be ready to answer some common questions. You should also be ready to talk about all of the information on your resume or Personal Data Form.

Responding well to interview questions takes a lot of practice. Sometimes it takes several job interviews to feel confident. It's kind of like learning how to drive. Someone can show you the basics, but the more you drive the better you get.

What kind of questions will I be asked?

Interviews can be short or long. You should be prepared to answer different kinds of questions. One great way to prepare is to write some common questions and then write potential answers. Once you have done this, you can practice your answers. Then you won't fumble, mumble or hesitate when an interviewer asks a question. You will have a well-prepared answer.

Use the Interview Questions Form at the end of this chapter (and in Appendix E) or use a blank page in your notebook and write "Job Interview Questions I May Be Asked" on the top. Write down "Tell me about yourself." This is one of the most common ways that interviewers start an interview. Your response to this question can set the stage for a great conversation.

This is your chance to make a general statement about your abilities and why you should be hired. This is not the time to give the details of where you have worked, lived or attended school or a training program.

Look at your skills, education and experience . Think about where you have worked, volunteered and gone to school. Write a brief answer to this question. Your answer should be no more than 3-4 sentences.

The answer to this question will include:

- The kind of work you like to do
- At least one real life example of experience, education or success
- Specific skills you have
- What you are looking for in a job

For example, you are interviewing for a job in retail that requires work in a stock room and you have relevant experience. When the interviewer says, "Tell me about yourself," you could say:

"I am a hard worker who likes to work with a team to get the job done. I have enjoyed working in a stock job where I also had to take inventory. This job used my math skills and ability to organize things. I am looking for a new job where I will be busy and can use my skills to keep track of things."

This kind of answer gives the interviewer ideas for additional questions. The interviewer could ask, "How else have you used math at work?" or "How big was the team you worked with?" or "How often did you take inventory and how long did it take?"

If you had replied, "I am a hard worker. I come to work on time and I need a job," you would not sound confident or prepared. The interviewer would not have anything to ask about. The interviewer would have to try harder to get information from you.

Here's a sample response to "tell me about yourself" for someone who wants to work in a health care related job:

"I have 5 years of experience in health care and always pride myself on providing excellent patient care. I feel especially proud of the number of patients and families who ask for me by name. I'm looking for a new job where I can exceed patient expectations and provide excellent care."

And another for a candidate interviewing for a job as a Security Guard:

"I recently earned my New York State Security Guard License because I understand the value of protecting a business, its customers and employees. I have always been very observant and while working in a residential building I knew the names of all of the tenants. I know that my skills and education will make me an asset as a Security Guard and I'm excited about starting this new career."

Writing an answer to a question like this will take some work, but it will really help you in an interview. The same answer or parts of it can be used to answer other questions, such as:

- What kind of job are you looking for?
- What kind of work are you good at?

- How would you describe yourself?

Once you are happy with your answer, you need to practice saying it. You can practice with a friend or family member or someone else who is helping you with your job search. You could also practice by yourself in front of a mirror. Your goal is to be able to make this statement with confidence.

What other questions can I expect?

Other questions that you might hear will have certain themes, or there may be a group of questions about the same topic. Here is a list of those themes and some suggestions for good answers. Write down the questions for each topic in your notebook. Leave space for the answer you would use.

Job skills

Questions about your skills and specific job experience might look like these:

- What are your qualifications for this job?
- Do you have the experience or training for this work?

Answer these questions with specific examples of similar work you have done or job training or education you have. Even if you have not performed the same work, look for skills or experience that relate to the job.

If you interview for a job in a mailroom, you can talk about how you managed many things at the same time, how you paid attention to detail and how you organized space and materials when you were a stock clerk.

You will most likely be asked specifically about past work experience:

- What were your responsibilities?
- How did you handle this task at your last job?

You should be able to talk about the experience outlined on your Personal Data Form or your resume. Write down and practice summaries of what you did at each job.

Remember to avoid using words or terms that were specific to the other places you worked. The interviewer might not understand them. For example, the interviewer may not know what an "ADR Report" is.

Education and Training

Interviewers may ask about your education or training programs you have attended. These questions may look like this:

- What was your favorite class in the training program?
- Why did you decide to get a certificate as a Home Health Aide?
- What is the most important thing that you learned in the training program?

These questions can be answered with information you wrote on your Personal Data Form or your resume. Write all of the questions and answers about your education and training in your notebook. Remember, you will be more comfortable if you think about this before an interview.

Attitude towards jobs and work

Interviewers frequently ask what you liked about previous jobs, companies, bosses or people you worked with. These questions can include:

- What do you like or dislike about this kind of work?
- How did you like the work or the job or the company or your supervisor?

Once again, it is important that you write answers that are specific about your experience. Don't say, "It was a good job" or "The job was okay." These answers are too general and don't tell the interviewer anything interesting about you. It is better to say, "I enjoyed working in a busy store where I could help customers all the time."

Don't sound negative. If you are asked what you didn't like, don't offer a list of complaints about the work, the workplace or the people. Do respond with a suggestion on what could have been improved. For example, don't say: "The boss yelled all the time" or "No one knew how hard I worked" or "It was too busy." You will sound more mature and professional if you say, "I did not get a chance to use all of my computer skills" or "I wanted more responsibility."

If you changed jobs or stopped working at one job, you should be prepared to answer a question like this:

- Why did you leave your last job?

The most common answers for this question are that you got a better job or you were laid off. If you were fired from a job, don't lie about it. Be ready to answer the question. Briefly state what happened and then explain that you learned from it. Note that it will not happen again. Don't complain that you were treated badly or that your boss was wrong. For example, if you were fired for a poor record of attendance, you could answer "I did not meet the schedule requirements, but I have learned since then about the importance of coming to work on time and when I am scheduled."

The job you are applying for

An interviewer is probably going to ask about why you want the job you are being considered for:

- Why do you want to work for this company?
- Why do you want this kind of job?
- Why are you the best candidate for this job?
- Why should you be hired for this job?

There are a few important points to remember when answering questions like these. You should find out as much as you can about the company and job that you are interviewing

for. Try to talk to people that work there. Find information about the company on the Internet. Go to the company web site and check out the history, products or services and leadership. It's also a good idea to do a general search for the company name to see if there is anything about it in the news. You will be very well prepared if you know that a new product was just launched or a new location is opening in a month. Pay a visit as a potential customer if the job is at a store, restaurant or other public location. These activities will give you specific reasons to use when you describe to the interviewer why you want to work for the organization. For example, if your research includes recent awards that the company won you can say, "I really want to work for the Health Care Agency rated #1 in patient satisfaction in New York State."

Your answer to these questions can include information about your skills or work that you have done. Don't worry if your answer sounds a lot like the question about previous jobs. Just make sure that you are talking about work that you would be doing in the new job.

You could say, "I am interested in this job because I will get to use my math skills." If the job is a cleaning position you might say, "I am interested in this job because it will let me use my eye for detail and ability to get a job done." Another good answer would be, "I like to clean!"

If you are asked questions that sound alike you can use similar answers as long as you continue to answer with enthusiasm. Don't say "I already told you..." or "I answered that question already." Interviewers meet a lot of people and may repeat questions without realizing it. Don't point this out to them - just answer the question.

Questions about you

Many interviewers ask questions to get to know you better.

These can be about your work life:

- What are your career or job goals?
- What are your plans for the future?
- What do you want to be doing five years from now?
- What would be the perfect job for you?

Answer these questions honestly. You may not have thought about these things before. So it is a good idea to prepare for these questions.

Make sure that your answers are about work. An employer does not want to hear that your goal is to "work for about a year", or "make enough money to move out of the country" or "get married and have children."

If you are interested in moving up to a better job, you can say that you want to get promoted or move to another department. There is also nothing wrong with saying something like, "I want a good job where I will be happy for a long time."

If the interviewer asks you about your dream job, don't say, "I want to be a rock star." Give an answer that relates to the job you are applying for.

As part of a conversation you may also be asked:

- What are your interests or hobbies?
- What do you enjoy doing when you are not working?
- Do you do volunteer work?

Employers are looking for people who are active and have energy. They do not need to know that you watch a lot of TV, spend hours playing video games or surfing the web. It is better to talk about something you like to do with friends or family. Your answer could include cooking, family gatherings, spending time with friends, playing with your children or taking walks. Let the employer know if you play a sport or have a hobby. Playing on a sports team shows that you can work with a group. Talking about fixing things shows that you like to work with your hands.

These are two very common questions you might hear:

- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?

You must be prepared to answer these questions. For strengths, think of something that relates to your work. Say that you are organized, hardworking, good with your hands, like to clean or like to see a job well done.

Responding to the question about your weaknesses is a bit trickier. You do not want to tell someone that you are disorganized, that you did not like customers or that you had trouble getting assignments completed. You could answer this by thinking of a weakness that could also be considered a strength. For example, you could say you are a perfectionist or you expect your co-workers to work as hard as you.

You could also answer by comparing what you like to what you don't like. For example you could say, "I like being active better than working at a job where you sit all day."

Here is an example of how these questions and answers might look on your Interview Questions Form or in your notebook.

<i>Job Interview Questions I May be Asked</i>	
<i>1. Tell me about yourself.</i>	<i>I am a hard worker who enjoys challenges and wants to find a job where I can use my customer service skills to help people find the products they want. I have a great attitude and can smile all day no matter how busy it gets.</i>
<i>2. Why do you want to work for ABC Audio?</i>	<i>I know that ABC Audio had a great reputation for selling really good equipment, doing fabulous installations and making sure everything is in good shape with follow up service. I would like to be part of a company that provides such great products and service.</i>

3. <i>What are your strengths?</i> I am a very friendly and outgoing person who gets along and can speak to all kinds of people. This makes me really well suited for providing customer service.
4. <i>What are your weaknesses?</i> I don't know a lot about electronics but I love music and am a very quick learner.
5. <i>Why did you leave your last job?</i> I was ready for more responsibility and the next job up was not available so I took a part time job that gave me more time to finish school and look for a new job at the same time. I can still return to my last job if I want.
6. <i>What did you like best about your last job?</i> I liked it when it was really busy and I just kept moving and got a lot done. I can work with more than one customer at a time, talking to one while the other is thinking or conferring with their spouse.

There's an app for that!

You can find lists of potential questions, and some recommendations for responses, and the potential to customize your answers, on apps created for your smart phone. Some free ones to check out include *Interview Buzz Lite*, *101 HR Interview Questions*, *InterviewPrep* and *HR Interview Questions & Ans*. If you install one of these apps you can check the content and use it for preparation at home or on the go. If the apps mentioned here don't work for you, search for others. There are enough free options that you should not have to pay for an app like this.

It's your turn to ask questions

At the end of an interview you will probably be asked if you have any questions. You should prepare for this. If you have questions about the job or company this is the time to ask them.

Some questions might include:

- What are the hours for this job?
- Who does the job report to?
- When do you need someone to start work?
- How much does the job pay?
- How do people get promoted?
- How many people work here?
- How many people are you hiring?
- What is the next step in the interview process?

There is no reason to be afraid to ask questions, including those about how much the job pays. You will sound more organized and ready to work if you ask good questions. You don't want to ask questions that the interviewer is not prepared to answer or could put them in an uncomfortable position. For example, don't ask,

- Did I get the job?

- How did I do?
- When can I start?

Asking about the interview process or when you will hear from the employer is better than asking, "When is my next interview?" Don't put the interviewer on the spot. You may be asked to meet someone else or schedule another appointment but don't push if it is not offered.

You should always be prepared to ask at least one question. If you cannot think of one about the job or the company you can always ask the interviewer one of these questions:

- Why do you like working here?
- How long have you worked here and why have you stayed?

These are good questions because people like talking about themselves. You can also gain some good information from the answers.

Always ask for a business card from an interviewer. You will need this to write a thank you note.

Don't Forget to Check Your Online Image

Your online image goes beyond making sure that your email address isn't curlygirl@aol.com. Before you complete any applications or send out any resumes you need to check up on what a potential employer can find out about you on the web. Is your Facebook full of photos of you at parties with lots of comments about how you felt the next morning? Did someone post a video on YouTube that includes your creative rap song about a really bad boss? When you begin a job search you should make certain that your online image is never offensive. Even if you think you deleted some photos, you may be surprised to find out those photos are still out there in cyberspace. The best advice is to post vacation photos that would look fine on the front page of the travel section of your local newspaper. You never know if someone may stumble on to something you never thought your boss would spot.

Job Interview Questions I May Be Asked
1. Tell Me About Yourself Answer
2. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? Answer
3. Why are you interested in this job? This company? Answer

4. Question Answer
5. Question Answer
6. Question Answer
7. Question Answer
8 Question Answer
9. Question Answer
10. Question Answer
11 Question Answer
12. Question Answer

The full text of the Job Search Toolkit is available at: FirstFind.org>>Look for a Job.