
INTERVIEW PREP FOR NEW GRADS

The stakes are high during job interviews, especially when you're a college student who is about to compete for your first job -- the one that could launch your career. It's no wonder you'll be nervous. But you can minimize your anxiety and put yourself in a position to win the job by preparing for your interviews, thoroughly. Here's how:

Research the Company/Organization in Depth.

Fairly or unfairly, your interviewer will expect you to know quite a bit about his organization. So at a minimum, browse the organization's Web site, read as many of its marketing materials as you can and look for articles about the organization in major periodicals or industry trade journals. If you can, dig even deeper by talking to some of the company's current employees.

Identify What You Have to Sell.

What are the top three skills or experiences you can offer to the employer that other applicants can't? Identify them before the interview, and then determine how you'll communicate them to the interviewer.

Prepare Examples.

Anyone can make claims in job interviews; far fewer people back up those claims with evidence. Be sure you fall into this latter group by thinking about some actual stories you can tell from previous work experiences to support your statements. Consider developing a career portfolio and using it as a presentation prop during the interview.

Develop Some Intelligent Questions.

At some point during your interview, you'll be asked whether you have any questions. It's important to ask questions, because they can show your level of interest in the job. So be sure you develop a few ahead of time and jot some down during the interview.

Develop Your "Close."

Successful salespeople know how to effectively close meetings with clients to win sales. Similarly, you need to learn how to close your interview to win the job -- if you want it, that is.

Practice.

At most campus career centers, you can sign up to do a mock interview with a career counselor. Take advantage of this helpful service so you can get a sense of what an interview situation is like. You can pinpoint specific questions you'll be asked and work through your responses.

Be Ready for Surprises.

It's possible, for example, that you'll be taken out to lunch or dinner as part of the interview, or you'll have to take a preemployment test, or you'll end up interviewing with more than one person. Don't be caught off guard.

Get Primped.

You need to look your very best for the interview. So get your hair cut and styled, and buy a professional outfit or two.

Know Where You're Going - Literally.

You cannot be late for interviews -- period. So get good directions to the company ahead of time, and if you can, practice traveling to the site.

Rest Up.

Get a good night's sleep before your interview so you'll be as physically, psychologically and emotionally ready for it as possible.

Plan to Bring Your Resume to the Interview.

In fact, bring several copies. Do not, however, plan to take anyone with you. You're on your own for this one.

Make Peace with Mistakes.

Your interview won't go perfectly. You'll struggle with some questions, and you may forget to make some points you'd hope to make. Accept this ahead of time, and you'll take some of the pressure off yourself so that you'll make fewer mistakes and omissions during the actual interview.