



# Interviewing

**Job Hunter**  
Workshop Series



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## Interviewing

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### **Workshop overview**

Welcome to our workshop on Interviewing, where deals are sealed or hopes are dashed. With so much at stake, you want to be prepared before you walk through the employer's front door. This workshop will teach you the latest interviewing techniques to help you become gainfully employed. Please take a moment to review the table of contents on the previous page and familiarize yourself with the topics we will cover during this course.

### **Learning objectives**

In this workshop, you will:

- Identify what an employer expects from you at an interview.
- improve your interviewing effectiveness using the handbook's guided worksheets.
- Implement strategies to prepare for an interview.
- Differentiate between positive and negative interactions that affect the employer's first impression.

## **Section one: Behind the scenes of an interview**

### **Introduction to interviewing techniques**

An interview is a chance to get to know your new potential employer and an opportunity for the employer to screen you to determine the best fit for the open position.

Job seekers may not realize that employers also can be nervous during an interview; they are under pressure to make a flawless hiring decision. Selecting the wrong person costs time and money, and may result in legal issues. It is very important during your meeting to demonstrate that you will be an asset and not a liability for the company.

### **The employer's perspective**

Interviewers are looking for a specific mixture of qualities, knowledge and abilities during the screening process. The job description that you reviewed when you applied for the position includes a long list of tasks, responsibilities, knowledge and other characteristics that their ideal candidate will possess. The bottom line in any hiring decision is whether you are the best fit for the job and if you add value to the organization.

Your four tasks during the interview are to convince the employer that 1) you are an asset to the company, 2) you are passionate about the work, and 3) you are excited to be a part of the organization, as well as 4) determine if this is the right employer for you to jumpstart your career.

Questions asked during the interview are geared to discovering if you have screenable characteristics that are highly regarded by employers. These include:

- Your capabilities, expertise and knowledge to be successful on the job from day one.
- Your professionalism and level of responsibility, and whether you will require supervision or can work independently.
- Your compatibility with those already working for the department or the overall culture of the company (teamwork, personality, ethics, passion for the work, etc.).



## Interviewing

- Early arrival for the interview and prepared to interview (dress, attitude, etc.).
- Positive or neutral about your previous employers (no bad-mouthing).
- Honest responses, including consistency (if you are building off one story, that the original story is still consistent and doesn't change dramatically to fit the interviewer's questions).
- Listen carefully and consider the question before answering (no interrupting).
- Attention to detail (remembering the interviewer's name and pronouncing it correctly).
- Your level of performance through related examples (judgment in tough situations, timeliness, etc.).
- Your level of confidence that you'll be successful in the position.
- Your level of commitment to your profession and your continued development to be a top performer.
- Your level of interest in working for the company (you did your research before you came to the interview).
- Probability that you will stay with the organization for the long-term.



### Helpful hint

*A positive attitude and thorough preparation win respect from the employer during the interview.*

Conversely, here are some qualities that the employer uses to eliminate you as a possible candidate:

- Not prepared
- Negative attitude
- Not a team player
- Controlling or bossy
- Unwilling to take charge
- Inappropriate or foul language
- Smug or boastful
- Impatient
- Disrespectful
- Sloppy appearance
- Careless
- Blames others for mistakes
- Evasive (doesn't answer questions)
- Unfocused

### Verbal and non-verbal communication in an interview

To present yourself in the best light to the employer, consider your verbal and non-verbal communication techniques. Practice speaking with someone who will give you a fair critique (even yourself in front of a mirror) to ensure that the following techniques are professional and genuine.

- **Eye contact.** Looking a person in the eye indicates confidence, openness and honesty. While this may be uncomfortable for you, it is essential to forming a positive impression during your discussions. If it is a panel interview (more than one interviewer), direct your response primarily to the individual who asked the question, but make eye contact with the rest of the panel during your answer.
- **Voice.** Speak clearly and with enough volume to be heard from a distance of 5 feet or more. Practice for the interview out loud, pronouncing words correctly and using proper grammar. Breathe deeply to add stability to your voice and slow down if you feel you are speaking too quickly.
- **Facial expressions.** A slight smile and open eyes convey confidence, alertness and genuineness. Practice in front of a mirror. Let your face emphasize your positive qualities. A frown shows disappointment or a lack of caring about an interview, while a straight face reveals nervousness or timidity.
- **Posture.** Walk tall and straight, sit forward in your chair, hold your head up, and keep your back and shoulders in line. Avoid slouching, crossing your legs or stretching them out in front of you; these typically are considered lazy postures and can lead to an unfavorable impression with the employer.
- **Mannerisms.** Be aware of nervous behaviors. Avoid tapping fingers, playing with hair, tapping feet, fidgeting or wringing your hands. Stay calm and focused. Keep your hands folded on the table, or take notes to keep busy during the interview.
- **Attitude.** Your body language, tone of voice, word use and actions say a lot about how you feel; others will read your attitude from the time you walk into the building. It is easy to distinguish if someone is nervous or confident.
- **Handshake.** A proper handshake is firm, but not hard. Use your full hand to grasp the full hand of the other person. The handshake should last approximately two seconds. If the other person releases earlier, follow his or her lead. Make eye contact and smile while shaking hands. Your handshake makes a strong impression about your attitude; are you coming across as confident, professional, aggressive, reserved or timid?



## Interviewing

### Interviewing: Stages and types

Interviews have a natural order or flow. Understanding this can help you keep track of where you are in the discussion process so you will be prepared for what comes next.



#### Key concept

*Interviews can have several stages.*

The **opening** is where the interviewer takes the lead. There is a brief exchange of pleasantries (small talk); first impressions are made based on appearance, handshake and attitude. The employer may give an overview of the company or the job vacancy at this time.

The **information exchange** is where the interviewer asks technical, situational or behavioral questions related to your skills, knowledge and qualifications to determine your ethics, principals, actions and ability to blend into the company's culture.

The **conclusion** involves wrapping up the interview by the employer asking if you have any questions. This is your chance to ask questions based on your research that demonstrate your interest in the position and give you an opportunity to thank the representative for his or her time and consideration.



#### Helpful hint

*Take notes (paper and pen) on key points the employer highlights during your conversation. Use these notes to create clarifying questions for the employer at the end of the interview.*

**Testing** also may be part of the interview. You may be asked to complete assessments before or after the interview. These pre-employment screenings typically measure hard skills (specific knowledge or abilities such as tool operation, math, 10-key or typing speed, software, etc.) and also may analyze soft skills (personality and behaviors).

### Types of interviews

After you've become familiar with the basic stages of an interview, it is important to understand the various types of interviews that commonly occur in the workforce selection process. Below are typical screening techniques that employers use based upon profession, company culture, and human resource standards.

There are two types of interviews: traditional and modern. **Traditional interviews** have been used for decades by employers. A one-to-one interview is a common example of this particular style of standardized interview. Traditional styles are tried and proven; they are the most common interviews you can expect to experience during your job search. Modern interviews are newer to human resources; these



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## Section one: Behind the scenes of an interview

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styles are continually evolving to accurately test today's job seekers for specific strengths and weaknesses. Progressive interviews are an example of this targeted style of screening candidates.

### Traditional interview styles

**One-to-one interviews** are the most direct exchange of information between a single employer representative and a job seeker. Some interviewers are personal and relaxed, others are professional and precise, and a few are not friendly in any way. Regardless of the type of interviewer you are encountering, it is important that you remain professional, positive and respectful, and use proper communication techniques.

**Telephone interviews:** Prepare for this just as you would a normal interview. Employers use telephone interviews as a way of identifying and recruiting candidates for employment as well as screening candidates to narrow the pool of applicants for in-person interviews. Telephone discussions also are used to minimize expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates. Be prepared for a phone interview on a moment's notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk.

**Panel interviews** involve more than one company representative asking questions while screening your appropriateness for the position. Because of the number of individuals taking part in the interview on behalf of the employer, this kind of interview can last longer than a one-to-one situation.

**Informal interviews** can be held in a professional setting, a worksite, a restaurant or elsewhere. You can expect to discuss job-related items and personal goals in more of a conversation style than a one-way interview. This is the most relaxed interview type and will nearly always require a second meeting before any sort of firm decision is made by the hiring party. Be prepared to chat more than you would during a formal interview; remember to keep professionalism and confidence in your abilities at the forefront of the discussion.



#### Helpful hint

*Create a seating chart with each panel interviewer's name so that you can address your answers to the person asking the question.*



## Interviewing



### Key concept

*Use specific examples of past successes to shine in an interview.*

### Modern interview styles

**Progressive interviews:** You have a quick succession of one-to-one meetings with individuals involved in the hiring decision for the position. This can involve human resources, managers and other representatives from the department meeting with you individually, one after another.

Group interviews typically involve one or both of the following:

- A panel of the employer's representatives (human resources, management, co-workers, etc.) makes a presentation to a group of candidates about the company and the position. There is generally a group question-and-answer session after the presentation. At a basic level, the employer has presented the same information to all candidates at the same time. It also has given the company's staff time to conduct an initial screening of a group of candidates as they observe individual behaviors (looking for attitudes and first impressions), interactions with each other (team players or not) and their communication skills (ability to speak up and ask questions).
- More involved group interviews can require candidates to participate in work-simulation exercises and team problem-solving activities, or may allow each individual time to respond to the same interview question in a particular order (down the line, by number, etc.). These activities screen candidates as individuals as well as their ability to work as part a team.

**Behavioral interviews** are used to discover how you acted previously in specific employment-related situations. The employer's logic here is that how you behaved in the past will predict how you will behave in the future.

**Demonstration interviews** require you to show the employer (through testing or live display) skill sets required for the position. Example: you are applying for a communications representative position; the interview may require you to write a speech on a topic in 10 minutes and then present it to employer representatives. This shows your ability to write and present a speech under time constraints.

**Multi-stage interviews:** Commonly, these are a combination of telephone, behavioral, panel and demonstration interviews. A candidate may be eliminated at any phase of the interviewing process based on performance. If a position requires various stages of screening, you will be notified by the employer. An interview of this variety can take several days or weeks to complete.

## Section two: Preparing for the interview

### Take time to prepare for the interview

Once an employer has invited you to interview, it is important to take time to prepare. If at all possible, begin researching and organizing two to three days before the scheduled appointment. Preparing for an interview allows you to:

- Arrive at a better understanding of the employer's job description, what the employer is looking for in a candidate, and how you match up with those qualifications.
- Reflect on your knowledge, skills and abilities to share during the meeting.
- Develop background information on the company to form your questions to ask at the end of the interview.
- Obtain data on the employer's competitors and how much those businesses are paying individuals in the same position.
- Estimate time and best routes to get to the interview at least 15 minutes early.
- Decide on an appropriate outfit to wear to the meeting (research company dress code).
- Establish your own STAR answers for behavioral interview questions (see page 20).
- Prepare answers to common interview questions and practice them with a friend, family member or WorkSource representative.
- Check your attitude, and ease your nerves.
- Build confidence in your ability to shine and successfully gain the position.
- Ensure that all your documents are in order for the meeting. See the checklist on page 37 – Things to take to the interview – for more details.
- Practice interviewing by conducting informational interviews with your networking contacts throughout your job search. To learn more about informational interviewing, register for Job-Search Strategies workshop.



#### Helpful hint

*Review the materials you submitted to the employer (resume, supplemental questionnaire, application, cover letter, etc.) at least a day before your interview.*



## Interviewing

### Comparing the employer's job posting with your history

The most critical piece to beginning your preparation process is to identify the top three qualifications that the employer has listed in the job posting. Then, match those requirements with your knowledge, skills and abilities. (If you are having trouble identifying your matching skills, see Assessing Skills and Abilities workshop.)

Many of the questions that the employer will ask during the interview will be based upon specific, preselected skill sets. By assessing your qualities that match the position's requirements, you can identify instances in your career where you applied those specific qualifications in a work environment.



**Helpful hint:** If you are having problems identifying all of your knowledge, skills and abilities, use the following steps to access this information via the **Occupational Information Network (O\*NET)**.

1. Go to **O\*Net Online** using the following URL: <http://www.onetonline.org>.
2. In the top-right corner of the Web page, use the **Occupation Quick Search** box.
3. Type in a brief description of your workplace skills **or** a previous job title; click the **arrow** to the right of the box.
4. View the list of possible occupations listed in rank order; click on the occupation that is the best match for your skills. **Note:** occupation titles are generic (most common); they may not reflect your most recent employer's job title.
5. A **Summary Report** for your selected title will appear on screen. In the **View report** menu, select **Details** to see typical tasks, knowledge, skills and abilities in rank order, based on national studies of those working in the occupation.
6. Select the definitions that best represent your skills to use in applications and résumés. Assume that an interviewing panel will ask about the highest-ranking skills. Prepare yourself with answers that illustrate how well you meet the requirements of the job.

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## Section two: Preparing for the interview

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Instructions for the Worksheet A on the next page

- The purpose of this worksheet is to help you prioritize the employer's needs with your qualities.
- On the **left side** of the chart, list the employer's top three qualifications/requirements for the job.
- On the **right side** of the chart, list your knowledge, skills, accomplishments and abilities that match the employer's needs.
- Below your list of knowledge, skills and abilities, give a specific example of how you used the identified proficiencies in the workplace.
- An example of how to complete the worksheet is provided in the first row of the chart.



### Helpful hint

*Don't forget to list transferrable skills that correlate to the job listing.*



## Interviewing

### Worksheet A



#### Writing activity

*Jotting down key words about your skills and abilities will help you talk about qualifications in an interview.*

What the employer wants (top qualifications)	Your matching experience
Example: Four years of customer service experience in a retail sales environment.	Skills: Telephone contact with customers to provide information about products and services. Resolve customer complaints including exchanging merchandise, refunding money and adjusting bills. Communicate clearly and in a respectful manner with all customers.
	Example from experience: While at JC Penny, assisted customer who was hostile due to an overcharge of \$250 on his/her credit card. Calmed customer, investigated issue, refunded money, and gave a coupon for 20% off next purchase. Turned a bad shopping experience into a customer who will return to store.
1.	Skills:
	Example from experience:

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## Section two: Preparing for the interview

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What the employer wants (top qualifications)	Your matching experience
2.	Skills:
	Example from experience:
3.	Skills:
	Example from experience:



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## Interviewing

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### Researching the company

Now that you've established what the employer is looking for and how you fit its needs, it's time to move into deeper research about the company's identity, history and role in the labor market.

This research will help you create questions to ask the employer at the end of the interview process to determine if this employer is the right match for your employment goals. The more you know about the company, the better prepared you will be to answer (and ask) questions with a targeted and knowledgeable focus.



**Helpful hint:** Try a search engine (Google, Bing, etc.) to access the company's official website and any additional articles that have been published about the employer. You also can find information about the organization on **Employment Security Department's** website using the following link or the navigation instructions below.

1. Access the labor-market information at [www.esd.wa.gov/employmentdata](http://www.esd.wa.gov/employmentdata).
2. From the blue "I am" box at the top center of the screen, select a **job seeker** from the first drop-down menu. Replace "Looking for" with **employer contact information** in the second drop-down menu, **-OR-**
  - a. Click the Employment resources tab in dark blue at the top of the home page.
  - b. On the right side of the screen under the title "Explore an occupation," click the Locate employers seeking that role link.
3. On the **Find employers** screen, you can search for employers by using the **Employers by name** function in the bottom-right box.
  - If, for some reason, the employer's name cannot be found using this search method, try using the **Employers by Geographic Area** search in the bottom-left box.



## Section two: Preparing for the interview

### Worksheet B

Target employer name:	
1. What are the mission statement and strategic goals of the company?	
2. Have there been any recent layoffs or significant changes within the company's structure?	
3. What is the purpose of the organization? What does it do?	
4. How many divisions, subsidiaries or departments does the company have? What are its roles in the company's structure?	
5. What is the average salary for the job title you are applying for in your region? Does the employer pay above or below that average?	
6. Who are the company's major customers? What are their needs?	
7. What is the company best known for?	
8. What do you offer the company that fits its profile and will make you stand out at the interview?	
9. What is the company's history? Is it owned by another firm? Is it a public or private organization?	
10. Does the company have any direct competition in your area?	
11. What acronyms and language (key words, industry specific speak) does the company use?	



#### Writing activity



#### Helpful hint

Use [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com) to compare a specific occupation's salary range by city, state or zip code.



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### Writing activity

### Prepare for common interview questions

To ease nerves and stress before an interview, use the following worksheet to prepare answers for commonly asked interview questions. Taking the time to think through your responses – including highlighting key experiences and accomplishments – will enhance your ability to answer questions comfortably and thoroughly during your meeting with the employer.

### Worksheet C

Employer question	Your response
<p>1. Tell me about yourself</p> <p>(Helpful hint: This is your career commercial developed in Job-Search Strategies workshop. Add any additional notes here that relate to the position you are applying for.)</p>	
<p>2. Why did you leave your last position?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: Be honest, without speaking negatively about your previous employer.)</p>	
<p>3. What are your short-term and long-term goals?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: You can answer this from a variety of professional perspectives – the job you are applying for, career improvement with the company, further education, your professional goals, etc.)</p>	
<p>4. What has been your most significant career accomplishment?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: This is your career commercial developed in Job-Search Strategies workshop. Add any additional notes here that relate to the position you are applying for.)</p>	
<p>5. What are your strengths and weaknesses?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: Turn weaknesses into challenges and how you have worked to overcome them – give specific examples. Make sure to list strengths that correlate to the job for which you are interviewing.)</p>	

## Section two: Preparing for the interview

Employer question	Your response
<p>6. How would your last boss describe you? How would your previous co-workers describe you?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: Be honest and present yourself in a confident manner. Remember to include both hard and soft skills in your description. Revisit prior performance reviews if you have copies.)</p>	
<p>7. Why are you the best fit for this position? Alternate: Why should we hire you?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: Let your confidence and excitement show. Present information that makes you stand out from others. This is not the same as a career commercial – it's how the position, the company and you are a perfect match.)</p>	
<p>8. What are your salary expectations?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: Prepare a well researched response. Stating a specific salary can lock you into something below what the company was prepared to offer you. Conversely, your expectations may be much higher than the employer's. Example: I am prepared to discuss salary at the time of a job offer.)</p>	
<p>9. What kinds of personalities are challenging for you to work with?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: Show that you are flexible and can find ways to work with individuals who are different from you. If it's an ethics issue, explain how you would resolve the problem.)</p>	
<p>10. Why do you want to work for this company? Alternate: What do you know about our company?</p> <p>(Helpful hint: This is where all your employer research will make you stand out; explain why the company and the position excite you.)</p>	
Other Notes	



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## Interviewing

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### **Interviewing STAR method**

STAR (situation, task, action and results) is used to map your course through behavioral interview questions. This type of interview question is based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation.

Employers establish behavioral questions by predetermining which skills and responses are necessary for the job, and then ask very pointed, probing questions to determine if you possess the skills that will lead to job success.

Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong answer to a behavioral question. The employer simply is trying to understand how you have handled a given situation. Your response will determine if there is a fit between your skills and the position the company is seeking to fill. Listen carefully, be clear and detailed when you respond and, most importantly, be honest.

The STAR method will help you establish some possible scenarios for behavioral questions based on the job listing and your research on the company. Fill in the chart on the next page, and make additional charts as necessary to demonstrate how you have responded to situations and the skills/knowledge used to resolve the issue.

Some behavioral questions for you to consider before building your STAR answers:

- Explain a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Walk through an instance where you had to think on your feet to overcome a difficult situation.
- Give a specific example of a time when you used judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give an example when you had to make a difficult and unpopular decision that affected yourself and others.
- Describe a time when you had to go above and beyond your position's expectations in order to get the job done.

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## Section two: Preparing for the interview

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- Explain a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Describe a time when you worked effectively and efficiently under an extreme amount of pressure.



**Writing activity**

### Worksheet D

Part of STAR method	Your response
Situation: Give an example of a situation in which you were involved that was difficult, but resulted in a positive outcome. In this space, tell how it all started.	
Task: Describe the tasks involved in that situation. (What did you determine needed to happen to be able to move to action?)	
Action: Describe the various actions (factors as well) that will lead to a problem/situation resolution.	
Result(s): What results directly followed because of your actions?	



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## Interviewing

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When sharing your STAR, remember to:

- Provide details about why, what, where, when, how and who were involved with the entire process.
- Use data, statistics or numbers to support your statements (if possible).
  - Examples: “this discussion took just 15 minutes” or “the idea helped the company save \$10,000.”
- Show the employer how your example relates to the position for which you are applying.
  - Example: “I know this position requires good communication and problem-solving skills and the ability to work with a variety of individuals. I believe this example shows that I have these characteristics.”



### Writing activity

Create your own STAR response using the blank chart on page 21.

## Sample STAR Response

### Interviewer’s question

“Tell us about a time when someone in your workgroup wasn’t pulling his or her weight.”

### STAR response

#### Situation

At my last position with ABC Company, I was part of a team assigned to redesign the layout of the waiting room and reception desk to improve service and efficiency. One of our team members wasn’t showing up for our work sessions, so I met with him in private to discuss my concerns.

#### Task

I explained the team’s frustration concerning his absence in a respectful manner. I then asked if there was anything the team could do to help him become more involved with the assignment. He explained that he was trying to finish up year-end reports, but was having trouble gathering data.

#### Action

I went back to the group and explained the situation. We decided to spend the afternoon helping our teammate so his year-end reports could be submitted in a timely manner.

### Results

From that moment on, he was at every meeting and dedicated himself to giving back to those that helped him. My employer was happy because our project came in ahead of schedule, improved our customer satisfaction rating by 24 percent and cut wait times by 38 percent.

### Translating military experience to a civilian interview

Finding the right words, descriptions and examples from your military career can be challenging when relaying your experience to a civilian employer representative. It becomes particularly daunting when the representative is unfamiliar with the military way of work and life.

According to Janet Farley of the Clearance Jobs website and author of *The Military-to-Civilian Career Transition Guide*, there are a few tips to keep in mind for civilian interviews:

- Mentally, don't confuse a job interview with a promotion board.
- Avoid using the military jargon you've come to know and respect; most civilians can't understand what you are trying to tell them. This means a great job match can be easily missed through lack of common language while discussing your knowledge, skills and experience.
- Like it or not, most civilian employers won't want to hear about combat missions.
- Focus on your technical skills, ability to carry out instructions and being a strong team player; these are all priceless qualifications in the civilian workforce.
- If you had supervisory experience identify specific types of individuals you oversaw (e.g., network technicians instead of service members).
- Be proud of your service, be proud of your team, and be proud of your abilities.



#### Helpful hint

*WorkSource has employment specialists whose sole job is to help military veterans obtain job training, find work and access various veteran benefits.*



## Interviewing

### Discussing offender history at an interview

If you have a criminal record and are trying to re-enter the workforce, it can be difficult to persuade an employer that you have the right attitude, abilities and work experience to do the job. However, this obstacle is not impossible to overcome.

It takes time, support and dedication to put together an incarceration speech and additional tools (bonding, tax credits, etc.). Keep in mind that all job seekers, regardless of their backgrounds, receive many “no” responses before they have interview success.



#### Helpful hint

*If you are having a difficult time finding a job or overcoming barriers tied to your previous incarceration, ask your local WorkSource representative for a list of online resources.*

According to Massie and Isaacs of the job-search engine Monster.com, keep the following points in perspective during the course of your interview:

- Be honest. Lying eventually catches up when a background check is performed.
- Take responsibility. Own your decisions, and don’t make excuses.
- Focus on your life now. Move past your history. Keep your response about your criminal record honest and brief, then talk about concrete examples of how you have improved yourself professionally and turned your life around (e.g., got a GED, pursuing training in your field, earned credentials, etc.).
- Acknowledge the employer’s concerns. As uncomfortable as it may be to acknowledge, it sets the representative’s mind at ease.
- There is no such thing as a bad opportunity. We all have to start somewhere to get somewhere. Though your first job after incarceration may not be your ideal or what you are fully qualified for, it is a stepping stone to greater future successes. Building – or rebuilding a – successful career takes time.
- Steer the conversation toward the positive. Always restate the knowledge, skills and abilities that make you the best candidate for the job. Show confidence at all times, without being cocky or aggressive.
- Prepare your incarceration speech beforehand – and practice, practice, practice.
- Understand your rights. For further information on this point, visit the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ website for ex-offender resources:  
[www.bop.gov/inmate\\_programs/itb\\_references.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/inmate_programs/itb_references.jsp).



### Questions for the employer

It is very common at the end of the interview for the employer to ask if you have any questions. This practice often is used to find out three things: 1) how interested you are in the position, 2) how much research you've done on the company, and 3) how much thought you have given to the interview.

This is the portion of the meeting where you can ask questions to find out if the employer is the right match for you. During the interview, take notes during the course of your discussion on key points that you would like to revisit at the end of the process. Consider the answers you receive from the employer carefully; is this the company you truly want to work for?

Potential questions to ask the employer include:

- Besides the qualifications listed in your job posting, are there other qualities you are seeking in an ideal candidate?
- Is this a new position? If not, what did the previous employee go on to do?
- How would you describe your organization's culture and management styles?
- What attracted you to the company, and what do you like most about working here?
- What are the most challenging aspects of this position?
- What are your next steps in the hiring process? When will you reach a hiring decision?
- Do you have other questions about my qualifications that I can clarify?

Whenever possible, try to link your questions to topics that you talked about during the interview. For example: "Earlier we discussed my short- and long-term goals. How do those fit in with the goals of your organization?"

It is equally important to know what questions not to ask. You can completely unravel the positive impression you have made during your job interview by asking inappropriate and ill-informed questions.



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## Interviewing

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Avoid questions that already were addressed during the course of the interview. If you have already prepared a list of questions and they have already been discussed during the interview, do not ask them again — otherwise, it gives the impression that you were not paying close attention to earlier discussion. Find other point(s) that interested you during the discussion and ask the employer further questions that reveal new information.

From the employer's perspective, the following items are considered unprofessional.

### **How much does this position pay? When do I get my first paycheck?**

Let the interviewer open this subject. You may give the impression that you are more concerned with pay than the substance of the position.

### **When will benefits start?**

As with pay, this question gives the impression that you are more concerned with the fringe benefits than the position itself; employers may regard this as a desperate action.

It's more appropriate to discuss wages and benefits if the job is eventually offered to you.

### **Do you have childcare available?**

From the employer's perspective, this indicates that you are having issues providing adequate child care for your children, and this may cause you to have a high rate of absenteeism from your new job. On another note, you have just opened up and provided an answer to a question that's not legal for an employer to ask – whether you have children.

### **Will I have to work overtime?**

Check to see if the job is exempt (salaried) or non-exempt (hourly). It should be part of the job description. This question implies that you are reluctant to put in the extra hours or are unavailable for certain job requirements.

### What does this company do?

This question gives the impression that you did not research the company and have no real desire to work there. If there is confusion in your research, state the points that weren't matching up and ask for further clarification.



#### Helpful hint

*It is appropriate to ask clarifying questions at any point of the interview process.*

### If I get the job, how soon can I take time off for vacation?

This just looks bad all the way around. An employer expects you to learn your work responsibilities and be focused on adapting to the work environment before you take off earned time.

### Can I change my work schedule if I get the job?

This question indicates that you are inflexible to meet the employer's scheduling needs. If you need to figure out how you can tend to needs outside of work and still make it to the job on time, ask this question when a job offer is made.

### Did I get the job? When do I start?

Shows impatience. You may not be the only candidate being interviewed. Candidates who ask this question commonly think it shows their enthusiasm for the position. From the employer's perspective, it comes off as pushy and unprofessional. Ask instead when you can expect to hear from the employer.



## Interviewing

### Developing questions for the employer

Use the following worksheet to create questions that show your ability to research the company and the position for which you are applying.

#### Worksheet E



#### Writing activity

*Develop thought provoking questions to ask the employer to show your interest in the company.*

Research discovery point	Question(s) for employer
Example: ABC Company's website lists one of its core values as "fun." The company knows its work is hard, so managers have made a fun working environment to keep stress levels down.	Example: When I was reviewing your list of core values, I noticed that one of the values listed was fun. What approach has ABC Company taken to make the environment less stressful while keeping productivity levels high?

### Illegal interview questions

As a job seeker, there are several types of questions that you are not legally required to answer. You should be aware of what the illegal areas (protected by federal and state laws) are and how to handle them if they arise during your interview.

If you are asked an illegal question during an interview, remain professional and avoid becoming defensive or harsh in your response. Give the interviewer the benefit of the doubt that no harm was intended by the question that was asked; even great interviewers have bad moments during the course of a discussion.

Politely ask the employer to rephrase the question or if he/she can clarify how the question relates to your ability to be successful in the position. Think carefully before redirecting the employer away from the original question – be aware of potential negative results. Plan ahead on how you will deal with an inappropriate question and whether you can answer the question in a different way than it was asked.

Many illegal questions are asked to break the ice at the beginning of your meeting. Examples include:

- That's a great accent you have – where are you from?
- What an unusual last name – what is your background?
- We are a family-oriented business; we hope that you would consider bringing your family to our events.

Developing a diplomatic response that you can deliver if the interviewer mistakenly asks a question that you feel is illegal can assist you in easing tension. "I have lived in this area for a while now" or "it's a long story that I'd be happy to share after I begin working for the company" can help you avoid giving any response that might hurt your chances of being hired.

Remember, if you choose to answer an illegal question, this information can harm your candidacy if the employer has a negative reaction to it. The best answer kindly asks the interviewer how the question relates to your ability to be the best candidate for the position.



#### Helpful hint

*Always remain aware of your rights and the law. To learn more about your rights as a job seeker, visit the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) or the Washington State Human Rights Commission at [www.hum.wa.gov](http://www.hum.wa.gov).*



## Section three: Take the stage

### Checklist: Professional image

In any interview situation, you have only one chance to make a first impression. Use the following checklists to ensure that you have every aspect of your appearance (external and internal) ready to make a positive impression with the employer. If possible, start these checklists three to five days before your interview.

When planning your outfit for the interview, take into consideration the company's dress code. When setting up your interview time, talk with the scheduler or contact the receptionist to find out this valuable piece of information. The checklists below cover attire, grooming, confidence building (internal professional imaging) and last-minute details.



#### Writing activity

*Appropriate interview clothing contributes to a positive first impression.*

Preparing your interview attire		
Description	Completed	In process
Select outfit that is appropriate for the interview: professional (suit), semi-professional (shirt and slacks) or business casual (polo and khakis).		
Analyze clothes. Check for: wear, damage, animal hair, stains and odor.		
Try on outfit to make sure it fits appropriately (not too tight or too loose).		
Dry clean or wash outfit; store in plastic/garment bag to keep odor free.		
Assess condition of shoes. Check for: damage, wear and shine.		
Polish shoes to rid of scuffs; take to cobbler, if necessary.		
Make sure nylons/tights to be worn with skirt/dress are not damaged. Pack extra pair in case of snag/run on way to interview.		
Dress a step above existing company employees doing a similar job. Research to see what they are wearing.		
Notes		

## Section three: Take the stage

Personal grooming		
Description	Completed	In process
Color hair if it improves appearance. Choose natural tones, avoid shocking colors.		
For men: determine if facial hair is acceptable for an interview with the company.		
For women: use natural-toned nail polishes. Use understated makeup colors — especially with lipstick.		
Remove body jewelry, and cover up tattoos.		
Avoid wearing too much jewelry — keep it simple (watch, small earrings and necklace for women; a watch for men).		
Notes		



### Writing activity

*Grooming and hygiene are workplace essentials.*

Build confidence		
Description	Completed	In process
Practice approaching the interviewer and shaking hands (with friends or family).		
Commit to memory your work skills, personal qualities and qualifications that relate to the employer and the job opening.		
Remember things you want to get across about yourself from your career commercial. Practice in front of a mirror and with others who will listen in person or by phone.		
Practice answering likely interview questions out loud. Do this with someone who will give you honest feedback or monitor yourself in a mirror.		
Review the job announcement; highlight key areas that you want to address during your meeting.		
Monitor your body language, tone of voice and eye contact in front of a mirror, or ask for feedback from a friend.		
Review your résumé, items in your portfolio, cover letter you wrote to the employer and other documents you submitted to the employer to refresh your memory. Highlight points to discuss during the meeting.		
Notes		



### Writing activity



## Interviewing



### Writing activity

Day of the interview	
Description	Completed
Showered	
Teeth brushed	
For men: shaved, groomed, deodorant, no cologne	
For women: makeup is understated, deodorant, no perfume	
Accessories are minimal and appropriate	
Organize items to take with you (purse, briefcase, portfolio, etc.)	
No use of chewing gum	
No smoking in interview clothing; make sure you are odor free before putting on outfit	
Check traffic; leave early for commute	
Turn off cell phone before entering the interview location	
Notes	



### **Checking in with references**

References link your past employment to your future employer. Prepare a list of potential references, and contact each person to see if he or she can provide a positive reference for you. There is nothing worse from the employer's perspective than to check a reference and find out something negative about a candidate's past work performance.

Be sure to inform your references that you are going to an interview. Tell them the name of the company and the position that you have applied for. If you have an electronic copy of the job listing, email it to your references so they understand what kind of position you are pursuing.

Though many employers refrain from collecting information beyond verifying dates, title (and possible wages), if you have signed a release-of-information form for reference-checking, your previous employer may answer questions about more than just the date hired, last date of employment, title and wages.

Have you obtained permission from your references to use their names and contact information before going to your interview? It is not uncommon for employers to check references immediately following your meeting. Have you informed your references what job you are applying for and from whom they should expect a call?

Use the worksheet on the next page to organize your references before your interview.



## Interviewing

### Worksheet F



#### Writing activity

*Positive references  
help you become  
employed.*

References	
Reference 1	Contact name _____ Physical address _____ Telephone and cell _____ Email address _____ Preferred contact method _____ Permission to use as a reference? _____ Is each a positive reference? _____
Reference 2	Contact name _____ Physical address _____ Telephone and cell _____ Email address _____ Preferred contact method _____ Permission to use as a reference? _____ Is each a positive reference? _____
Reference 3	Contact name _____ Physical address _____ Telephone and cell _____ Email address _____ Preferred contact method _____ Permission to use as a reference? _____ Is each a positive reference? _____
Reference 4	Contact name _____ Physical address _____ Telephone and cell _____ Email address _____ Preferred contact method _____ Permission to use as a reference? _____ Is each a positive reference? _____

## Checklist: Preparing for an interview

You've prepared your outfit and planned your appearance. You've reviewed the job listing and compared it with your skill sets and knowledge. You've researched the company. You've thought about answers to the employer's questions using the STAR model (page 20) and other tools to create responses.

Now it's time to focus on what you need to take with you, how you are going to get there, and what to do when you get to the interview location. Use the following checklist to prepare final pieces for the big day.

Things to take to the interview	Completed
Several copies of your résumé — including one for yourself that is highlighted to reference during the interview. Make sure the résumé you are printing contains the same information as the one that was originally submitted to the employer.	
A copy of your references with up-to-date contact information for all individuals listed.	
A pad of paper and a pen to take notes during the interview.	
Highlighted research that you completed on the company that can be referenced during the meeting.	
Directions to the interview site, including the employer contact for the meeting.	
Copy of the job description that you have highlighted and reviewed.	
A copy of the completed application, résumé and cover letter that you submitted to the employer for the position.	
Make clean and neat copies of reference letters that you can leave with the potential employer that demonstrate the successes and achievements you've had earlier in your career.	
Proper I-9 documentation if they ask you to fill out hiring documents on site.	
If you have prepared business cards, bring enough for the entire interview panel.	
Clean and neat copies or originals of any documents that the employer has asked you to bring with you (certifications, driving abstract, school transcripts, etc.).	
Leave chewing gum at home. Instead, take a breath mint that will dissolve before the interview.	
If driving, make sure you have enough fuel to get to the interview and home.	
Leave emergency snacks in your car in case the interview process involves a long testing period as well. Keep your energy levels up. Bring along a bottle of water to quench any thirst.	
Grooming tools (comb, makeup, stain remover tool, lint brush, tissue, etc.)	
Other	



### Writing activity

*Start this checklist at least one day before your interview.*



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## Interviewing

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### **Interview arrival planning**

Find out the interviewer names, correct spelling and pronunciation (important for introductions and thank-you cards). To keep stress down, find out the type of interview that you will attend: phone, one interviewer, a panel of interviewers, group interview (more than one candidate interviewed at the same time), and any tests or activities that will be given during the interview. If possible, find out this information from the human resources or company representative that contacts you to set up the meeting time.

Where is the interview located? How long will it take you to reach that location during busy traffic times? Making an excuse for being late is never a positive start to the interview process. Be sure you know the way. Make a practice run to the interview site a day or so before at the same time you would leave to attend your real interview. This will help you identify traffic patterns and possible holdups (railroad crossing, schools, etc.). Have an alternate route in mind in case of an accident or road closure.

If you are driving, be sure you have enough gas and that the car (with no major maintenance issues) will get you there. Take along maps, a navigation system or Internet directions. If you are using public transportation, make sure you know the route. Plan to take an earlier bus in case the regular one is late. Do not take anyone to the interview site with you. If someone drives you, have the person wait in the car and out of sight from the building. Ask your ride not to smoke in the vehicle before your interview, to keep odors away.

### **Entering the interview**

Often, the interview begins before you walk in the front door. From the parking lot to the interview room, be on your best behavior and polite to everyone. Candidates have lost out on jobs because they were impolite to a receptionist, security, secretary, clerk or other company representative; one of these individuals did not think that the candidate would fit into the organization. Introduce yourself respectfully and confidently when you check in.

Use a breath mint before entering the interview; make sure it is dissolved before you start your meeting. Grab a drink of water from a fountain, or pack your own water to take with you to avoid dry-mouth syndrome during your discussion with the employer.

Remember to relax and take a deep breath. Be confident in the knowledge, skills and abilities that you have worked so hard to achieve over the course of your career. Remember that you have something special and unique to offer, or you wouldn't have been invited to the interview in the first place. This is your chance to get to know the employer just as much as the employer's opportunity to screen you as a candidate.

Be prepared to fill out any additional application forms, documents or tests the employer requires while you wait for the interview to start. If you have time on your hands and nothing to fill out, review your research, the job listing, questions you have for the employer, your résumé or other items you've prepared to take into the interview.

### **After the interview: Next steps**

After the interview, take time to write down the names and titles (check spelling) of all your interviewers. Include impressions from your interview, remaining questions and any information that may influence your decision to accept a position. If you are interviewing regularly, this will help keep employers and positions clear in your mind.

Always send a thank-you letter, even if you do not feel that the interview went well. After all, the employer may not have reached the same conclusion. In other instances, an interview for one position may lead to an offer for a different position based on information shared during discussions. If your communication with the employer was via email before your meeting, sending a thank you by email is acceptable.

Your thank-you letter should be sent within 24 hours after the completed interview. It is important to show appreciation for the time the interviewer spent with you and his or her consideration of your candidacy for the position. It is a great reminder to the employer to keep your name in the forefront.

To learn more about composing thank-you letters and other business writing, ask your WorkSource representatives for information to attend the Résumés and Correspondence workshop.



## Interviewing



### Helpful hint

*Make sure to put your best foot forward when you reach out to employers by presenting a positive attitude during follow-up and that you appreciate their time and efforts. Kindness and professionalism will always advance you further with a company than rude or aggressive behavior.*

### Following up with the employer after the interview

A thank-you letter or email is the first contact that you will have with the employer after the interview. Keep in mind that any contact you have must continue to build on the positive impression created during your meeting.

Below are some suggestions for following up with the employer for a second or third time after the interview.

**Email.** In the subject line, make sure to state your name and the purpose of your email. Keep the body of your email brief and professional, and make sure to thank the employer representative in advance for taking the time to respond to your inquiry.

**Call.** Similar to an email, introduce yourself by your full name and state that you are following up on the interview. Kindly ask the representative if you are still considered an applicant for the position and any next steps that may be involved in the process.

- Even if you receive a “we’ve hired someone else” response, thank the representative again for his or her time and ask if there are any other positions you might be considered for in the near future. Ask the representatives to keep your résumé on file for future consideration.

**Don’t overstep boundaries** by appearing to be “aggressive.” Multiple phone calls or emails are a complete turn-off to the employer. It may take more than a week to know who is advancing as a candidate and who is not. Patience and non-aggressive inquiries will keep you on the recruiter’s good side.

**Check in with the reception staff.** If the representative will not return your inquiries, contact the reception staff. Introduce yourself and explain your reason for calling the same way that you would talk to the recruiter.

### **The thank-you letter**

You should send a thank-you letter for the following situations during the job-search process:

- After an interview.
- After a rejection (the employer chose a different candidate).
- After you decline a job offer.
- After an informational interview.
- After being referred to a job.
- After someone gives you a reference.

A simple rule to follow: If someone has had an effect on your job search, you should send him or her a thank-you letter.

Saying “thank you” is not only the professional and courteous thing to do, it’s also an effective job-search strategy. A thank-you note is another opportunity to sell your qualifications and leave a positive impression.

Include the following in your thank-you letter, where appropriate:

- Statement of appreciation for the opportunity, reference or other action.
- Expression of continued interest in the job, career field or company.
- Brief restatement of key qualifications and skills the employer needs.
- Additional information you may have omitted previously.
- Final thank you for his/her consideration.

You should write the letter no later than 24 hours after the job-search action (interview, rejection, referral) occurred. Be brief, respectful and professional.



## Thank-you letter example

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for the opportunity this morning to discuss the secretarial position. Our conversation gave me a better understanding of ABC Company and the requirements of the job. The additional information from Max and Katherine was helpful in gaining a better perspective of the position.

My strong office and interpersonal skills will definitely make a contribution to your company. I'm proficient in all the computer-software packages you use, and I feel I possess the customer-service experience you want.

I enjoyed meeting the office staff and touring the facility. This is clearly a high-quality organization with an emphasis on efficiency and a dedication to teamwork. I would consider it a privilege to join your team and will contact you next week to inquire about the hiring decision.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

(Your signature in blue or black ink)

Your typed name



## Notes

[illegible]



## Interviewing

## Notes

[illegible]





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