

## TIPS FOR MASTERING THE JOB INTERVIEW



**Summary:** A critical part of the job search process is interviewing well with employers. Here's how to master the job interview.

Fewer firms are hiring and salaries are down. First and foremost, you must **master the art of the interview**. It's imperative you learn the skills to set you apart in a crowded field of candidates.

Your first interview with a prospective employer may not be a face-to-face meeting. These days more companies are requiring phone interviews first. They're tough because you can't present your whole self. The best advice I can give you for these interviews is, speak slowly, listen well and do not interrupt.

When you do interview in person, remember that your **dress and overall appearance** are important. In an employer's mind, the way you look on an interview is the best you're ever going to look. Everyone puts his or her best foot forward for the interview. For women, my advice is to wear a classic, generic dark suit. It works well in any business environment and in any field. Wear simple jewelry and classic pumps. Absolutely avoid perfume. For men, wear a coat and tie and skip cologne. Believe it or not, the details do matter. Statistically, the first thing an interviewer looks at is hands and shoes. Are your hands well-groomed and are your shoes taken care of? Shine away.

Boost your attitude before you go in. You want to be confident and credible. It's inevitable that you will be **asked a series of questions**, many of which can cause a candidate to stumble. One of the most difficult to answer is the **question about salary expectations**. I tell all my clients that your response should be one of only two answers:

- "My current salary is X, and I'll consider your very best offer." Or,
- "I'm entry level, I've got some very good internships under my belt, but my salary is negotiable."

Another common yet tricky question is "Where do you see yourself in three to five years?" That is an attitude question and it stumps 90% of new college grads. The only answer is: "With the same firm. I'm looking for stability and a long-term situation."

Many new graduates tell me they have a problem answering the question: **What is your biggest weakness?** It's a tough one. You never want to give a true weakness. Don't say: "I'm a perfectionist." Employers are sick of hearing it. What you might want to say is: "I'm very hard on myself. There's probably not going to be an employer who is harder on me than I am on myself. But I'm taking the time to pat myself on the back." Or, if the interview has a fun, upbeat tone, throw out a funny zinger like, "chocolate." But you have to use your judgment on how you think the interview is going. Believe it or not, employers often welcome some levity in a job interview. It's important to practice, practice, practice before you actually go to the interview. Preparation is the key to calmness and confidence.

Once you've given an interviewer your best, you're out the door only to wait and hope for an offer. A **thank-you note** can increase your chances of being remembered. It's your last chance to interact with employers before they make their selection. Make sure it's a solid business letter with correct titles for the addressee and perfect spelling. If you've just interviewed with a technology company, consider e-mailing a note. Otherwise, use a typed business-format letter – not a handwritten card.

Don't leave the future you've worked so hard for to chance. Take hold of your opportunities. You can master the interview process and embrace success.