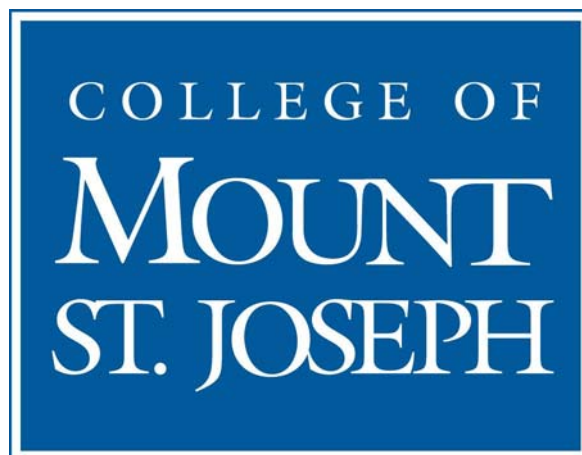


# The Job Interview: How to be Successful

Use the following resource as  
a guide to preparing for an  
effective interview



## THE SUCCESSFUL JOB INTERVIEW

There are two sets of objectives to be considered in an interview – the interviewers and yours. It should be seen as a business meeting between two equals. The interviewer is trying to predict, based upon your past and present experience, whether you would make a good employee. Your goal is to bring out those characteristics that would be useful to the prospective employer. Your cover letter and resume have opened the door; the interview secures the position. The interview gives you an opportunity to match your talents and skills to the needs of the employer and a chance to evaluate whether the position you are interviewing for is right for you.

## PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

### Types of Interviews:

Different types of interviews are used as dictated by the job opening, interviewer's style or company policy. You may encounter one or more of the following types:

- **Preliminary or screening interview** - This is used to determine if you meet the basic qualifications. It lasts from 15 to 30 minutes and a further in-depth interview may follow.
- **Telephone interview** - A telephone interview is a type of screening interview. This is a way for the interviewer to narrow the number of face-to-face interviews.
- **Structured interview** - The interview has an organized plan: a beginning, middle, and end. Questions follow a progression and may have been developed in advance.
- **Unstructured or discussion interviews** - In this type of interview you may talk about the weather, summer vacations, baseball, etc., anything but the job. In this instance, the interviewer is trying to evaluate your communication and interpersonal skills, attitude, interests, motivation, poise, etc.
- **Multiple interview (series of meetings with staff)** - Different people will interview an applicant at separate times. The first interview may be with a hiring manager, then other colleagues and perhaps the department manager or vice president.
- **Panel or group** - This is a situation where there are several interviewers. Be certain to maintain eye contact with each person.

### Things to Consider Before the Interview:

- **Evaluate your skills (work content, self-management, transferable), interests, abilities and values.** Articulate or apply what you know about yourself to the career field for which you are interviewing. Know your career goals or objectives.
- **Research the field, industry, and/or organization and acquire as much information as possible.** This research will help you to ask intelligent questions and determine which of your assets to emphasize. Prepare and practice anticipated questions. You can do this by using materials in the Career and Experiential Education Center resource library or on the Internet. Most companies have a website where you can research them. Important facts to gather include:
  - Key people in the organization
  - Major products or services
  - Size in terms of sales and employees
  - Locations other than your community
  - Organizational structure of the company
  - Major competitors
  - View of the company by clients, suppliers, and competition
  - Latest news reports on the company or on local or national news that affects the company

- **Be sure to have a few copies of your resume, cover letter, and references with you.** You may also want a pen and paper to jot down notes throughout the interview.
- **Be prepared to ask questions about the organization/position.** You can type out a list of questions you'd like to ask, and bring this document to your interview. However, be sure to listen to what has already been said so you do not ask something that has already been covered. Here are a few examples:

*What do you like about this position or company? What do you see as challenges in this position? What skills are you looking for in the ideal candidate? What would the first month on the job be like? How will my performance be evaluated?*

Please see attached "Interviewee Questions" for a more complete list of possible questions.

- **Consider creating a portfolio to back up what you have noted in your resume.** This could consist of anything you have created or have done which demonstrates your skills and abilities. Education and Art students must have a portfolio ready for display.
- **Practice before the interview.** You can try a mock interview or have a friend ask you possible questions and then practice answering them.

### **Some Helpful Tips:**

- **Be on time** (5-10 minutes early) - It is always good to arrive early to give yourself ample time to find a parking place, relax a bit, and collect your thoughts before you begin the interview.
- **Practice a strong handshake** - A firm handshake and a smile will get the interview off to a good start. First impressions are vital!
- **Be comfortable with consistent eye contact** - Be sure to make eye contact with the interviewer to show you are interested in what he or she is saying.
- **Check your non-verbals** - Be aware of how you carry yourself. Try to avoid habits such as having a bouncy foot or twirling of hair. Be sure to show that you are listening by occasionally nodding your head and other similar gestures. Be aware of your posture.
- **Dress professionally** - If your attire is questionable don't wear it. It is better to "overdress" than "underdress." Conservative dress is appropriate. For examples on dressing for success, see attached "Extreme Interview Makeover Mike and Candace".
- **Exhibit your confidence** - Show confidence in your answers by cutting out the "ums," "aahs," "likes," and "you know's."
- **Sharpen your listening skills** - Be sure to listen to the interviewer so that you do not end up asking a question that has already been answered earlier in the interview.
- **Think through your answers** - It is better to have a few moments of silence than a jumble of ideas that do not make sense. Stop and think about what you are saying, and use that time to target your answer to the company's needs. It is OK to respond, "Wow that is a great question. Do you mind if I take a moment to think about my answer?"
- **Questions to ask** - As discussed above, make sure you have questions ready to ask the interviewer well in advance.
- **Be thoroughly prepared.** See attached "Interview Preparation Checklist" for extra help.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

The job interview is typically a two way discussion between you and a prospective employer. The interviewer is attempting to determine whether you have what the company needs, and you are attempting to determine if you would accept the job if offered. **Both of you** will be trying to get as much information as possible in order to make those decisions.

A few key points to consider throughout the actual interview process:

### Make a good impression.

- You only have a few seconds to create a positive first impression which can influence the rest of the interview and even determine whether you get the job. The interviewer is assessing your overall appearance, non-verbal cues and demeanor.
- When greeting the interviewer, be certain your handshake is firm and keep eye contact.
- Wait for the interviewer to signal you before you sit down. Once seated, your body language is very important in conveying a positive impression. Find a comfortable position so that you don't appear tense. Lean forward slightly and maintain eye contact with the interviewer. This posture shows that you are interested in what is being said.
- Smile naturally at appropriate times. Show that you are open and receptive by keeping your arms and legs uncrossed. Try to appear relaxed and confident.
- Avoid keeping your briefcase or your handbag on your lap.

### Get the information you need.

- If you weren't able to get complete information about the job and the company in advance, you should try to get it as early as possible in the interview.
- Do not end the interview without knowing the following things:
  - Why does the company need someone in this position?
  - Exactly what would they expect of you?
  - Are they looking for traditional or innovative solutions to problems?

### Know when to ask questions.

- Your chance to ask questions occurs late in the interview. How can you get the information you need early in the process without making the interviewer feel that you are taking control? Timing is everything.
- You may have to make a decision based on intuition and your first impressions of the interviewer. Does the interviewer seem comfortable or nervous, soft spoken or forceful, formal or casual? These signals will help you to judge the best time to ask your questions.
- Since most interviewers like to set the tone of the interview and maintain initial control, always phrase your questions in a way that leaves control with the interviewer. Perhaps say, "Would you mind telling me a little more about the job so that I can focus on the information that would be most important to the company?"
- You may want to wait until the interviewer has given an overview of what will be discussed. This overview may answer some of your questions or may provide some details that you can use to ask additional questions.

### Utilize strong responses.

- You will be asked many questions about your work experience, skills, education, activities, and interests. You are being assessed on how you will perform the job in relation to the company objectives – provide responses with this in mind.
- All responses should be concise. Use specific examples to illustrate your point.

- Although your responses should be prepared in advance so that they are well phrased and effective, be sure they do not sound rehearsed.
- Remember that your responses must always be adapted to the present interview. Incorporate any information you obtained earlier in the interview with the responses you had prepared and then answer in a way that is appropriate to the question.

### **End the interview effectively.**

- During the closing phase of an interview, you will be asked whether you have any other questions. It is important to have one or two questions ready.
- Ask any relevant question that has not yet been answered. **Do not forget to ask “When should I expect to hear back from you?”** This will ensure you know their timeline and when to follow up with the employer.
- Highlight any of your strengths that have not been discussed before you leave. If another interview is to be scheduled, get the necessary information.
- Reiterate your interest in the position and ask for the job.
- Thank the interviewer by name (Ms. or Mr. XXX) and say good-bye.

### **Typical questions you may encounter in an interview.**

A *traditional* job interview uses broad, open-ended questions and the interviewer is focused on the ability of the job seeker to communicate. Some possible questions may include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What interests you about this position and our company?
- What type of positions have you been applying for?
- Why should we hire you?
- What makes you stand out from other candidates?
- What are your short term and long term career goals?
- What characteristics make up a “good” supervisor to you?
- How would your supervisor describe you?
- What are your strengths?
- What is your greatest weakness?

A *behavioral* job interview is based on the theory that past performance is the best indicator of future behavior and uses questions that probe past behavior. Typically, behavioral based interview questions begin with, tell me about a time when you...or, give me an example of when you...

- Worked efficiently under pressure.
- Were creative in solving a problem.
- Had to adapt to a difficult situation.
- Were tolerant of an opinion that was different than yours.
- Had to deal with an irate customer.
- Made a good decision.
- Worked as a member of a team.
- Accomplished something that you are proud of.
- Demonstrated initiative.
- Made a mistake.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

**Assess the Interview.** You are not finished yet. It is important to assess the interview shortly after it is concluded. Following your interview you should:

- Write down the name and title (be sure the spelling is correct) of the interviewer(s).
- Review what the job entails and record what the next step will be.
- Note your reactions to the interview; include what went well and what went poorly.
- Assess what you learned from the experience and how you can improve your performance in future interviews.
- Make sure you send a thank you note within 24 hours; your thank you note should:
  - Be hand-written only if you have a very good handwriting; or in type.
  - Be on good quality conservative, professional paper or note cards.
  - Be simple and brief, but add at least one specific detail from the interview.
  - Express your appreciation for the interviewer's time.
  - Show enthusiasm for the job.
  - Get across that you want the job and can do it.

Everyone knows that a thank you letter should be sent after an interview, but very few people actually send one. Make sure you are one of those few. It could give you the edge.

**Phone Follow-up.** If you were not told during the interview when a hiring decision will be made, call after one week.

- If you learn that the decision has not been made, find out whether you are still under consideration for the job.
- Ask if there are any other questions the interviewer might have about your qualifications and offer to come in for another interview if necessary.
- Reiterate that you are very interested in the job.
- If you learn that you did not get the job, try to find out why.
  - You might also inquire whether the interviewer knows anyone else who might be able to use someone with your abilities, either in another department or another company.

**Second Interview.** Success in the screening interview means being called in for a second "on-site" interview. This time, the person who would be your boss will interview you, and perhaps by that person's boss and others you would work with, as well (multiple interviews).

In second interviews the same rules apply but there are some differences. First of all, the interviewer will certainly know far more about the specific position for which you are interviewing. Impressing the person who may soon be your boss will require even more knowledge of the field, the organization, and the position than was necessary for your screening interview. Review your notes carefully and be prepared to answer more technical questions relating to your field.

**The Job Offer.** If you are offered the job, thank the employer and ask for several days to think about it. Ask any other questions you might need answered to help you with the decision. Ask whether the employer will be sending a letter of confirmation, as it is best to have the offer in writing. Some other things to consider once you have a job offer:

- If you accept one job offer, it is unethical to accept another job offer.
- All other applications should be withdrawn.

**Negotiating Your Compensation Package.** Do not discuss your specific compensation package, especially salary, with the employer until you have been offered the job and you think it is an offer you should seriously consider. During salary negotiations:

- You are not only talking about your monetary salary but your entire compensation package. This includes vacation time, sick leave, health insurance, tuition reimbursement, and other benefits the company may offer.

- Your base salary and performance-based raises are probably the most negotiable parts of your compensation package. However, keep in mind the *total* package.
- Before you begin negotiating your compensation, decide which benefits are most important to you, so you are ready to talk to the employer.
- The key to salary negotiations is preparation. Do your research before you begin salary negotiations and investigate the salary range that someone with your skills and experience can expect to receive in your area. (See attached “Where Can I Find Salary Information”)

Once you have a good feeling for the type of salary and benefits you are willing to accept, it's time to negotiate with the company.

- Don't sell yourself short during these negotiations.
- If the employer makes you an offer that does not seem equitable, discuss your concerns with the employer. Present your concerns about the benefits package in a constructive, non-threatening manner. Focus on the reasons why you have concerns, as opposed to making general statements about what you think you deserve.

Again, when you are considering the offer, make sure you are taking the entire benefits package into account. Sometimes excellent benefits can compensate for a lower salary. If you really want the job, but the offer still seems low after negotiations, see if the employer will consider a salary review three to six months from your starting date. Otherwise, be prepared to walk away.

### **Final Quick Tips for the Interview:**

DO:

- Be sincere, honest and direct
- Be attentive and polite
- Ask relevant questions
- Answer questions concisely and use specific examples to illustrate points

DON'T:

- Try to control the entire interview
- Bring up salary
- Let your discouragement or frustrations with the job search show
- Make negative comments about anyone or anything, including former employers
- Look at your watch throughout the interview

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Please contact the Career & Experiential Education Center at 244-4721 or via AOL Instant Messenger (MSJCareerCenter) with any questions or for further assistance.

*Best of luck throughout your interviews!*

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### **Works Cited:**

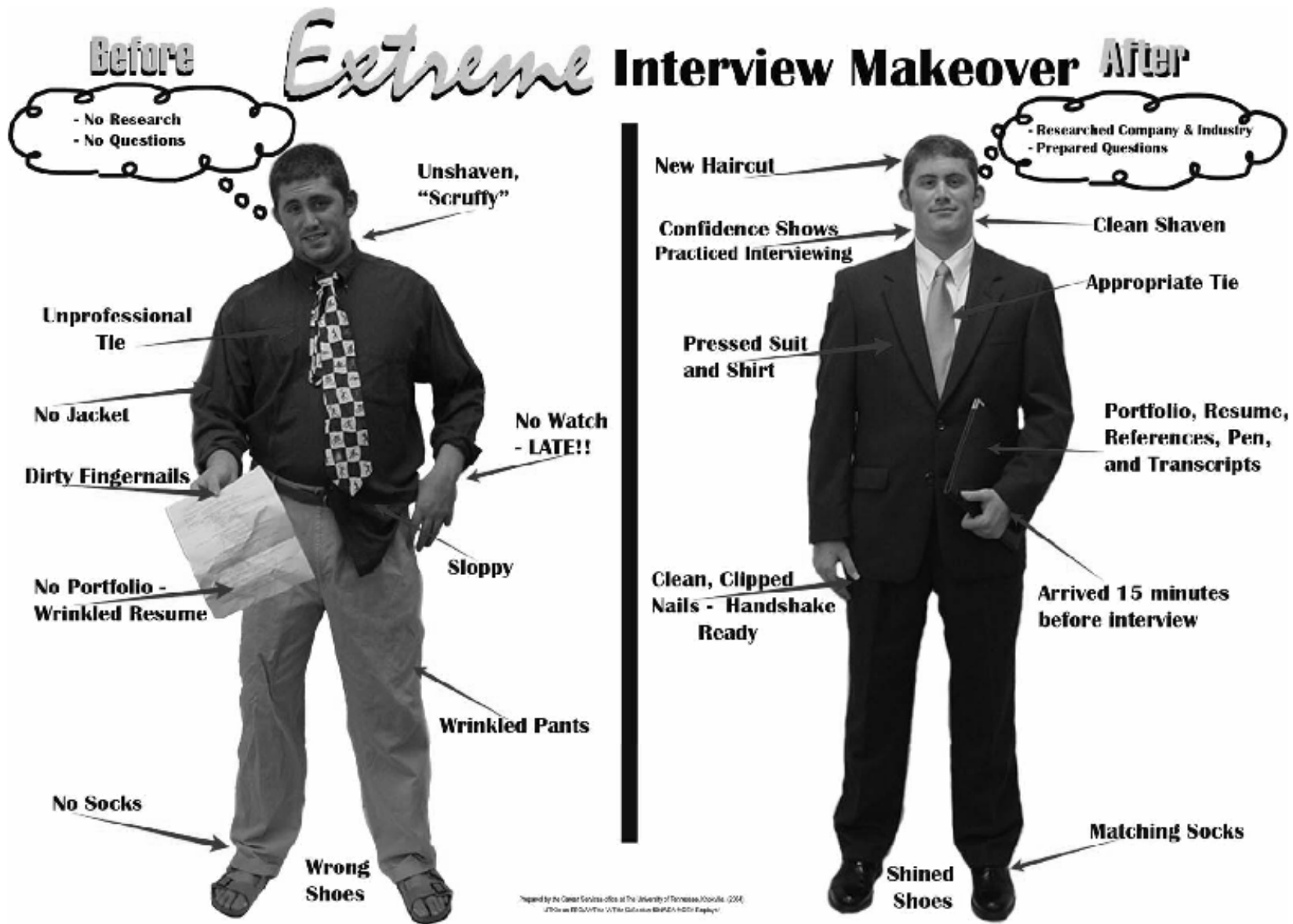
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## INTERVIEWEE QUESTIONS

Interviewees are expected to ask questions during the interview. To recruiters, this is a sign of interest and enthusiasm. The following list contains some questions that may be suitable for an interviewee to ask. Remember to listen during the interview - don't ask a question that has already been answered.

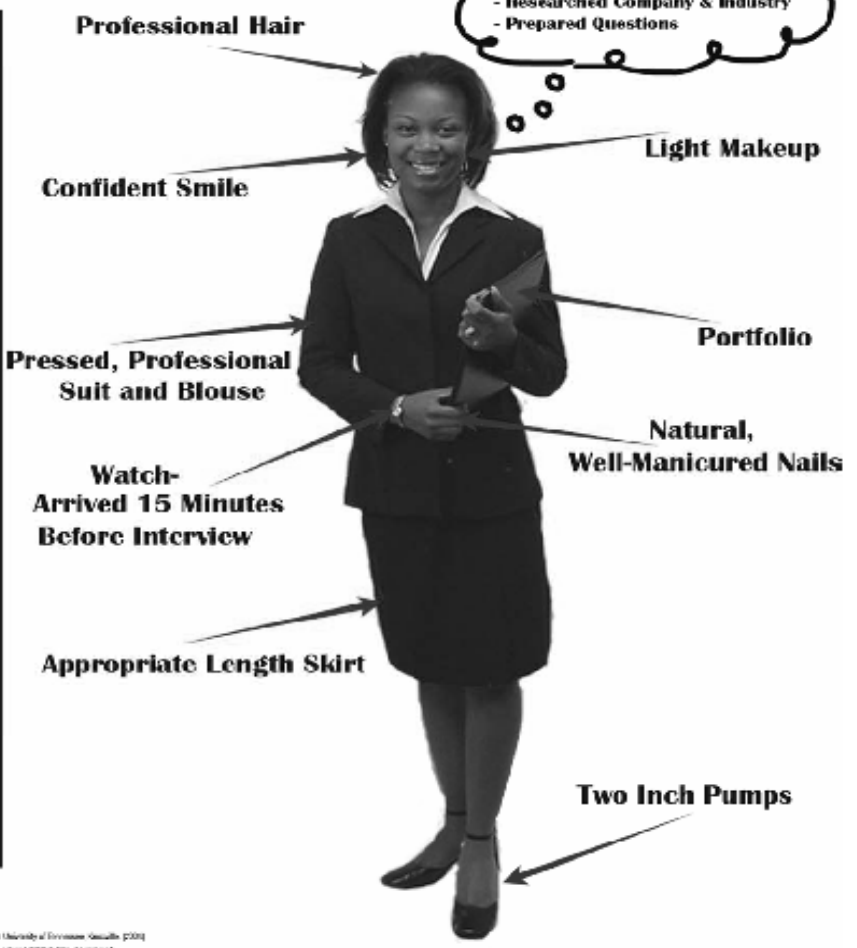
1. What are the opportunities for personal growth?
2. Identify typical career paths based on past records. What is the realistic time frame for advancement?
3. How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
4. What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
5. Describe the typical first year assignments.
6. Tell me about your initial and future training programs.
7. What are the challenging facets of the job?
8. What are the company's plans for future growth?
9. What industry trends will have the greatest impact on this company?
10. What makes your firm different from its competitors?
11. What are the company's strengths and weaknesses?
12. How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
13. Is it company policy to promote from within? Tell me the work history of your top management.
14. What kind of career opportunities are currently available for my degree and skills?
15. What are your expectations for new hires?
16. What would a typical day look like in this position?
17. Describe the work environment.
18. How can you utilize my skills?
19. What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
20. Why do you enjoy working for your firm?
21. What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
22. What characteristics does a successful person have at your company?
23. What challenges face this company in the next 3 months?
24. How would you describe the ideal candidate?



# Before *Extreme* Interview Makeover After

- No Research  
- No Questions

- Researched Company & Industry  
- Prepared Questions



Prepared by the Career Services office at The University of Toronto, Ontario (2001)  
L11 & L14 of HRM 101 for the Business School of York University

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION CHECKLIST

### Knowledge of the organization:

- You are familiar with the major products or services
- You know who are the main competitors
- You have researched the latest news reports that affect the company
- You know the size in terms of sales or employees
- You know the organizational structure of the company
- You know if it is unionized? Profit or non-profit? Publicly or privately held?
- You have researched the current economic outlook

### Materials you may need:

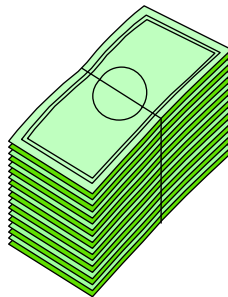
- Copies of your resume
- Dates, names, addresses, etc., concerning previous jobs, education, etc., to aid you in filling out an application
- Pen and paper for note taking
- Change for parking meter, garage, or pay phone
- Cell phone battery charged
- Any information you may already have about the organization and/or position (to review while you wait)
- Letters of reference or names, addresses, and phone numbers of references
- Portfolio of artwork, writing samples, or any other visual examples of your work, if appropriate

### General preparation:

- You are familiar with the general format of interviews
- Have rehearsed answers to typical interview questions, giving particular thought to how you will answer questions that might be discriminatory
- Have thought about/typed up questions you will ask
- Your interview attire and grooming are appropriate for the organization
- You know the name/title of interviewer
- Know precisely where to go for the interview (Hint: If you've never been there, make a dry run the day before.)

## WHERE CAN I FIND SALARY INFORMATION?

- \$ NACE Salary Survey (available in Career Resource Library)
  - \$ Updated yearly based on career fields
- \$ Occupational Outlook Handbook ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov))
  - \$ Updated information on all occupations
- \$ Wageweb ([www.wageweb.com](http://www.wageweb.com))
  - \$ Create an account to utilize information related to salaries
- \$ ACI Network ([www.ACInet.org](http://www.ACInet.org))
  - \$ Information on salaries for careers and more
- \$ Economic Research Institute ([www.eri.com](http://www.eri.com))
  - \$ Updated geographic salary surveys
- \$ JobSmart ([www.jobsmart.org/tools/salary/index.htm](http://www.jobsmart.org/tools/salary/index.htm))
  - \$ Updated salary surveys based on career fields
- \$ The Riley Guide ([www.dbm.com/jobguide/salary.html#survey](http://www.dbm.com/jobguide/salary.html#survey))
  - \$ New website with updated salary information
- \$ Salary Calculator ([about.salary.com](http://about.salary.com))
  - \$ Salary information based on geographic location and position



**Still have questions?  
Like to schedule a mock interview?**

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