

Ace Your Interview Before You Walk in the Door

How to Effectively Prepare for an Interview

Going into an interview without doing some research beforehand is like sitting down to a five-star, five course meal on a full stomach. You can do it, but I wouldn't advise it. Follow these quick tips to help you nail your interview before you even walk in the door.

Research the Employer- Show how the stars are aligning

Thoroughly researching an employer can help you demonstrate during the interview how the stars are aligning between the employer's needs and what you have to offer. When researching an employer, start with the company website. Review the website and look for any information you can find about the company's mission and vision, your future co-workers and manager, and your specific department. Take a moment to jot down your thoughts about why your personal mission and values make you a good fit for this company. Maybe you learned your future company really values giving back to the community, or your future supervisor belongs to the same sorority, or the company's vision is closely aligned with projects you really enjoyed at your last job. During an interview, you will be asked in one way or another to explain why you want to work for the company. The research you conduct prior to the interview will help you demonstrate why you are passionate about working for this company specifically and why you are a good fit. Other resources you can use to help you gather information about your future company and co-workers are LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and Google. Yes, Google. They are going to Google you, so fair is fair.

Research the Role- Know what you are fighting for

A good place to start when researching the role you are applying for is the job description. I know that sounds like common sense but a lot of my clients skip this step. Spend A LOT of time reviewing the job description because many of the interview questions will refer to the skills and responsibilities outlined in the job description. I'm a huge fan of using a highlighter to mark up this treasure trove of interview ammo. When highlighting use two colors. The first color is for skills and responsibilities you have used in the past and the second is for skills and responsibilities you do not have. Now begin to outline stories that demonstrate the skills you already possess. Explain your capability to learn the skills you need to develop by offering a story of a time when you used a skill that is tangentially related to the skills you are trying to develop.

Pro Tip: A great way to outline your "stories" or examples, when you are taking notes for your interview, is to remember that you are a STAR. Use this acronym to frame your story. S-T-A-R stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result(s). This means for each example, you will explain the situation in which your story is taking place, the task you were assigned, the actions you took to complete your task, and the results of your work. Additional acronyms such as SOAR, SPAR and SCAR also work really well when you are explaining stories that highlight your value. In these additional acronyms, "O" stands for opportunity, "P" refers to problem, and "C" is for challenge.

Another place you can go to gather intel about your new job is your network. Reach out to those in your network who have knowledge of the company you are applying to work for. If you can find someone who previously worked for that company, great. Someone who worked in the department you are apply to, even better! Someone who currently works at the company, the best!!! Here are some questions you can ask your network to help you learn more about the company or your role:

- Why do (did) you like working for XYZ Company?
- What are some challenges XYZ Company is facing?
- How would you describe the culture at XYZ Company?
- What is the history of the ABC role I am applying for? Is this a new position or will I be taking someone's place?
- What are some challenges that come with the ABC role?
- How would you describe the supervisor of this position?
- How are XYZ Company's values "lived out" on a regular basis?
- Are you aware of the salary ranger for this position? (Side note: it is totally ok to talk about salary before the interview...just not during the interview)

Research Yourself- Play offense not defense

In addition to preparing to answer questions about the skills in the job description, you should also prepare an interview game plan that allows you to play offense not defense. By that I mean instead of stressing over what questions you will be asked, think about what skills, achievements, and interests *you* would like to highlight during your interview and begin to think of ways you can answer common interview questions that allow you to highlight your greatest achievements. Prepare to explain these achievements by outlining examples of your work using strategies explained in the "Pro Tip" section above.

There you go. You worked really hard to prepare for this moment and now you are ready to nail your interview! Good luck!