



King County
Career Support Services Section

INTERVIEW PREP GUIDE



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Interview

Here are some tips you may find helpful in preparing for a job interview:

Three Simple Steps to a Successful Interview

* Prepare

Understand and know yourself; self-assessment is a highly valued skill in today's job work environment. What are your strengths and development areas?

Be knowledgeable about the position, organization and community before you go into the interview; research goes a long way!

Sharpen your interpersonal skills

Be prepared to ask questions. Use this opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and interest in the organization and position.

* Practice

Develop your answers to possible questions

Practice your responses

Participate in a mock interview

* Sell

Most interviews begin with the question, "Tell me a little about yourself." Use this open-ended question to sell your skills, abilities and qualifications

Demonstrate enthusiasm, a positive attitude and strong interest in the position

Let them know you will "fit"

Dress professionally

Bring several copies of your resume to all interviews

Other Tips for Successful Interviewing

Be punctual, try arriving 15 minutes early to allow yourself to prepare and show the employer you have time management skills

A good handshake demonstrates confidence and warmth

Keep good eye contact with the interviewer(s)

When answering questions, be brief and try not to ramble

Listen carefully to the question before responding and answer in an organized way

Try to minimize irritating habits, both verbal and non-verbal

Exercise good body posture

Remember, the interviewer wants to know if you

1. can you do the job
2. will you do the job
3. will you "fit" in the organization, and
4. can you make the transition to a new job position or career path
5. If given an opportunity to ask questions, be prepared to ask some pertinent ones

There are a few standard types of job interviews; having an understanding of them will aid you in preparing for them.

Screening: It is usually conducted by the H.R department of a company; the objective of this interview is to confirm if you meet the minimum required standards set by the company. Also, the interviewer may wish to verify the information that you have stated in your resume.

Selection: If you clear the screening, the next step is the all important selection interview. In this step, the employer will be interested to find out if you have the skills and temperament to execute your job responsibilities and gel with the rest of the team. Companies place a lot of significance on the ability of an individual to work as a team member; often people lose out due to their inability to convince the interviewer of their suitability in terms of being good co-workers.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

- **Mock Interview** - The Mock Interview focuses on how well you know yourself and your past experiences, how well you know the industry you hope to enter, and how well you can articulate that information. You may get the most out of your Mock Interview if you treat it as you would an actual interview.

- **Group Interview** - Several applicants are interviewed simultaneously, it gives the interviewer an idea of the team spirit of an individual and it divides the group into those that lead and those that follow. The selection depends on the requirements of the employer so there is not much that an individual can do in terms of preparing for a group interview.

- **Panel Interview** - Candidate faces a barrage of questions from a panel; the questions may not even be related. It helps the employers get an idea of your ability to identify with different perspectives of the same issue.

- **Stress Interview:** The objective of this interview is to artificially induce stress into the interview process and see how the interviewee copes with it. Techniques to unnerve the interviewee include asking questions rapidly, not responding to any queries from the candidate, making the interviewee wait before joining him for the interview. The candidate should ascertain if the job announcement warrants such an interview and if he is willing to put up with the stress. You have the option of either answering the questions without losing your cool or refusing to go along with it.

- **Telephone Interview** - Telephone interviews, also known as telephone screening interviews, are a convenient way for employers to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. Additionally, phone interviews are more efficient and minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates. For job hunters, the objective of a phone interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer.

Interviewing Tips

KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING AND GET THERE EARLY

Get directions. Get a map if you need it. Do a dry run if you have to. Allow for last minute glitches and plan to get there early rather than right on time

BE YOURSELF

It's natural to be nervous before an interview. Keep in mind that you have a lot to offer as an employee. Affirm those good qualities to yourself and maintain your confidence.

BRING YOUR MATERIALS TO THE INTERVIEW

As an aid to help you focus and bolster your confidence, bring your letter, resume and application to the interview site and review them before the interview starts.

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PATH

While it is good to keep your goal in sight, keep foremost in your mind that attaining your goal is a step by step process. If you keep looking up at the mountaintop, you may not pay enough attention to the details at your feet and can stumble badly. Your strategy in the interview should be to perform as well as you can in every part of the process.

DO NO'T BE EAGER FOR THE JOB

By giving the interviewers signals that you want this job very badly, you will hurt your chances of being successful. Go into the interview with an "I can take it or leave it" perspective. This won't be your only opportunity for employment.

PERSONAL REFERENCES

Be prepared to present at least three references to the interview committee at the conclusion of the interview. Reference information should include reference name, job title, current address, and phone numbers. It is important that you request and receive authorization from the reference before listing them as a source. When possible, provide your references with a copy of the job announcement so that they are able to respond appropriately when contacted by hiring authority.

LISTEN TO THE QUESTION

The most important part of the answer is the question. If you do not hear the question properly, odds are you will not respond appropriately. Listen without anticipation so that you avoid formulating answers before the question is completed.

PAUSE BEFORE ANSWERING

Do not “jackrabbit-start” your response. Give yourself a few seconds to collect your thoughts before you start talking. One strategy is to silently ask yourself a short list of questions such as - where/when did I do this, what was my role, how much of this activity did I do on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Answering these silent questions will allow you to provide the interviewer with comprehensive information in an orderly manner.

FOUR ROUTINE INTERVIEW TOPICS

In an effort to determine ones work ethics, the interviewer will ask questions specific to teamwork, customer service, conflict resolution, and time management.

In response to a question such as "What does being part of a team mean to you?" respond with the following points.

Team members: share information and promote good communication, respect each other, acknowledge that all team members have ideas and talents that contribute to the success of the team, back each other up, resolve issues within the team.

In response to a question such as "What are the elements of good customer service?" cover the points below:

- Providing customer service requires knowledgeable about the services, products, procedures, that the company offers;
- the ability to engage active listening skills to identify customer wants/needs;
- display positive behavior that shows the customer that their issue, complaint or request is important to you;
- do not personalize customer complaints or comments;
- always give the customer respect;
- solicit customer feedback in order to evaluate the quality of service delivery and improve service.

In response to a question, such as "How do you resolve conflicts with co-workers?" present the following steps:

1. I would first try to resolve the issue locally by discussing the issue with my co-worker. In doing this I need to determine if there is a misunderstanding/miscommunication or if a conflict really exists.
2. In discussing with my co-worker I would look for the common ground between us, such as the fact that we are both part of a work team and we have a job to accomplish.
3. In discussing with my co-worker I would treat my co-worker with respect and courtesy

In response to a question about managing workload and/or multiple projects (time management), it is best to think in terms of tools and strategies. Here are tools and strategies for you to consider incorporating as part of your response:

- Outlook-use calendar, schedule, reminder feature, flags, priority designations in email, read receipt feature
- Voice mail-call office email from home to leave messages/reminders for self
- Computer-use Word to create task lists/use Excel to create schedule for completing tasks
- Appointment book-reminders for deadlines, meetings
- Desk blotter calendar-reminders for deadlines, meetings
- Post-it pads-carry with wallet/purse to write down last minute things I need to remember

LISTEN FOR THE CUES

Keep in mind that interviewers can be just as uncomfortable in an interview as you are, and that their actions in the interview may reflect their unease with the process and not be a reflection of how you are performing.

Some interviewers may seem cold or aloof. This may be an interviewer's way of reinforcing his/her own objectivity. Some interviewers may nod enthusiastically as you talk. This may be a reflection of their desire to make you feel welcome. The best strategy is to ignore most of these cues and keep your focus on responding to the question.

There is one cue to which you should pay attention. If you have finished answering a question and a member of the interview panel says something like “Let me explore that a little further” or “Let me put that another way”, the interviewer is probably telling you that you have provided only part of the answer and there is more the panel is waiting to hear. This cue is giving you an opportunity to provide more information. Seize this opportunity and add to your response. Do not repeat in another way what you have already said.

COVER AS MANY POINTS AS YOU CAN IN YOUR RESPONSE TO EACH QUESTION.

When answering a question, present your response in outline form rather than trying to formulate an in-depth detail-packed explanation. Most interviewers are expecting you to cover several points in response to the question. If you only cover one point and get bogged down in the nuts and bolts details, you will be rated lower.

LOOK FOR PARALLELS & MAKE CONFIDENCE STATEMENT

If you are asked about something you haven't done or an area of knowledge you are not very familiar with, do not say you have “no experience”. Before you respond, look for parallels between what the interviewers are asking about and other functions you have performed. For instance, you know Word and some Excel, but have never used Access. Rather than stating that you have no experience or knowledge of Access, you will be better off saying that you have learned other computer programs in the past quickly, and you see no problem with becoming proficient with Access. You won't get the highest rating for your answer but you may score a point on the question rather than the certain zero you would have got by saying “no experience”.

AVOID USING THE WORD “BUT” OR “HOWEVER” IN YOUR RESPONSES

The words “but” and “however” negate everything that came before them. For example: “I am a very accurate and detail oriented worker but...”

BE HONEST

Be honest and do not misrepresent yourself. On the other hand, a job interview is not the witness box; it's a promote-yourself-situation. Tell the truth. Omit the negatives.

DO NOT VENT FRUSTRATIONS OR BAD MOUTH OTHERS

The job interview is not a place to air your on-the-job grievances or frustrations. Venting and badmouthing others is inappropriate. Accentuate the positive.

MAKE EYE CONTACT

Maintain good eye contact with all members of the panel as you respond to the questions. First address the panel member who poses the question: then make eye contact with the other panel members as you continue.

WATCH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

Be aware of how you present yourself. You do not want to distract the interviewers from what you are saying by fidgeting, playing with your ballpoint pen, or rocking in your chair. This is not to say you should be rigid and unexpressive. For example, if you tend to use your hands when you talk, keep them within an imaginary rectangle around your body rather than flinging them about. Speak clearly and smile.

HOW TO HANDLE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Generally we know our strengths and are comfortable expressing them. Ideally, the strengths you express should relate to the responsibilities of the job.

Describing a weakness is harder. There is the concern that one might damage oneself in the process. Whatever you do, do not try to turn a weakness into strength. Example: "I work too hard." Interviewers will see right through this ploy. Besides, we all have weaknesses. If you cannot express a weakness now, interviewers may wonder if you will be receptive to constructive criticism in the future.

Pick a weakness that is technical in nature and that can be fixed by training. Example: "I would like to improve my computer skills in Excel." Do not pick a weakness that relates to your personality or character. Example: "Sometimes I get impatient with people." Character flaws are generally perceived as unfixable."

HOW TO HANDLE HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

A hypothetical question evaluates how well you analyze problems, devise solutions, and accept responsibility. There is not necessarily one right answer to a hypothetical situation.

Begin your response by showing the interview panel how you think. Start by saying aloud to the panel something like "In a situation like this I would take the following circumstances into account in order to come up with a solution" Then continue to identify what these are, consider them, and construct a solution.

For instance, you are asked to resolve a situation where you are requested by three different persons to produce a work product for each of them by close of business. You know that if you must do all the work on your own that only some of the three customers will get the product. In a situation like this you could begin by considering the following. How much work is involved to create each product? Can I prioritize these requests in order of importance? Is the product destined for

someone higher up beyond the original customer? Is it possible to delegate one of the assignments to a co-worker? Is it possible to negotiate with one or more of the customers to push back the deadline? Is there other work on my agenda that I can postpone to make room for these requests? Only as a last resort would you want to take the problem to your supervisor to resolve.

HOW TO HANDLE TWO PART QUESTIONS

Don't try to remember all the parts of the question. Remember the question has more than one part. Answer the first part, then ask to have the other part repeated.

ASK QUESTIONS AT THE END

At the end of the interview, you will have an opportunity to ask a question of the interviewers. This is your chance to demonstrate your interest in the job and the agency you hope to be working for. Take this opportunity and use it to your advantage.

If you have done a little research about the agency, you may be able to ask a highly focused question that demonstrates your knowledge and gives you new information. A more general question you can use would be something like "What do you see as the greatest challenge for the person coming in to this job in the next twelve months? alternatively, "What is the most important goal management has for the new employee in this position?"

The question you ask should not be about you. It should be about the job. Examples of questions you should **not** ask are "How much does this job pay? (You should know that), Can you start me at a higher step? When can I get a promotion? Can I get flex time?"

SEND A THANK YOU

Within one business day, send a thank you note or email to the panel members. Your note should simply express your thanks for the opportunity to interview and your enjoyment with meeting the members of the panel.

4. If my co-worker was not receptive to discussion or we do not seem to be able to resolve issue together then I will suggest to my co-worker that we meet together with our supervisor to seek resolution.
5. If my co-worker does not want to meet together with our supervisor to seek resolution I will inform co-worker that I will go ahead and contact supervisor, who will then most likely want to meet with both of us either separately or together.
6. Throughout this process, I would keep in mind that finding a solution is for the good of the team/workplace.