

FLASHPOINT CHICAGO

A CAMPUS OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE HOLLYWOOD

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Now that you've been selected for an interview, you've some additional homework to do. Understanding the company you're interviewing with is crucial to making a great first impression. Candidates who walk in and ask questions about public information they could have easily found the answers to through a quick Internet search display extreme apathy and laziness. Here are some tips on the types of information you need to dig into and get answers about ahead of time.

The company's mission

Your prospective employer's website, especially the About Us page, is a great place to see the company as it wants to be seen. Look for its mission statement, which outlines the company's values. Then, consider how the position you want relates to that mission. Also think about how your experience and background have prepared you to support the company's goals.

Recent company achievements

While you are on the company's website, look for a Press Room or Company News page that links to recent news and updates, or simply search the Web for news about the company (**Pro tip:** Set up a Google Alert to get the latest company news sent right to your inbox). Think about the positive or negative long-term impact of the news you find, not only for the company but also for you as an employee.

The industry

Learn what general interest publications, trade publications and blogs are saying about both the employer and the industry as a whole. Search national publications for news and updates on major corporations; use newspapers to learn about local businesses and industries. Depending on your field, you should be prepared to discuss your industry's financial prospects or other trends, as well as know the main competitors for the employer with whom you're interviewing.

Your interviewers

Look for online bio pages of your interviewers for more background information about them. You may find out you have a shared alma mater that you can bring up in conversation, or you may discover a recent professional achievement of theirs for which you can pay a compliment.

People on the inside

People who already work at the company are another great source of information. Current employees can give you insight into business initiatives, corporate culture and even personality dynamics. Check your social networks to see if you have any connections, but don't stop there. Look to professional organizations and alumni organizations to which you belong, and ask friends and relatives if they know anyone who might have information to share about your prospective employer.

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ETIQUETTE & PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE

After doing your research about the company, carefully consider what to wear to the interview. Regardless of the level of casual attire at a company, it's always best to dress up with a more business professional look for your job interview.

PROFESSIONAL BODY LANGUAGE:

- Practice good posture and be aware of your nonverbal communication (such as fidgeting, twirling your hair or biting your nails).
- Smile, maintain good eye contact and acknowledge all individuals present in the interview.
- Turn off your cell phone and stow it. Let's be clear: Not on vibrate. Not on silent. OFF.
- Offer a firm handshake both at the beginning and end of the interview.

PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE:

It's always better to be overdressed for your first meeting. A good rule of thumb to follow is to dress two degrees above the company standards. For example, if employees wear jeans, you should wear slacks and a nice shirt. **If you're not sure what the company standards are, stick to a more traditional wardrobe:**

- For women – skirt and a nice blouse or pantsuit.
- For men – slacks and a blazer with a tie or a suit.

OTHER THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Take out any visible body piercings and cover any tattoos, unless you're interviewing at a tattoo or piercing parlor.
- Make sure your hair is clean and neatly trimmed or brushed.
- Clean and press your clothing – wrinkles show apathy and lack of attention to detail.
- Be conservative with makeup, perfumes and colognes.
- Check for scuffs or wear and tear on your shoes.
- Avoid excessive jewelry.
- When in doubt, run a lint roller over yourself before leaving home.
- Do not smoke before the interview.
- Do not chew gum during the interview.
- Brush your teeth or use some sort of breath freshener beforehand.

CLOTHES TO AVOID:

- T-shirts or tops made of see-through material.
- Oversized, baggy pants or tight, clingy skirts.
- Miniskirts, jeans, or shorts.
- Tank tops, wrinkled apparel or loud, distracting clothing.
- Open-toe shoes, flip-flops or tennis shoes.
- Baseball caps or hats

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PREPARING TO TALK ABOUT YOURSELF

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS TO PREPARE:

Now it's time to start practicing for your actual interview. In addition to the more specific job-related interview questions that focus on your unique skill set, several common interview questions will come up in nearly every job interview. These are general interview questions about your employment history, strengths, weaknesses, achievements and goals.

Here's a list of a few of the most popular interview questions that hiring managers ask and our tips on how to address them:

“TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.”

How to handle: Point out areas of success, such as career growth path, strategy, follow through and work ethic.

“WHAT'S THE BIGGEST MISTAKE YOU'VE EVER MADE?”

How to handle: Don't bring up anything damaging, but do say what you learned from a professionally related mistake.

“WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT?”

How to handle: Use examples that demonstrate key hiring characteristics.

“WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST STRENGTHS?”

How to handle: Your strategy is to first uncover your interviewer's greatest wants and needs and make a connection.

“WHAT DO YOU NEED TO WORK ON?”

How to handle: Choose a strength that you could improve upon.

“HOW WOULD YOUR CO-WORKERS DESCRIBE YOU?”

How to handle: This is seeing how self-aware you are of how others perceive you. What would be some common adjectives others might use to describe you?

“WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?”

How to handle: Give examples of how your qualifications match their requirements.

“AREN'T YOU OVERQUALIFIED FOR THIS POSITION?”

How to handle: Demonstrate a new way to think about this situation, seeing advantages instead of drawbacks. Focus on your level of commitment.

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Additional questions to prepare for:

- Why did you choose this field?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- Why are you leaving (or have you left) your employer?
- What are your short-term goals?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What are three of your weaknesses?
- Do you prefer to work independently or as part of a team?
- When can you start work?
- What would your last boss say about you if I were to call for a reference?
- What motivates you most in a job?
- What did you enjoy most about your last job? Least?
- Give an example of a time you worked under a deadline?
- How long would it take for you to make a contribution to our firm?
- How do you respond to tough situations?
- What would be your biggest challenge during your first 30 days on the job?
- What interests you most about this job?
- What can you do for us that someone else can't?
- How would you rate your communication skills?
- Have you ever been fired? If so, what happened?
- Do you have any questions for me?

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QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

Toward the end of your interview, you'll probably be asked if you have any questions about the position or company. Your answer should always be "Yes, I do!" This is your opportunity to find out more about the company (inquire about things like the workplace environment and corporate culture) and the job (find out things such as what the interaction is like with various teams, and whether you'll have a lot of autonomy) to make sure it's a good match for you. Generally, go to the interview with five questions that are unrelated to salary.

Remember, employers ask questions to determine if you are a good fit; you need to do the same to ensure this company is the right fit for you.

Below are sample questions you may want to ask:

- What do employees seem to like best about the company?
- What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
- What skills are important for someone in this position?
- What do you see as the primary focus for this position?
- What is the position's greatest challenge?
- Can you describe the daily functions and expectations of the job?
- Can you describe your training and evaluation process?
- Can you describe the best performer who's currently on your team in a similar role?
- What is the work atmosphere at your company like?
- Where will the job be performed?
- Is it based at headquarters or is it field-based?
- What are your growth projections for next year?
- What are the opportunities for career advancement within the company?
- How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
- In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?

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- Why is this position open?
- How do you see the position developing?
- What do you foresee for your company in the next five years?
- How do you see the future for this industry?
- What can you tell me about your new products or plans for growth?
- What were the major strengths and weaknesses of the last person who held this job?
- What types of skills do you NOT already have onboard that you're looking to fill with a new hire?
- What have been the department's biggest successes in the last couple of years?
- What would you consider to be the most important aspects of this job?
- What are the skills and attributes you value most for someone being hired for this position?
- Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to within the company?
- Could you describe the typical client or customer I would be working with?
- What is the next step in the interview process?
- When should I expect to hear from you, or should I contact you?