

5 Things to Do Before Your Next Job Interview

Want to impress the hiring manager? Here's how to prepare.

Do you get nervous before speaking in public? You take the stage, scan the crowd and suddenly realize that you haven't practiced as much as you should have. You realize your preparation was totally insufficient—but there's nothing you can do now. And that's when the butterflies kick into high gear. We've all been there.

Job interviews are no different. The more insight you have into your position and the company you're interviewing for, the more poised you'll be during your talk with the hiring manager. So do your homework before the big day and you will be more confident, because you prepared.

Our friends at NerdWallet suggest you do these five things before setting foot in the interview room:

1. Study the job inside and out.

In the days leading up to your interview, the job description for the position you're applying to should become your best friend. Study it closely to get a better sense of the skills the hiring manager is seeking.

“Before an interview, pore over the job description and pick out the five most important duties or skills,” says Pat Joachim Kitzman, director of career and professional development at Central College in Iowa. “Think of examples of when you have successfully used those skills during an internship, part-time job or volunteering [experience].”

Julia Browne, director of Connecticut College's career development program, advises interviewees to think about how skills they've picked up over the last four years “translate into the ‘value add’ they bring to the workplace.”

Talking about a particular project or paper can highlight what you've learned over the last four years, which can segue into a discussion about how those newly attained skills “would be of value to the company and/or the job for which you are interviewing,” says Dr. Mary Spencer, director of career services at the Milwaukee School of Engineering.

2. Research the company.

Although you'll learn a lot about the organization during the interview, be sure to do some investigating beforehand. Familiarize yourself with the company's mission statement and culture by checking out its website and social media platforms. Companies are working increasingly hard to hire not only the right employees, but the right people. Being a good cultural fit can go a long way in securing a job.

"Candidates for jobs, especially new or upcoming college graduates, need to use social media to connect with a future employer," Kitzman says. "Perusing a company's Facebook page, liking a couple of features and adding a short comment is an excellent way to demonstrate interest in the employer."

Jon Neidy, executive director of the Smith Career Center at Bradley University in Illinois, urges applicants to "be prepared to explain what specifically attracts you to the company and why you think you would be a good hire for them."

3. Tap into your network of contacts.

Speaking of social networks, don't forget to make use of your own collection of contacts. Reach out to your school's alumni to see whether anyone has experience in your field of interest. Or, if you know someone employed by the company you're interviewing with, arrange an informational session with him or her. If all goes well, that person will probably put in a good word for you.

"Tap your network of contacts," says Twyla Hough, director of career services at Trinity University in Texas. "Depending on the alma mater, the employer may have alumni working for them. These individuals can be a great resource for preparing for a strong interview. Look them up in LinkedIn alumni groups or through the university alumni office."

4. Prepare questions for the hiring manager.

A successful interview will feel more like a conversation than a one-sided interrogation. Although Browne advises students to rehearse short elevator speeches that can be used if the hiring manager asks them to tell him or her about themselves, it's equally important to have additional questions ready. Ask for more detail about your potential role, the company and the interviewer's experience at the organization.

"Have questions for the interviewer, but not questions that have already been answered in the job description or that are easily found on the website," Hough says.

Neidy notes that “the more insightful and thoughtful the questions, the more interested you will appear in the company.”

As well as highlighting a genuine interest in the job, asking questions will buy you some time to collect your thoughts while giving you an opportunity to take a deep breath or two.

5. Use positive body language.

Parents don’t prod their kids to sit up at the dinner table for no reason. In an interview room, good posture matters, and the way in which you deliver your responses to questions is nearly as important as the answers themselves. “Body language and attitude speak volumes,” Spencer says. “Show interest and enthusiasm for the company and the position.”

Because this doesn’t come naturally to everyone, take some time to practice in front of a mirror or with a friend. You want to come off as professional as possible.

“This includes emails, phone calls and in person to anyone with whom [interviewees] come in contact with during their meeting,” says Alana Albus, director of the Career Center at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania. “Many people miss these little nuances that can make a difference.”

You might not be able to eliminate them, but pre-interview anxieties can be decreased by taking the right steps to prepare for your interview. Making the effort to get as ready as you can be should leave you feeling more in control, something that a hiring manager will pick up on the minute you enter the room.