



Interviewing for a Civilian Job

Going on a job interview can be intimidating for anyone, but even more so if it's your first one. For many transitioning military members about to enter the civilian workforce, it can be a new and especially challenging experience. Your interview should go smoothly if you follow these tips:

- Prepare for the interview.
- Understand the different types of interviews.
- Develop interview strategies and questions.
- Prepare for the after-interview follow-up.

Preparation is the key to a successful interview. If you know what to expect, how to answer interview questions and how to follow up afterward, you can feel more confident as you work on landing the civilian position that's perfect for you.

Preparing for the interview

This is your chance to show the employer how your abilities and work ethic are a good match for the company. Go to the interview feeling calm and confident after preparing in these ways:

- **Research the company.** Find out about the company's history, corporate culture, sales trends and management style to help you develop solid, intelligent questions to ask.
- **Review your resume.** Be prepared to talk about your accomplishments. Think back on your previous positions and successes.
- **Get your references together.** In case the interviewer asks for them, list names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of professional and personal references. If you have letters of reference, bring them with you.
- **Prepare your portfolio or work samples.** Be ready to discuss your work. Make copies of samples or items that might be relevant to the position to share when appropriate.
- **Plan what to wear.** You'll want to make a good first impression. Dress conservatively and appropriately for the type of organization. You may need to invest in some new clothes. Makeup and jewelry should be simple, and make sure your hair and nails are well groomed. Avoid wearing perfume or cologne.

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Understanding the different types of interviews

Job interviews generally fall into one of these four categories:

- **One-on-one interview** — Conducted in a conversational style, the interviewer gets to know you, and you get to know the company and the job.
- **Panel interview** — These are common for government jobs and can be more structured and challenging than a one-on-one interview. The panel, usually three or more interviewers, uses a standard set of questions for each applicant.

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more about how to [sell your military skills](#) to a civilian employer.

- **Telephone interview** — This is sometimes used to screen applicants. You should use a landline phone, if possible, to avoid dropped calls or cell phone reception problems. Make sure you have a quiet place to talk without interruptions.
- **Stress interview** — Often used by law enforcement agencies, this interview intends to find out how an applicant reacts in stressful situations. If you're faced with a stress interview, staying calm, cool and confident is the key.

Interview strategies

Getting the job offer can largely depend on how you conduct yourself in the interview. Here are some strategies to help you make a great impression and ace the interview:

- **Arriving** — Get there early and be polite to everyone you meet. Shake hands with confidence and smile. Make sure your cell phone is turned off.
- **Responding to questions** — Listen carefully to questions and be sure you understand them. If you don't understand, ask for clarification. Be positive about your past job experiences, former supervisors and co-workers. Take time to gather your thoughts before you answer a question, and resist the urge to fill times of silence with irrelevant information.
- **Ending the interview** — Thank the interviewer, restate your interest in the job, and ask when you can follow up.

Interview questions

Prepare for the types of questions you'll most likely be asked. Be sure your answers are realistic and not too prepared or canned. Common questions may include:

- Why did you leave the military?
- What do you like about your current position?
- What do you dislike about your current position?
- What professional mistakes have you made?
- What are your strengths (or weaknesses)?
- How do you handle deadlines and job stress?
- What is your greatest accomplishment (or failure)?
- Where do you see yourself in ___ years?
- Why should I hire you?

Other question types may include:

- **Tell me about yourself** — These questions are your chance to sell yourself. Focus on your professional accomplishments, and draw from your research on the company to discuss how your skills and character make you a good fit for the company.
- **Situational** — The questions draw from your experiences and may begin with "Tell me about," "Describe a time when," or "What would you do if." Your answers help the interviewer evaluate how you handle yourself in the workplace.
- **How to answer** — These questions help the interviewer find the candidate who best fits the job in both technical ability and professional character. Use examples from your experiences, extra-mile accomplishments or teamwork successes to show that you're the best fit.

You should ask questions during an interview, too, so you can make sure the company is a good fit for you. Your research on the company can help you develop questions about the corporate culture and job responsibilities. Your questions can also show the interviewer that you did your homework.

Questions about salary may have been answered in your research about similar jobs in the area. Try to avoid asking salary questions unless the interviewer brings it up or you get the job offer. Know all the details about the job before you commit to a salary. Remember, other benefits — like tuition reimbursement — may affect your decision to accept

the position.

After the interview

The after-interview follow-up is another important step in the interview process. Even if you don't get the job, the interview experience can be valuable as you continue your job search. Here's what to do after the job interview:

- **Write a thank-you note.** Many applicants overlook this important part of the interview process. It may be a typed business letter, a simple handwritten note or an email. Restate your interest in the position, thank the interviewer for his or her time and include any relevant information you may have forgotten to mention.
- **Follow up.** After the interview, ask when a decision will be made and if you may call him or her to follow up. Make your follow-up call on or after the day the interviewer suggests.
- **Consider all aspects of the job.** If you get a job offer, consider the work environment, location, growth potential, job security, salary and benefits before you accept or decline. Be sure to include your family in the decision process.
- **Don't be discouraged.** Keep your chin up if you don't get the offer. There could be any number of reasons you didn't get it, including some not related to your interview performance. See it as a learning experience — analyze what you did right and what you could have done better as you prepare for your next interview.

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