

# EXPERT ADVICE



Landing the perfect job means rising to the challenge of the interview.

Compiled by the Partners at  
*GSP International*

*As an expert in the field of recruiting and placement in the accounting and finance professions, our tips on interviewing may just help you land that dream job.*

## GETTING STARTED

**A**n interview is an opportunity for you to learn as much about the company and its team as they will want to learn about you. Taking this opportunity seriously means that you will do adequate research (office locations, products and services, customers, competitors, philosophy, history, recent news and financial information) on the company and go into the meeting prepared to talk about how your skills and abilities can benefit the company. With today's capabilities for information gathering via the Internet, it is ridiculous to go into an interview without a great deal of knowledge. Even small

and private firms have web sites; if for some reason they don't; you will be able to find other places with discussion about what it is that they are doing. So we'll assume that you will be going into the interview well armed with information about what it is that you can do for them.

I believe that the best advice anyone can give you is to be yourself and relax. Think of the interview as a conversation, not an interrogation. And remember the interviewer is just as nervous about making a good impression to you. Please avoid any canned or phony responses. If for some reason you end up in a position based on a false premise, you may find that it ends up being a disaster. Good interviews are the ones you walk away from feeling that the company is a place

where you can continue to develop; all of that built upon a solid personal chemistry with a team you can contribute to by establishing a rapport with the interviewers.

What I find hard to believe is that most people will spend more time planning their vacation than they will for an interview, which could ultimately enhance their career!

Now, study this material and read it again right before your interview. This refresher includes some items that you will see as very basic. Take every suggestion seriously. Each has been known to make or break a potential career opportunity. You would be surprised at how many 10- and 20-year veterans leave interviews without an offer because they stumbled over one of the basics!

## INTERVIEWING DO'S AND DON'TS

**Do** be alert but comfortable. Use animation with hands, eyes, and head. Lean forward slightly in your chair while listening and maintain a healthy share of eye contact.

**Don't** be a statue; your body should have a general attitude of "attentive interest."

**Do** smile and laugh when appropriate. Keep in mind that smiling people are seen as individuals who are friendly and who have confidence in themselves.

**Do** give sincere compliments to all interviewers.

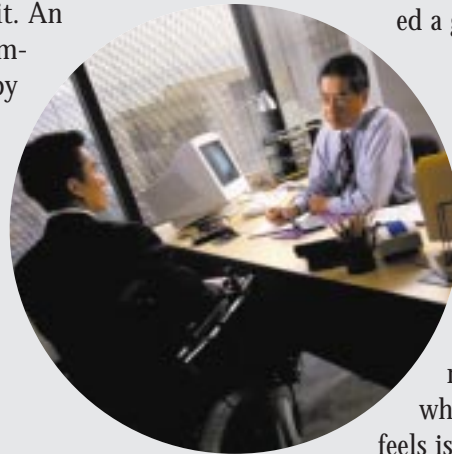
**Don't** take notes during an interview unless the interviewer suggests that you write something down. By constant note taking, you may violate unspoken laws dealing with eye contact.

**Do** treat everyone in the company with the same high level of courtesy.

**Do** walk into the interview with a confident, upright posture. Shake hands firmly, giving your name first.

**Don't** joke. Telling a joke during an interview, no matter how hilarious it might be, is rarely in good taste.

**Do** find out early what the interviewers are interested in and then talk about it. An easy way of accomplishing this is by asking, "what do you see as an ideal candidate for this opportunity".



**Do** remember that the interviewer may be just as uncomfortable as you are. Rather than concentrating on your own insecurities, try concentrating on the person in front of you. Help the interview go smoothly for him or her and you will find that you've conducted a great interview.

**Do** remember to listen. Communication is a two-way street. If you are talking too much, you will probably miss cues concerning what the interviewer feels is important.

**Do** avoid controversy.

**Do** remember that a well-placed pause after an important question is worth its weight in gold. This "thinking pause" doubles the value of whatever your answer might be. Obviously you know what your five-year goals are before going into the interview; still, it is better to pause and reflect briefly before responding.



**Don't** speak in a monotone. Try to vary the tone and volume of your voice during the interview.

## INTERVIEWING DO'S AND DON'TS

**Don't** ever say anything negative about a previous employer or a former colleague. Everyone knows this, and yet it is a crutch that many people fall back upon when asked why they are leaving or left a company.

**Don't** hide facts. If you have some sort of skeleton in your closet, get the answers to these questions sorted out in advance. Resumes always have some sort of glitch to be probed, for example, the job change after 9 months.

**Do** assume that everyone you talk with on the interview day will be involved in the decision to hire, no matter how they are introduced. Many times you will have an opportunity to meet future peers in an organization. Answers to the “candid” questions you’re asked in these circumstances often make it back to the hiring manager. Consider yourself as “interviewing” no matter where these conversations take place.

**Don't** be overly concerned with details (such as how many weeks of vacation you’ll get) when the human resource professional starts to rattle off the company benefits. You can get specific answers to these questions when an offer is made. These benefits are not the focus of your day.

**Do** get the names, with proper spelling, of all the people you interview with over the course of the day. Better yet, get their business cards.



**Do** write a synopsis of the interview immediately after you leave. You’ll refer to it often.

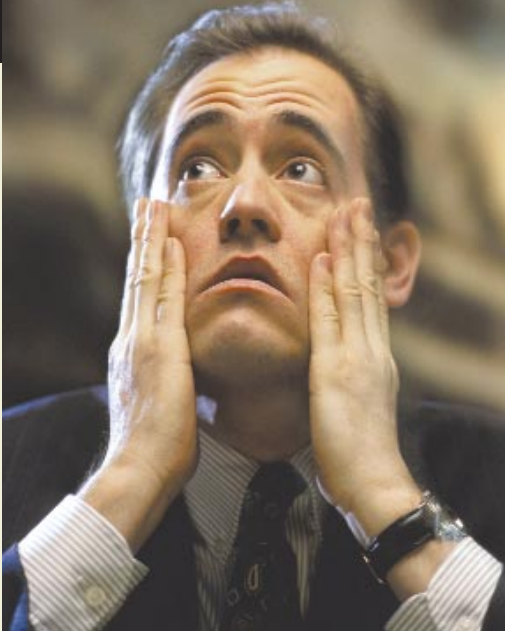
**Do** provide prompt feedback to the recruiter who set up the visit. Remember that the person who put the interview together is involved throughout the entire process, and deserves your respect.

**Do** send a “Thanks for the Interview” note. It will serve as a reminder to the interviewer concerning your interest and enthusiasm for the position, so feel free to mention any topics discussed during your interview. You can send it via e-mail immediately after the interview.

**Do** end the interview with a handshake and thank the interviewer for his or her time. Reiterate your interest in the position and your qualifications. Ask what would be the next steps in the interview process.



## WAYS TO DISQUALIFY YOURSELF



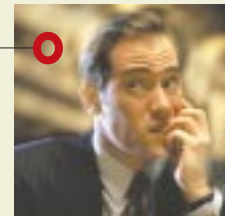
**H**ERE ARE SELF-INDUCED “KNOCKOUT” FACTORS THAT CAN DISQUALIFY A CANDIDATE. OBVIOUSLY, THE NUMBER ONE REASON A CANDIDATE MIGHT BE KNOCKED OUT OF THE COMPETITION FOR A PARTICULAR JOB IS A LACK OF TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS TO DO THE WORK. HOWEVER, MANY PEOPLE LEAVE INTERVIEWS HAVING BROUGHT NEGATIVE RESULTS UPON THEMSELVES. HERE ARE SOME KNOCKOUT FACTORS WE MOST OFTEN HEAR FROM OUR CLIENTS:



- Asking questions with negative overtones, indicating attitude problems, or a persistent “What can you do for me?” posture. (This is quite common for younger interviewees).
- Failing to ask appropriate questions about the job responsibilities or to ask any questions at all. (Make sure you have questions when asked or during “dead air”).
- Arriving late for the interview or by indicating you are late because the directions you were given were not good (Is usually interpreted as evidence of your lack of commitment and dependability).
- Neglecting to cite evidence of your accomplishments and answering questions with a simple “yes” and “no” answers.
- Looking disarrayed and inappropriately dressed (Appearance always counts).
- Not being able to respond to areas of inexperience in various technical or industry related areas. A way to respond to this situation is by letting the interviewer know that unfortunately you were not exposed to this area, but you will make it one of your first initiatives to learn once you come on board.



- Showing too much concern about money or raising salary questions early in the interview, (Indicating availability to the highest bidder).
- Failing to express thoughts or communicate clearly. (Often, a lack of eye contact can result in “poor communication skills” comments).
- Making negative comments about current/past employers or colleagues.
- Lacking a definite set of career goals or seeming to lack direction for the future.
- Lacking enthusiasm and interest in the company.
- An obvious lack of preparation by revealing a limited knowledge of the company you are interviewing with.



# COMMON JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**B**Y REHEARSING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, YOU'LL BECOME MORE FAMILIAR WITH YOUR OWN QUALIFICATIONS AND WILL BE WELL PREPARED TO DEMONSTRATE HOW YOU CAN BENEFIT AN EMPLOYER. SOME EXAMPLES:

## "Tell me about yourself."



Make a short, organized statement of your education, professional achievements and professional goals. Then,

briefly describe your qualifications for the job and the contributions you could make to the organization. This question typically will come shortly after exchanging pleasantries and it's what I like to consider a brief "infomercial" about you.

## "Why do you want to work here?" or "What is it about our company that interests you?"

Few questions are more important than these, so it is critical to answer them clearly and with enthusiasm. Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job, the company and the industry through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company.

## "Why are you looking to leave your current job?" and "Why did you leave some of your previous jobs?"

The interviewer may want to know if you had any problems on your current and/or previous jobs. Simply give reasons that are logical and truthful for each move questioned.

## "What are your best skills/attributes?"



If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills/attributes the com-

pany values. List them, and then give examples where you have demonstrated these skills/attributes. Start by stating, "I have been told through my reviews that my best skills/attributes are \_\_\_\_". I like to lead this way because I find it to be a working reference and a humble approach.

## "What is your major weakness?"

Be positive; turn a weakness into a strength. For example, you might say: "I often worry too much over my work. Sometimes I work late to make sure the job is done well."

## "Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?"



The ideal answer is one of flexibility. However, be honest. Give examples describing how you have worked in both situations.

## "What are your career goals?" or "What are your future plans?"

The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company's goals are compatible. Let him or her know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance. Be specific as possible, about how you will meet the goals you have set for yourself.

## "What is your salary expectations?"

Salary usually comes up twice, once when the company asks (because it needs to know) your current salary, and again when the talk gets serious and the discussion turns to your salary expecta-



tions for the position. When you hear that question on expectations, or something similar, you'll know that the

negotiation has begun. Tell them that "my number one goal is the opportunity, however, based upon a reasonable offer, I would seriously consider the opportunity". If they are only asking for clarification of your current salary, help them out. Don't leave out pertinent information. Be sure to provide details about your total compensation package, including any bonus, stock options and when your next review will be. The value of your entire package is the figure they need to consider before making you an offer.

## "What are your hobbies?" and "Do you play any sports?"



The interviewer may be looking for evidence of your job skills outside of

your professional experience. For example, hobbies such as chess or bridge demonstrate analytical skills. Reading, music, and painting are creative hobbies. Individual sports show determination and stamina, while group sport activities may indicate you are comfortable working as part of a team. Also, the interviewer might simply be curious as to whether you have a life outside of work. Employees who have creative or athletic outlets for their stress are often healthier, happier and more productive.

## "What have I forgotten to ask?"



Use this as a chance to summarize your best characteristics and attributes and how they

may be used to benefit the organization. Convince the interviewer that you understand the job requirements and that you can succeed within their organization.

## APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS TO ASK

**A**T MOST INTERVIEWS, YOU WILL BE INVITED TO ASK QUESTIONS OF YOUR INTERVIEWER. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EMPLOYER, AND FOR THE INTERVIEWER TO FURTHER EVALUATE YOU AS A CANDIDATE. IT REQUIRES SOME ADVANCE PREPARATION ON YOUR PART. HERE ARE SOME GUIDELINES FOR ASKING QUESTIONS: PREPARE FIVE GOOD QUESTIONS. UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU MAY NOT HAVE TIME TO ASK THEM ALL. ASK QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE JOB, THE COMPANY AND THE INDUSTRY OR PROFESSION. • THE FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF THE TYPES OF QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK AT YOUR INTERVIEW.

“Can you share with me why you joined the firm?”

“Can you please tell me how your career has developed at the firm?”

“If I work hard and prove my value to the firm, where might I be in five years?”

“How does the position and the department contribute to the overall company mission?”

“What characteristics best describes individuals who are successful in this position?”  
(Follow up by stating you maintain some of those characteristics).

“Does the position offer exposure to other facets of your organization?”

“What other positions and/or departments will I interact with most?”

“To whom does this position report?”

“How much decision-making authority and autonomy are given to new employees?”

“How will my performance be evaluated?”

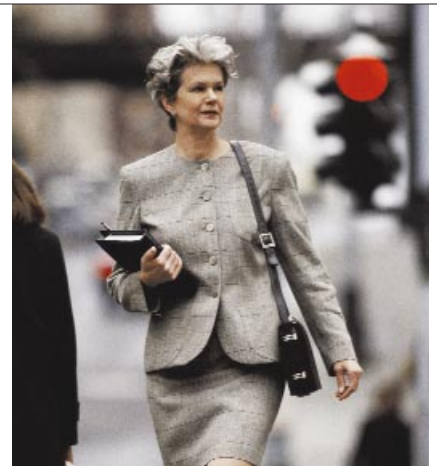
“What are the opportunities for advancement?”

“Does your organization encourage its employees to pursue additional education?”

“How would you describe the organization’s culture/environment?”

“What makes your organization different from its competitors?”

“How would you describe your organization’s management style?”



**T**HERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF JOB INTERVIEWS YOU MAY PARTICIPATE IN DURING THE HIRING PROCESS. HERE ARE THE MAJOR ONES AND TIPS ON HOW TO HANDLE THEM.

## ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW

In a one-on-one interview, it has been established that you have the skills and education necessary for the position. The interviewer wants to see if

you will fit in with the company, and how your skills will complement the rest of the department. Your goal in a one-on-one interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer and show him or her that

your qualifications will benefit the company.



## LUNCH INTERVIEW

The same rules apply in lunch interviews as in those held at the office. The setting may be more casual, but remember it is a business lunch and you are being watched carefully. Use the lunch interview to develop common ground with your interviewer. Follow his or her lead in both selection of food and in etiquette.



## COMMITTEE INTERVIEW

Committee interviews are a common practice. You will face several members of the company who have a say in whether you are hired. When answering questions from several people, speak directly to the person asking the question; it is not necessary to answer to the group. In some committee interviews, you may be asked to demonstrate your problem-solving skills. The committee will outline a situation and ask you to formulate a plan that deals with the problem. You don't have to come up with the ultimate solution. The interviewers are looking for how you apply your knowledge and skills to a real-life situation.



## GROUP INTERVIEW

A group interview is usually designed to uncover the leadership potential of prospective managers and employees who will be dealing with the public. The front-runner candidates are gathered together in an informal, discussion-type interview. A subject is introduced and the interviewer will start off

the discussion. The goal of the group interview is to see how you interact with others and how you use your knowledge and reasoning powers to win others over.

## SCREENING INTERVIEW

A screening interview is meant to weed out unqualified candidates. Providing facts about your skills is more important than establishing rapport.

Interviewers will work from an outline of points they want to cover, looking for inconsistencies in your resume and challenging your qualifications. Provide answers to their questions, and never volunteer any additional information. That information could work against you. One type of screening interview is the telephone interview.

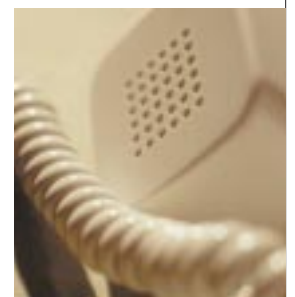
lenging your qualifications. Provide answers to their questions, and never volunteer any additional information. That information could work against you. One type of screening interview is the telephone interview.

## TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Telephone interviews are merely screening interviews meant to eliminate poorly qualified candidates so that only a few are left for personal interviews.

Your mission is to be invited for a personal face-to-face interview. Some tips for telephone interviews:

**Anticipate the dialogue:** Write a general script with answers to questions you might be asked. Focus on skills, experiences and accomplish-



ments. Practice until you are comfortable. Then replace the script with cue cards that you keep by the telephone.

**Keep your notes handy:** Have any key information, including your resume, notes about the company, and any cue cards you have prepared, next to the phone. You will sound prepared if you don't have to search for information. Make sure you also have a notepad and pen so you can jot down notes and any questions you would like to ask at the end of the interview.

**Be prepared to think on your feet:** If you are asked to participate in a role-playing situation, give short but concise answers. Accept any criticism with tact and grace.

## STRESS INTERVIEW

Stress interviews are a deliberate attempt to see how you handle yourself. The interviewer may be sarcastic or argumentative, or may keep you waiting. Expect this to happen and, when it does, don't take it personally. Calmly answer each question as it comes. Ask for clarification if you need it and never rush into an answer. The interviewer may also lapse into silence at some point during the questioning. Recognize this as an attempt to unnerve you. Sit silently until the interviewer resumes the questions. If a minute goes by, ask if he or she needs clarification of your last comments. This type of interview can be performed in conjunction with any of the interviews listed above.



**Push for a face-to-face meeting:** Sell yourself by closing with something like: "I am very interested in exploring the possibility of working in your company. I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you in person so we can both better evaluate each other. I am free either Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning. Which would be better for you?"

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Best of success to you!

**P**reparing well lets you approach an interview feeling confident and comfortable. When you've done your homework, you'll know that you've got all the information you need to make the right decision about an offer when it comes. Preparation also allows you to show how your skills and abilities will fill the company's specific needs. That's the key point you've got to apply all the focus you can muster to show them how well you fit into their organization and how quickly you can begin to contribute.

Keep in mind that every opportunity has a salary range, which can vary by thousands of dollars. What I have discovered over the past few years and through over a thousand placements by my firm is that the candidate who sells him/herself by performing most of these techniques achieves and at times exceeds their expectations in salary increases. Interviewing becomes an art and those who practice, drill and rehearse it will receive dividends for years to come. Remember the number one goal of the interview is to get the offer!