

INTERVIEWS:

JOB INTERVIEW BASICS: PREPARE WELL TO PRESENT WELL

Takeaway Points

- Always dress to impress in attire that projects confidence and professionalism.
- Analyze your skills before the interview and outline how they would benefit the company you're interviewing for.
- Allow yourself at least an extra 15 minutes to get to the interview location, since you never know what kind of traffic or detours you'll run into on the way there.
- Bring three more copies of your resume than you think you'll need – you can never be over-prepared!

By: Team Pongo

You put together a solid resume and cover letter, and you've just been called in for an interview. If you're like most job seekers, you may be thinking you'll just throw on a decent outfit that morning, show up on time, and wing it. That's fine, if your goal is to be like most job seekers. If you'd prefer to stand out from the crowd, read on.

Preparation is the key to mastering a job interview. Plan ahead, organize your thoughts and materials, and follow these steps to ensure you're well prepared to present yourself in the best possible light:

- **Know yourself and how your skills match up with the position.** Be prepared to go into more detail on anything the interviewer brings up from your resume. Refresh your memory about all your past work experiences. Think of stories that illustrate your ability to solve problems like the ones this employer might have. For instance, if you once devised and implemented a new procedure that streamlined the way some people did their jobs, prepare a succinct description of how you worked through and overcame internal resistance to those procedural changes.
- **Make sure you're very clear on what you can bring to the company.** Prepare a few talking points to address how your skills and background may help the employer address a critical area. Don't focus on what you've done in the past; frame your responses in terms of what you can do for the new employer. You might say something like, *"With the skills I acquired managing the web site redesign at X Corporation, I can help your team anticipate, identify, and prevent unexpected project costs and delays."*
- **Research the company beforehand.** Check out the employer's web site and become more familiar with its business model, the market(s) in which it competes, and (if the company is public) its recent financial performance. Do a web search for articles or blogs that mention the company, either in a positive or negative light. Some web sites even feature employee critiques of companies.
- **Dress neatly and conservatively.** You want to project the best possible image of yourself, so plan and prepare a neat, businesslike outfit. You can't go wrong with a business suit. Even if the company has explicitly stated that it's a "business casual" workplace, stick with the suit. An interview is not the time to express your unique fashion sense; it's the time to show you know when it's time to follow the rules and traditions of business.

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Did you know?

Pongo’s Interview Tips video program provides 12 how-to videos for every stage of the interview, plus printable checklists and interview guides.

- **Gather your supplies.** Never go to a job interview without a pen, paper, and two or three extra copies of your resume. Many companies will ask you to fill out an application for their records when you arrive. You should consider bringing a summary sheet with company addresses that you will need for the application but do not appear on your resume, which you can attach to the application and save a lot of needless writing. Also bring a list of about three references in case they ask for them, as well as any work samples, letters of recommendation, or other items that will help you make your case.
- **Arrive a few minutes early.** Arrive for the interview about 10 minutes ahead of schedule. Arriving early sends a message that you’re reliable and that you respect the interviewer’s time. It also gives you time to fill out the aforementioned application or freshen up in the restroom before the interview begins.

Too many job candidates put all their time and effort into the resume, then just hope for the best in the interview. Don’t make that mistake. The better prepared you are, the more confidently and impressively you’ll present yourself. And that’s what leads to job offers!

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Pongo Resume is a full-service online resource for job seekers. The Pongo Resume web site provides all the tools and support needed to write professional resumes and cover letters, ace tough interviews, and secure a great job. Pongo members generate over 100,000 resumes per month. Privately held and headquartered in Northborough, Massachusetts, Pongo Resume currently has more than 4 million registered members and averages over a half-million unique visitors per month. In 2009-2011, Pongo was named to the Inc. 5000 list of America’s fastest-growing private companies.