



Fundamentals of Interview Preparation

Preparing for an interview is a critical step in the job search process. It's your opportunity to showcase your qualifications, highlight your personality, and demonstrate how your experiences align with the needs of the employer. A successful interview not only reflects your readiness for the role but also your ability to communicate confidently and professionally.

In this packet, you will learn the core fundamentals of interview preparation — from understanding different interview formats and anticipating common questions, to knowing how to present yourself, ask thoughtful questions, and follow up appropriately. Whether you're preparing for your first interview or looking to sharpen your skills, this guide will provide you with the strategies and tips you need to leave a strong, lasting impression.

What is the Purpose of an Interview?

- **From the Employer's Perspective**
 - **Can you do the job?** They want to assess your skills, qualifications, and relevant experience.
 - **Are you a good fit for the company?** This includes evaluating your personality, values, and how you might fit within the team or company culture.
 - **Are you motivated and dependable?** Employers look for candidates who are enthusiastic, reliable, and show potential to meet (and exceed) expectations.
- **From Your Perspective**
 - **This is your chance to shine.** Show how your background, skills, and passion align with the job.
 - **Evaluate the role.** Does this position align with your career goals and interests?
 - **Assess the company.** Do their mission, values, and workplace culture match what you're looking for?

Preparing for the Interview

- **Do Your Homework**
 - Research the **company, industry, and job description**.
 - Understand recent company news, products/services, and organizational values.
- **Be Organized**
 - Know **when and where** your interview is scheduled.
 - **Arrive 10–15 minutes early** to show punctuality.
 - Bring essential documents: **resumé, cover letter, portfolio, references**, etc.
- **Know Yourself**
 - Reflect on your **skills, strengths, interests, and values**.
 - Be ready to talk about **your experiences** and how they relate to the job.
- **Practice, Practice, Practice**
 - Prepare for **common interview questions**.
 - Practice answering out loud, ideally with a friend, mentor, or in front of a mirror.
 - Develop a short **“Tell me about yourself”** pitch (about 1 minute long).

Prepare the Essentials

- **Materials:** Resumé, notepad, pen, questions to ask the employer.
- **Clothing:** Choose appropriate, professional attire (more on this below).
- **Rest:** Get a good night’s sleep before the interview to be alert and confident

Dressing for Success

- Choose professional, well-fitted, and clean attire.
- Keep accessories, makeup, and fragrances subtle.
- Make sure your clothes are wrinkle-free and shoes are clean.
- Dress slightly more formal than the company’s everyday dress code.

Communication Skills

- **Verbal**
 - Speak clearly and confidently.
 - Avoid filler words (e.g., “um,” “like”) as much as possible.
 - Match your tone and energy to the conversation.
- **Non-Verbal**
 - Make eye contact.
 - Maintain good posture.
 - Offer a firm handshake and a friendly smile.
 - Be aware of your body language—it should show interest and engagement.

Preparing for Interview Questions

- **Listen actively** before responding.
- Answer all parts of the question—**avoid tangents**.
- Provide **one strong, relevant example** instead of multiple vague ones.
- Use **first-person language** ("I led a project that...").
- Be **honest** about your experience—integrity goes a long way.
- Practice responses to **difficult or sensitive questions**, such as gaps in employment or weaknesses.

Know your Rights: Inappropriate Interview Questions

- Employers **are not allowed** to ask questions about:
 - Race or ethnicity
 - Sexual orientation
 - Religion
 - National origin or birthplace
 - Age
 - Disability status
 - Marital status or family plans
- If you're asked a question like this, you have the right to politely decline or steer the conversation back to your qualifications.

Common Interview Questions to Expect

- Prepare thoughtful responses to questions like:
 - **"Tell me about yourself."** (Craft a brief 1-minute pitch.)
 - **"Why should we hire you?"**
 - **"Why did you leave your last job?"**
 - **"Describe a time you worked well in a team."**
 - **"What is your greatest strength? Your greatest weakness?"**
- Use the **STAR Method** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure your answers for behavioral questions.

Questions to Ask the Employer

- You're interviewing them, too! Prepare **2–3 thoughtful questions**, such as:
 - What does a typical day in this role look like?
 - How would you describe the team or company culture?
 - What are the next steps in the interview process?

Wrapping Up the Interview

- **Thank the interviewer** for their time and the opportunity.
- Ask for a **business card** or contact information.
- End with a **firm handshake** and a **genuine smile**.

Following Up

- Send a **thank-you email** within **24 hours**.
 - Reiterate your enthusiasm for the role.
 - Mention something specific you discussed.
 - Keep it brief and professional.

Thank You Email Example:

Subject: Thank You for the Interview Opportunity

Dear Ryuzaki,

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me yesterday to discuss the job opportunity to work as a Barista at Shirokuma Cafe. I really appreciated learning more about the team, the values of the cafe, and the expectations of the role.

Our conversation gave me a clear sense of what it would be like to be part of the Shirokuma team, and I'm excited about the possibility of contributing to such a positive and customer-focused environment. I'm confident that my strong work ethic, attention to detail, and ability to collaborate effectively would make me a valuable addition to your team.

If there's any other information I can provide, feel free to reach out. I appreciate your time and consideration, and I look forward to what's ahead.

Sincerely,

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The STAR Method: How to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

- The **STAR Method** is a powerful way to answer behavioral interview questions that ask things like:
 - *"Tell me about a time when..." or "Give an example of..."*
- These types of questions look at **how you've handled real situations**, and the STAR Method helps you share clear, focused stories that show your skills, problem-solving abilities, and professionalism.

I. S – Situation

- **What was happening?** Set the stage with context so the interviewer understands the background.
 - **Example (Shirokuma Cafe):** *"While working at Shirokuma Cafe, we had a sudden rush during a weekend promotion, and we were short two staff members due to illness."*

II. T – Task





- **What was your role?** Describe the specific responsibility or challenge you were faced with.
 - **Example:** *"As the shift lead, I was responsible for managing customer flow, making drinks, and ensuring everyone on the team was supported to keep up with demand."*

III. A – Action

- **What happened?** Share the outcome of your actions—bonus if you can measure the result.
 - **Example:** *"I quickly reassigned team responsibilities to make sure the most experienced barista handled mobile orders, while I took the register and communicated wait times clearly to customers. I also jumped in to help prep when there was downtime at the front."*

IV. R – Results

- **What happened?** Share the outcome of your actions—bonus if you can measure the result.
 - **Example:** *"Despite the short staff, we kept the line moving, received positive customer feedback for our service, and hit our daily sales goal. My manager later commended me for staying calm under pressure and adjusting the team's workflow efficiently."*

STAR METHOD			
SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULTS
			
What was the context or challenge? <i>(Where were you? What was happening?)</i>	What was your specific role or responsibility? <i>(What needed to be done?)</i>	What steps did you take to address the situation? <i>(What did YOU do?)</i>	What was the outcome of your actions? <i>(What changed or improved?)</i>

Q: Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult customer.

- **S:** A customer at Shirokuma Cafe was upset that we had run out of their favorite seasonal drink.
- **T:** My job was to de-escalate the situation and ensure they left satisfied.
- **A:** I apologized sincerely, offered a free sample of a similar drink, and explained when the item would return.
- **R:** They appreciated the effort and returned the following week—eventually becoming a regular.

Q: Describe a time you worked with a team to achieve a goal.

- **S:** Shirokuma Cafe was launching a new menu, and our team had just a few days to learn the recipes.
- **T:** We had to be fully trained before the weekend launch.
- **A:** I organized a small after-hours tasting session where we practiced making the drinks and quizzed each other on ingredients.
- **R:** The launch went smoothly, and we got great feedback from customers and our store manager.

Q: Talk about a time you made a mistake and how you handled it.

- **S:** I accidentally entered the wrong order into the register at Shirokuma Cafe during a busy rush.
- **T:** I needed to correct the order without slowing down the rest of the line.
- **A:** I calmly apologized to the customer, quickly fixed the order, and asked a coworker to step in at the register so I could help remake the drink.
- **R:** The customer was impressed with the quick resolution, and we avoided any disruption to service.

Interview Preparation Worksheet

Interview Preparation can be challenging:

What should I say? How do I answer questions clearly and confidently? How do I stay on track without going off on a tangent? What should I ask the interviewer? And what should I do after the interview?

Expressing our thoughts and experiences in a professional and impactful way isn't always easy—but that's where this packet comes in. These pages are designed to help you organize your thoughts, reflect on your strengths, and prepare thoughtful responses. Whether you're getting ready for your first interview or looking to sharpen your skills, this worksheet is a practical tool you can reference before and even during the interview.

Employers are often looking for well-prepared candidates who can clearly articulate their experiences, values, and goals—and this guide will help you do just that.

Company Name: _____ **Employer Name:** _____

Date of Interview: _____ **Position Title:** _____

Time: _____ **Location:** _____

Company Research

What does the company do?
What values or qualities does the company emphasize?
Why do you want to work here?

Your Elevator Pitch

Write a short summary introducing yourself, your experience, and your goals.

Top 3 Strengths/Skills

List your top 3 strengths or skills and provide a brief explanation or example for each.
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

STAR Story Prep

Use the STAR Method to prepare one story from your work, internship, volunteer, clinical, fieldwork, or school experience.
<u>S</u>ituation:

<u>T</u>ask:

<u>A</u>ction:

<u>R</u>esult:

Key Accomplishments/Highlights

List 2–3 accomplishments you're proud of and how they prepared you for this job.
1. _____ _____
2. _____ _____
3. _____ _____

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

List 2–3 thoughtful questions you want to ask to show interest and learn more about the role or company.
1. _____ _____
2. _____ _____
3. _____ _____

Post-Interview Plan

Outline your plan for following up, reflecting on the interview, and preparing for future opportunities.
1. Send a thank-you email within 24 hours. _____ _____
2. Reflect and note what went well. _____ _____
3. Identify areas to improve for next time. _____ _____