

South Mountain Community College  
Career Services Center  
Presents...

# The Six Steps To a Successful Job Interview



**Step 6** - Promptly Send a  
Thank-You Letter

**Step 5** - Present Yourself  
Positively & with Confidence

**Step 4** - Plan Your Route  
& Show Up on Time

**Step 3** - Professionally Dress

**Step 2** - Practice

**Step 1** - Prepare

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# Step 1 – PREPARE

**Don't skip this part!** You might be tempted to just move right on to practice, but don't do it! This might be the most important part of the interview process. If you don't know who you are, what your skills are, and how you've used those skills, you won't be able to communicate these things to someone else either. So take the time to think through these exercises and write your responses – it will help you tremendously in your interview process!

## Exercise #1 – What are my skills?

Think about what you are good at. What would your friends, family, teachers, co-workers say about you? What skills are you most proud of? Make a list of 5 – 10 skills that you possess, AND that you'd like to use in a job. Here are just a sampling of skills – use these and/or come up with your own:

Advising	Fixing computer hardware
Analyzing data	Fund raising
Attending to detail	Giving presentations
Auditing	Grant writing
Budgeting	Graphic designing
Building structures	Helping others
Coaching	Implementing programs
Collaborating	Inventing
Communicating	Investigating
Coordinating	Leading others
Counseling	Marketing
Creating	Organizing
Creative writing	Planning events
Data entry	Problem solving
Decorating	Programming computers
Developing curriculum	Project managing
Directing	Repairing
Drafting	Researching
Drawing	Selling
Driving	Supervising
Editing	Team building
Educating	Telephone calling
Engineering	Training
Evaluating	Using equipment
Financial planning	Writing reports
Fixing cars	Writing software programs

My top skills are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Exercise #2 – How have I used my skills?**

Interviewers don't just want to know that you have skills – they want to know how you've used those skills in the past and how you will use them the future – with the company you're interviewing with.

For each skill you listed above, give 2 – 3 examples of how you've demonstrated the skill in your work, school or volunteer experience. And try to be as quantitative as possible. A quantity is “an exact or specified amount or measure.” For example, if my skill is “Leading Others,” instead of a generic statement like, “I led a lot of people in my last job,” I could say something like:

“As a volunteer coordinator, I led more than 50 volunteer groups in one year, ranging from small groups of students to large corporate groups of 40 or more volunteers.”

Other examples include:

- In my position as an Administrative Assistant, I personally handled over 150 phone calls per day.
- As a student governance board member, I planned a fund-raising event attended by 100 people that raised \$3000 for college students clubs.
- I reduced overhead by 20% while increasing profit by 40% annually.

If you can't think of a way to quantify your skill, just be very specific about how you've used your skill.

Skill 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 6 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 7 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 8 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 9 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skill 10 \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal Example #2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise #3 – General Employment Skills

There are several skills that most – or all! – employers want you to have. Even if these are not your top skills, you will still need to be able to list specific ways that you have exhibited these skills in past employment, school, or volunteer work.

### Communication Skills

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### Teamwork Skills

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### Strong Work Ethic (showing up on time, working with integrity, etc)

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### Flexibility / Adaptability

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## Exercise #4 – Research, Research, Research!

One of the things that can easily separate you from the other candidates is your knowledge of the company you are interviewing with. So do some research! Go to the company's website, Google the company to find out what outside sources say about them, if you know someone who works for the company, ask him/her questions. Use whatever you can think of to learn about the company. Find out their mission statement, what the company culture is like, their history, etc.

List 5 – 10 things you learn about the company from your research.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

**Congratulations! You are done with the Prepare portion of your interview process!**

## Step 2 – Practice

Now you get to take all of that preparation and put it to use! Below are some of the most common interview questions you may face. As you look over the questions, think of how your skills and past experience fit into the questions you are being asked. Then practice answering the questions out loud with another person! Practice with a friend, spouse, parent, or a Career Service staff member. Don't try to memorize answers to the most common questions – just be very comfortable with your experience and skills, and your answers will begin to flow naturally.

### 1. Tell me about yourself.

- ✓ This question is very open-ended, so it requires you to be concise and to the point.
- ✓ However tempted you are to ramble on for 10 minutes about your life, keep your answer to 1 – 2 minutes, and be sure to keep it professional – do not give personal information.

### 2. What are your greatest strengths?

- ✓ Take a look at the skills you listed above. Mention 2 or 3 of your top skills, and then give an example of one of them.
- ✓ For example, “My strengths are organizing, programming computers, and training. In my current position, I wrote curriculum for a company wide software training program, and conducted the training for more than 200 employees.”

### 3. What is your greatest weakness?

- ✓ Do not tell the interviewer your greatest weakness! This question is intended to stress you out – so don't stress out. Think of a weakness you have that could also be a positive. And emphasize the positive or how you are working on this weakness. Some weaknesses that could also be positive are: perfectionistic, competitive, too people-oriented, too task-oriented, etc. But be authentic – don't tell them you're a perfectionist if you're not.

### 4. What would your previous employer say about you?

- ✓ Here is another opportunity to highlight your strengths. Look at your list of skills and personal examples and choose one or two to highlight here.

### 5. What would your friends say about you?

- ✓ Think about your personality not necessarily related to work. Do you have a great sense of humor? Are you a compassionate listener? This is another chance to show the interviewer what an amazing, well-rounded person you are – so use the opportunity well! Think of personal skills that would make you a better employee, such as, sense of humor, listening skills, or generosity. And give an example of how you've shown this quality.

**6. Why do you want to work for our company?**

- ✓ Here is where you get to use all that research you did! But don't just list off all the things you know about the company. Instead, tell them what impresses you about the company (e.g. progressive, talented management, high quality, etc) and how you can contribute to specific company goals.

**7. Why did you leave your last job?**

- ✓ Stay away from bashing your former employer at all costs! Even if it was the worst job you've ever had, always keep it positive! Think of this in terms of moving on to new opportunities. And remember, you have no legal obligation to reveal that you have been fired.
- ✓ If you have been laid off, use these three rules in formulating your response to this question:
  - 1) Don't blame yourself.
  - 2) Don't blame or sound angry with the company.
  - 3) End your statement about the situation on an upbeat note by saying that you are looking forward to a new position with new responsibilities.

**8. What would you do if you discovered that another employee was stealing from the company?**

- ✓ Expect at least one "what if" question in your interview. It may be a general "what if" question like the one above, or it may be a "what if" question specific to the job you are interviewing for. In most cases, the interviewer is looking to see if you have good judgment. So take time to ensure that you've understood the question, then answer honestly and with sensitivity.

**9. Why should I hire you?**

- ✓ Don't simply say, "Because I'm the best person for the job." Instead, tell the interviewer why you are the best person for the job. Use your prep work – the skills and examples of how you've used your skills – to show the interviewer that you are the best person for the job.

**10. Do you have any questions for me?**

- ✓ Always have an answer for this question. Choose 2 or 3 questions to ask the interviewer. Having questions for the interviewer shows that you are interested in the job and have given thought to working for the company. Here are some options for questions to ask:
  - Is this a new position?
  - What do you consider ideal experience for this job?
  - Could you tell me where this job fits into the organization?
  - What are the primary results you would like to see me produce?
  - What are the opportunities for growth and advancement for this position?
  - When can I expect to hear back from you?
  - What would be some of my duties in the first year of employment?
  - What do you like most about working here?

## Other Common Interview Questions

11. What is your long-term goal?
12. Are you a team player?
13. How would you describe your ideal job?
14. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction in your life?
15. Would you rather work with information or with people?
16. What motivates you?
17. What stresses you out and how do you deal with stress?
18. Tell me about some of your recent goals and what you did to achieve them.
19. How has your education prepared you for your career?
20. What do you know about our company?
21. How do you spend your spare time? Hobbies?
22. Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
23. How has your previous experience prepared you for this position?
24. What was your favorite class in school and why?
25. What did you think about your former boss?
26. How do you explain that you were at your last company for only 1 year/1 month?
27. What were you doing between the time you worked for that company and today?
28. What is the most difficult interpersonal situation you have had to deal with at work, and how did you handle it?
29. Are you familiar with our company mission statement, and if so, what do you think of it?
30. How would you describe your personality?

Congratulations! Now that you've practiced, practiced, practiced, you're ready to get dressed for your interview!

## Step 3 – Professionally Dress



How you present yourself on your interview begins with how you dress. Your appearance on an interview does matter. This doesn't mean you have to go out and spend money you don't have on a new suit. It does mean that you can look sharp, pressed, and well-groomed no matter what. Here are some tips for both men and women:

### Men

- ✓ If you have a suit, wear it. Most HR professionals suggest blue, gray or brown.
- ✓ If you don't have a suit, choose slacks and a nice collared shirt with a conservative tie.
- ✓ Make sure that whatever you wear is clean, pressed and sharp-looking. If you're not so good with an iron, take your outfit to the drycleaner. There are many low-cost dry cleaners around that charge less than \$2.00 for dry-cleaning and laundering.
- ✓ Wear dark shoes and socks. Shoes should be polished.
- ✓ Hair and facial hair should be clean and trimmed.
- ✓ If you choose to wear cologne, don't wear a lot. You don't want to overwhelm the interviewer with your scent – even if it's a good scent.
- ✓ One or two conservative earrings may be okay for some interviews, but if you are interviewing for a financial institution or another business-oriented position, it would be best to remove your earrings. All facial piercings should be removed for your interview.
- ✓ NO hats, jeans, tank tops, shorts, sandals, tennis shoes, wild jewelry, food, gum, cigarettes.

### Women

- ✓ Wear a conservative suit, skirt, blouse or a dress with a blazer-type jacket.
- ✓ Wear medium-heeled pumps with closed toes shoes and pantyhose. Make sure there are no runs in your pantyhose.
- ✓ Make sure that whatever you wear is clean, pressed and sharp-looking. If you're not so good with an iron, take your outfit to the drycleaner. There are many low-cost dry cleaners around that charge less than \$2.00 for dry-cleaning and laundering.
- ✓ Style your hair in a way that is conservative and controlled.
- ✓ Wear flattering, but minimal, make-up.
- ✓ Go light on the perfume. Remember that some people are allergic to perfumes, and a lot of perfume can make a poor impression.
- ✓ Wear moderate jewelry. Simple earrings, necklace, one or two rings, and a watch is probably enough. If you have facial piercings, remove them before the interview.
- ✓ Have clean fingernails with no chipped polish. If you choose to wear polish, steer clear of wild colors or patterns.
- ✓ Carry a conservative purse or briefcase.
- ✓ NO sleeveless or backless tops, hemlines above the knee, see-through or sheer fabrics, hats, jeans, shorts, sandals, revealing clothes, tennis shoes or wild jewelry.

## Step 4 – Plan Your Route & Show Up on Time

Very few things can blow an interview like showing up late. It is recommended that you drive to your interview location the day before your interview so that you know exactly how to get there, how long it takes, and where to park. Use the number of minutes it took you to get to your interview the day before, then add on 30 minutes for the real thing. This is to ensure that unforeseen traffic issues will not make you late for your interview. If you cannot do a trial run, at the very least MapQuest your route and make sure that you are familiar with the route. Then give yourself at least 30 extra minutes to get there.

If you arrive very early, take the time to sit in your car or at a coffee shop nearby to relax yourself and/or go over your interview prep notes. We recommend arriving at your interview 10 minutes early. This shows that you are punctual and prepared, but not so early that you'll be sitting in the waiting room for half an hour.

## Step 5 – Present Yourself Positively & With Confidence

Congratulations! You've made it to your interview – you are prepared, you look good, and you're on time. Now is when the fun really begins! Now is when all of your hard work gets put to use. Here are some tips to think about on your interview day.

- ★ Have these things with you when you come to the interview:
  - A few copies of your resume
  - A page of references
  - A pad of paper and pen
- ★ Have a positive attitude at all times! If the receptionist asks how your day is, smile and say, "Very good! How about yours?" Even if the dog threw up on the new carpet, the toaster caught on fire, and your car battery died just as you were pulling into the parking lot. Do not complain ever, about anything, at your interview.
- ★ Speaking of the receptionist, be kind to everyone you meet during your interview. You better believe that if you are rude to the receptionist, your interviewer will find out.
- ★ Be aware of your body language. Shake hands firmly (without crushing), smile, don't slouch, try not to fidget, make eye contact, etc.
- ★ Now... Relax! Remember that you're ready. You've done the prep. Now it's just time to show the interviewer how perfectly your skills fit into the job and the company. If you are asked a question that throws you, which you didn't prepare for, simply take a breath, gather your thoughts, and answer confidently. If you don't understand a question, politely ask the interviewer to explain. You are not expected to interview perfectly – so don't get hung up on one not-so-good answer – just move on with confidence and positivity.

## Step 6 – Promptly Send a Thank You Letter

My former boss, the Executive Director of a non-profit organization, was interviewing candidates for the Operations Director position. He must have interviewed ten or more people over the course of two weeks. As he was narrowing down his choice of top candidates, he mentioned to me that only two of the candidates had sent thank you letters. He was so impressed with this effort, and their interview skills, that these two candidates topped his list. One of those candidates is now the Operations Director. Please don't miss this point – **because several of the candidates' interviews were strong, the thank you letter is what made the difference!**

### Thank You Letter Tips:

- ☺ Send the letter *within 48 hours* following the interview.
- ☺ Always address a thank you letter to a specific individual. Be sure the name is spelled correctly. If you were interviewed by a committee, send your letter to the search chair and ask that person to share with the rest of the committee OR send a separate letter to each committee member highlighting points you discussed.
- ☺ Write each thank you letter separately, even if you follow a similar form for each letter. The letter should highlight what was discussed in your interview and reiterate your qualifications and continuing interest.
- ☺ As with resumes and cover letters, make sure there are NO errors in your letter.
- ☺ You may send a simple, hand-written note on a conservative note card, or a more formal type-written letter. Choose whichever you feel would be most appropriate.

### Sample Formal Thank You Letter Layout:

Your Address

Date

(Interviewer's Name)

Company Name

Address

Dear Mr. Ms. Dr. (Etc):

First paragraph: Thank the interviewer for meeting with you. Express your enthusiasm about gaining employment in the organization.

Second paragraph: Reiterate your qualifications and continuing interest in the position. Include any personal skills you forgot to mention during your interview. Emphasize a particular skill or accomplishment that would make you an asset as an employee.

Third paragraph: Briefly thank the interviewer again for consideration. Express confidence in your ability to perform well in the organization. State that you look forward to hearing from the interviewer and give a specific date if you plan to follow up with a phone call.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Your Name (typed)

# Congratulations!

You have just taken a major step in procuring the job of your dreams. Interview preparation is a very important – but often neglected – part of your job search process. Having completed this packet, you are now likely more prepared than most of the people you will be competing against for jobs. Continue to practice, continue to build your skills, and continue to feel confident about your job prospects. Don't be discouraged if you don't get the first job you interview for – instead choose to see it as practice for the next one. And keep at it. Job searching can be difficult and humbling. But it can also be an incredible experience to grow as a person, to discover what type of career you really want, and to build the skills you will continue to use throughout your career and life.

One more tip... don't be afraid to use the Career Services Center! We are here for you and can help you through the job search process at no charge to you. Call us at 602.243.8154 or stop by and see us at the South Mountain Community College Student Enrollment Services building at 7050 S. 24<sup>th</sup> Street in Phoenix. You can also visit us on the web at <http://students.southmountaincc.edu/StudentDevelopment/CareerServices/>.

## Resources

Mesa Community College. [Tips For a Successful Interview](#). 30 March 2006

Monster Career Advice. <http://career-advice.monster.com/interview-tips/home.aspx>. 8 May 2008.

Stein, Marky. [Fearless Interviewing: How to Win the Job by Communicating with Confidence](#). New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003.



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