

What Happens in an Interview

The interviewing process can be scary if you don't know what to expect. All interviews fit a general pattern. While each interview will differ, all will share three common characteristics: The beginning, middle and conclusion. The typical interview will last 30 minutes, although some may be longer. A typical structure is as follows:

- Five minutes - small talk
- Fifteen minutes - a mutual discussion of your background and credentials as they relate to the needs of the employer
- Five minutes - ask you for questions
- Five minutes - conclusion of interview

As you can see, there is not a lot of time to state your case. The employer may try to do most of the talking. When you do respond to questions or ask your own, your statements should be concise and organized without being too brief.

It Starts Before You Even Say Hello

The typical interview starts before you even get into the inner sanctum. The recruiter begins to evaluate you the minute you are identified. You are expected to shake the recruiter's hand upon being introduced. Don't be afraid to extend your hand first. This shows assertiveness.

It's a good idea to arrive at least 15 minutes early. You can use the time to relax. It gets easier later. It may mean counting to ten slowly or wiping your hands on a handkerchief to keep them dry.

How's Your Small Talk Vocabulary?

Many recruiters will begin the interview with some small talk. Topics may range from the weather to sports and will rarely focus on anything that brings out your skills. Nonetheless, you are still being evaluated. Recruiters are trained to evaluate candidates on many different points. They may be judging how well you communicate on an informal basis. This means you must do more than smile and nod.

The Recruiter Has the Floor

The main part of the interview starts when the recruiter begins discussing the organization. If the recruiter uses vague generalities about the position and you want more specific information, ask questions. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the job and the company.

As the interview turns to talk about your qualifications, be prepared to deal with aspects of your background that could be construed as negative, i.e., low grade point average, no participation in outside activities, no related work experience. It is up to you to convince the recruiter that although these points appear negative, positive attributes can be found in them. A low GPA could stem from having to fully support yourself through college; you might have no related work experience, but plenty of experience that shows you to be a loyal and valued employee.

Many times recruiters will ask why you chose the major you did or what your career goals are.



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These questions are designed to determine your goal direction. Employers seek people who have direction and motivation. This can be demonstrated by your answers to these innocent-sounding questions.

It's Your Turn To Ask Questions

When the recruiter asks, "Now do you have any questions?" it's important to have a few ready. Dr. C. Randall Powell, author of *Career Planning Today*, suggests some excellent strategies for dealing with this issue. He says questions should elicit positive responses from the employer. Also, the questions should bring out your interest in and knowledge of the organization. By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions, you show the employer you are serious about the organization and need more information. It also indicates to the recruiter that you have done your homework.

The Close Counts, Too

The interview isn't over until you walk out the door. The conclusion of the interview usually lasts five minutes and is very important. During this time the recruiter is assessing your overall performance. It is important to remain enthusiastic and courteous. Often the conclusion of the interview is indicated when the recruiter stands up. If you feel, however, that the interview has reached its conclusion, feel free to stand up first. Shake the recruiter's hand and thank him or her for considering you. Being forthright is a quality that most employers will respect, indicating that you feel you have presented your case and the decision is now up to the employer.

Expect the Unexpected

During the interview, you may be asked some unusual questions. Don't be too surprised. Many times questions are asked simply to see how you react. For example, surprise questions could range from, "Tell me a joke" to "What time period would you have lived in?" These are not the kind of questions for which you can prepare in advance. Your reaction time and the response you give will be evaluated by the employer, but there's no way to anticipate questions like these. While these questions are not always used, they are intended to force you to react under some stress and pressure. The best advice is to think and give a natural response.

Evaluations Made by Recruiters

The employer will be observing and evaluating you during the interview. Erwin S. Stanton, author of *Successful Personnel Recruiting and Selection*, indicates some evaluations made by the employer during the interview include:

1. How mentally alert and responsive is the job candidate?
2. Is the applicant able to draw proper inferences and conclusions during the course of the interview?
3. Does the applicant demonstrate a degree of intellectual depth when communicating, or is his/her thinking shallow and lacking depth?
4. Has the candidate used good judgment and common sense regarding life planning up to this point?
5. What is applicant's capacity for problem-solving activities?
6. How well does candidate respond to stress and pressure?

