

# THE INTERVIEW

## You got the call! Now What?

*What to do to prepare for an interview*



Getting the call for an interview is really exciting – it is the kind of thing you celebrate (before the nerves kick in). Proper preparation is key to walking into any interview with confidence and

wowing them with your skills, experience and potential. There is a lot you can do as a candidate to make the most of this opportunity and to give yourself more control over the outcome.

### Interviewing Skills

#### Interview Prep:

Let the STAR guide you. Power preparation techniques that will have you acing any interview question with style and confidence

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A comprehensive guide to preparing for interviews (before, during and after) to keep you focused and on your game

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#### And more!

Look at our list of potential interview questions to help you prepare for the big day and those tough questions that may otherwise have you stumped.

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Salary negotiation is a tricky area; you want to get it note perfect to ensure a positive relationship between you and your new employer.

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*"Interviews are 90% preparation and 10% execution"*

## Interview Prep: It Starts With Your CV

Your CV and covering letter were what got you this far, but did you know they are also what could take you the rest of the way? They could, especially when your CV and covering letters use achievements-based examples to showcase your skills, knowledge and experience. The prospective employer is going to want to learn

more about those achievements, so each time you update your CV (or write a covering letter) make sure to start your interview prep work by writing out **STAR** for each of those achievements (and others you know you'd want an employer to hear about but may not fit on your CV). Keep reading to find out more.

## Let the STAR Guide You: Acing Interview Questions

Today's employers typically ask competency or behavioral based interview questions designed to help you demonstrate how you behaved in experienced based circumstances (or to showcase your competencies and expertise). Writing this out for each achievement before hand will ensure you don't forget anything in the interview.

**Situation** – set the context for your story. For example, "We needed to deliver an important financial report for the Board of Directors, allowing them to make key decisions."

**Task** – what was required of you. For example, "It was my

*responsibility to ensure the data we were using was accurate."*

**Activity** – what you actually did. For example, "I set up several tests to check for data accuracy and found there were several problems that needed to be addressed before we could use the data in our report."

**Result** – how well the situation turned out. For example, "Because I caught that concern at the beginning we were able to complete the report on time with accuracy, and I was able to make several process recommendations to ensure the inaccuracies wouldn't happen again in the future."



*You will feel this good going into an interview (and coming out of one) when you prepare and practice your responses ahead of time.*

## Delivery: Making Your STAR Achievements Count



*You need to get, and keep, her attention in an interview.*

Hiring Managers are busy people, so as you construct your STAR responses ensure you use specific examples (i.e. "it was my responsibility to ensure the data we were using was accurate"); generalities will make you sound vague or unsure (i.e. "I helped my team deliver a report").

You want to balance details with being concise to ensure you keep your audience's attention throughout your example. Don't just write out your responses; practice them with a friend to ensure you are prepared to deliver them in an authentic and comfortable way.

Lastly, you want to convey relaxed body language, no crossed arms or fidgeting and maintain a good level of eye contact.



## Interviews: 90% Preparation 10% Execution

Collecting achievements-based response data in the STAR format is a great start (keep all of this in a catalogue or file for use over your career), but that is just the beginning.

**When you apply for the job.** Make sure you copy the job posting and keep it with your cover letter. If you targeted your whole CV for the role keep that CV version with this information as well. You need to have this on-hand in case you receive a screening call from the employer. For that reason you should also become familiar with the employer's mandate (i.e. they provide state of the art prosthetic devices for amputees), so that you are able to prove familiarity with what the employer does. Bookmark their web site so you can get to it quickly if you need to. Assess if your current STAR responses will cover everything they may ask in an interview (look to the job posting to help you with this). If more

examples come to you, write them out so you are ready. Some other things you may want to note are the salary (if it is listed), your ballpark salary expectation for this type of role, and any questions that come to you about the organization or the job (office location, travel requirements, etc.).

**The phone pre-screen.** Many employers will narrow down their choices to their top 5 or so candidates and conduct phone interviews to confirm their candidacy. These calls may be conducted "out of the blue" or you may be contacted to let you know they'd like to have a preliminary conversation with you and ask for your availability to schedule the call. Either way, your earlier preparation will help to make you look good on the spot.

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Typical questions you may be asked during a phone interview include where you saw the job posting, what drew your interest to it, why would you like to work with their organization, your salary expectations for the role and your availability to start the job (if you were selected). If there are other job-related items they need to know (like language proficiency, ability to travel, security clearance level, etc.) then these may be questions the prospective employer asks at this time.

Before concluding the phone interview the recruiter or hiring manager may ask you if you have any questions. You should have one or two that you would like to ask, as it shows you are engaged in the process. You want to convey the right tone throughout the call; phone interviews can be tricky because they are one-dimensional (you cannot see each others body language).

If the caller didn't already highlight their recruiting process for you, ask when you'll hear from them next, and their timeframe for hiring. This should give you an indication of how long the process may take (which will vary by employer). Sometimes the employer may book the next step after your phone screen and

sometimes you may need to wait a few days before understanding if you are moving further in their process (and when the next step is).

**Booking an Interview.** When the employer books your interview ensure you ask enough questions to adequately prepare for it. You'll need to know where the interview will take place, if there is parking available (or transit), with whom you'll be meeting, how long the interview may take, if there is any testing involved (skills, language, etc.), dress code, and if you need to bring anything to the interview (a copy of your CV, references, etc.). Write this information down so you have it to reference later (and consider celebrating that you have an interview – it's a big step in the right direction).

Now you have homework to do. If you are not familiar with the area where you'll be going for the interview take a test drive at the same time of day as you'll be commuting to the interview so you'll know in advance how long it may take you to get there (and where the bus stops are or available parking). Also, look up the people you'll be meeting

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## Your Strengths

Most employers will ask you to describe your strengths. Ensure you are ready for this question and that you roll aspects of the job opportunity you are interviewing for into your answer. As an example:

*“One of my strengths is to be able to work with multiple deadlines and accurately prioritize through collaboration with stakeholders. My experience in similar roles has prepared me for competing deadlines and the importance of clear and regular communication”.*

## Your Weaknesses

Just as they will ask about strengths, so too will they ask about your weaknesses. Be ready to highlight one and speak about it in terms of your way to overcome it:

*“A weakness I occasionally experience is perfectionism. I know this happens if I am stressed and I take steps to minimize it by proper prioritization of work, adhering to deadlines and checking my work just twice for mistakes.”*

with (on their company web site or Linked In) so you are familiar with them (at least be able to say their names correctly, know their titles and areas of responsibility). Review the company website until you feel you could confidently answer any questions on the content. Prepare for any test they are administering and (lastly) gather any documentation you need to bring to the interview (proof of citizenship, your driver license, a copy of your references, etc.). Make a list of your questions, as you'll have an opportunity to ask them in the interview. If you haven't practiced your STAR responses in a while (or at all) now is a good time to find a friend and do some verbal dry runs. Authentic and comfortable requires practice.

**The day before the big day:** Make sure you get lots of sleep and have a chance to relax. By this point you've already prepared your material and responses, so give yourself a breather; try not to get nervous (easier said than done, depending on your comfort level with interviews). Chose what you are going to wear to the interview and make sure it is ready for action; there is nothing worse than discovering on your way to the interview the hem on your pants has come down or your shoes are filthy.

**During the interview.** You have the first 3-5 minutes to make a good impression. Smile, shake hands firmly and adopt a relaxed but professional posture during the interview. Make lots of eye contact and direct your answers to the person who posed the question (this is especially important if there is more than one interviewer as it can be tough to know where to look). Calmly answer questions concisely and comfortably and check-in to ensure they received the information they needed (often the interviewers will re-direct or ask follow-up questions with the exception of the Government of Canada where they may not ask follow-up questions during an interview). As the interview draws to a close confirm they

have everything they need from you and that you've asked all your questions. It is OK to ask when they feel they may have a decision, they will expect candidates want to know. If you have been selected as the preferred candidate in another process but would choose the role you just interviewed for instead help them to understand your circumstances and when you need to get back to the other employer.

**After the interview.** Once you have returned from the interview (or at least within 24 hours) send an e-mail individually thanking all the participants; offer to answer any further questions they may have, re-express your interest in their opportunity and in working for their organization. Some candidates believe this is "just sucking up" but it isn't. After the interview is complete it is always reassuring to the interviewers to hear from candidates and to confirm that you are still actively interested in their position.

**What to do if you don't hear anything from the employer.** If after the amount of time the employer stated it would take for a decision has lapsed it's fine to touch base with your contact there (either the recruiter or the hiring manager) and enquire if your candidacy is still being considered. Often there may be a delay in making a decision if people at the prospective employer's unexpectedly needed to travel or other work-based circumstances came up. If your circumstances change (you received another offer you are planning to accept, or you decide you'd no longer like to be considered for the opportunity) then it is appropriate for you to contact the employer to let them know. If you received another offer but would prefer to work for this employer then it is also appropriate to contact them to let them know (without any pressure) that you have a deadline to respond to for the other job, but would prefer theirs.

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**What to do if you are not the selected candidate.** It is disappointing, after all the effort you put into preparing for an interview, to hear you are not selected. Try not to sound angered or upset by the news (normal as it is to feel that way) - there is some information you need to collect from the contact delivering the information. You may express regret that you were not selected and ask if you would be considered for other opportunities with them in the future that may fit your skill set (letting them know you are still interested in working for their organization). You may also ask if there is any feedback for you from the interview that would help strengthen your candidacy in future interviews. Some employers may have constructive feedback for you, some may honestly not have any feedback (especially if all the candidates were really strong) and some employers may not provide any feedback to candidates as a matter of course. Take what information you can away from the process, make adjustments if needed, and try not to dwell on the disappointment. There will be other job interviews in your future.

**When you are the selected candidate** the person calling to let you know this will likely have some questions for you, they may make a verbal offer to you on the phone (or ask you to come in for a meeting) and may want to re-confirm your starting date. Make a note of any information they give you over the phone so you can accurately complete the actions required. You may also need to provide your references, ensure you've let your references know to expect contact and (if possible) from whom. If you are currently employed it is a good rule of thumb to wait until you've signed your letter of offer before letting your current employer know you will be moving on. Once the paperwork is out of the way and you know your start date, celebrate! You've just landed yourself a new job!

## Common Interview Questions

Here is a list of common interview questions (in no particular order). Use them to prepare your answers using the STAR method.

- Give me a work-based example of a time when you worked effectively under pressure and how you managed it.
- Can you give me an example of a time when you handled a challenge at work?
- Please give me an example of a time when you made a mistake at your job. How did you handle it?
- Please provide an example of a goal you achieved and tell me how you reached it.
- Describe a decision you made that wasn't popular and how you handled implementing it.
- Please give me an example of how you plan for goal achievement.
- Please give me an example of a time when you worked effectively on a team.
- What do you do when you disagree with someone at work?
- Please share an example of how you were able to motivate others at work.
- What was the last difficult conversation you had in the workplace and how did you handle it?
- What would your last manager or supervisor say was one of your strengths and why?
- What would your last manager or supervisor say was an area of improvement for you and why?

There are many more of these types of questions at this web site:  
<http://blog.timesunion.com/careers/50-behavioral-based-interview-questions-you-might-be-asked/1538/>

For more interview tips and scenarios please visit: <http://career-advice.monster.ca/>

## Power Words: Use Them In Your Interview

Candidates often want to appear sincere and not come off as boastful or conceited. Sometimes this leads to the use of words that send a different message. Be mindful of the number of times you use the words *probably*, *possibly*, *maybe*, *pretty* (as in pretty sure) and *usually*. These words do not convey conviction when describing either yourself or your actions.

When asked to describe yourself in an interview remember that being

hardworking, dependable, accountable, accurate and on-time are the least an employer should be able to expect from anyone he or she employs. Let them know what you have to offer in a strong statement that compliments what their organization needs. *"I bring over 10 years of experience in the HR field, working for organizations with a focus in technology. I help organizations like yours achieve increased workforce productivity, reducing costs and providing better profit margins."*



*Impress him with your confidence and qualifications. He needs to know you can do the job.*

## Salary Negotiation: Getting It Right

You received the offer but the salary is not what you hoped for or expected. How do you speak to your almost-new employer about this? First you prepare. Make sure you are aware of what this type of role is paid in the market. Keep in mind not to evaluate this based on the job title, but on the responsibilities the job holds. There are several web sites that may help you determine this (here are two for Canada).

[http://monsterca.salary.com/CanadaSalaryWizard/LayoutScripts/Swzl\\_NewSearch.aspx](http://monsterca.salary.com/CanadaSalaryWizard/LayoutScripts/Swzl_NewSearch.aspx)

<http://www.workingincanada.gc.ca/home-eng.do?lang=eng>

If after learning what comparable jobs are paid you feel the salary is still not in line then look at it in the context of total compensation. Look at the health benefits, leave benefits, bonus plan and salary and see if that makes a difference. Many employers do not pay on the

"leading edge", choosing instead to give increased benefits in other areas. If after all your research you believe you need to negotiate a better salary help the employer to understand you are interested in working for them but have some questions about their offer. There is usually room to negotiate on salary, but you need to be specific. If your research tells you the salary should be \$2,000 more let them know this through a value statement; if you saved your last employer 10% on overhead costs mention this (in a professional way) to help them understand the context of what you are asking for. Listening skills are key too. Some employers may not have much room to negotiate on salary, but have flexibility on vacation or other benefits. Work together to get to a place of mutual understanding. Start your new job off right. Need more help?

<http://career-advice.monster.ca/salary-benefits/negotiation-tips/jobs.aspx>

*Please note the information contained in this document is meant to provide resources and guidance, but is not comprehensive advice applicable to every circumstance. Please engage assistance as needed in your process.*