# New Interview FAQ

Searching for, interviewing for, and even landing a new job can be incredibly stressful, no matter what field you're in. Here are some frequently-asked-questions (and answers) to help put your mind at ease when it comes time to start interviewing for that new position.

## What are some "first things" I should do when I think it's time for me to find a new job?

First things first: if you can afford to, do *not* apply for every job prospect that crosses your email inbox, even if they're ones that you find yourself qualified for. Why? You might end up in the same position that you're likely in now: stuck in a "Yeah, I can do that..." job and boxed into a role that doesn't really fit either what you want to do *or* the breadth of your skillset. Instead, take some time to figure out what you want to do and focus on it. Figure out the job prospects in your area for that field -- if they're not great, do two things:

1. Develop a plan B: figure out a similar position to what you want to do and see if *that's* available in your area.
2. Look farther afield: there just might not be jobs for what you want to do in your area -- time to look elsewhere.

As an example, I'm interested in gaining a role as a technical writer. However, most of the local jobs that I found were for software developers -- specifically C# and the .NET framework. So I developed a Plan B: I built myself a curriculum that was designed to take me from coding novice to the makings of a junior developer in a year and a half. But I also started looking elsewhere. I applied for technical writer jobs in Philadelphia, New York City and even as far away as Wisconsin. I got emails back from recruiters -- a lot of "sorry, not interested" -- but enough interested parties (even one is "enough") to make the whole thing worthwhile.

## So I've decided what I want to do and found some jobs that I think I'm qualified for: is there anything I should do before I apply?

Yes, absolutely. One of the biggest things you can do when it comes to a job -- especially a job in the software or technology space -- is research. Poke around the company website. Look at some of the projects they've worked on, their company culture, things like that -- a number of the "basic" questions can be answered just by looking around a company's website and doing preliminary research. Once that's out of the way, it's time to do a bit more of a deep dive. If the company is open source, download their product and work with it for a bit (until you feel comfortable using it, if you can). Many closed-source companies also offer trial versions of their software: these are great because they're often designed to walk the user through a sample workflow and leave them at the end of it with an item that they've built with their own two hands.

Once you've done all of your research on a company, but before you apply, **tailor your resume.** Read through the job description and decipher, as best you can, what it is that the recruiter or hiring manager is looking for in an ideal candidate. If certain requirements are phrased a certain

way, try to echo or ape this phrasing as much as possible. Not only will it make it easier for whoever reads your resume to find the relevant information, but it'll also help you get past the applicant-tracking software that so many companies seem to use these days.

# The company called me back and they want to interview, but it's during work hours: what do I do?

While the answer to this one might seem obvious at first glance -- that is, use some PTO and take the day off, both to keep you off company property and to give yourself time to prepare -- it can be much murkier if you're in a probationary period (where you don't have PTO) or have burned through all your PTO for the year. The simplest option is to tell your boss that you need to step out for a period of time (I usually say an hour) and will be returning later. Most preliminary interview screenings go for 15 to 30 minutes, so that gives you plenty of time to duck out to your car (or to the local gas station, if you want to be truly off company property) and have your interview. If your boss asks for details on where you're going, simply say that you have a dentist or doctor appointment -- no one will want to hear any more details.

# What kinds of questions should I ask my interviewer?

There are a number of different questions you can ask your interviewer that can help you nail the phone screening -- in fact, just having questions in the first place is a big step up. Here are some good examples of questions to ask when the interviewer turns the conversation over to you.

### What is the day-to-day of the position like?

This is a great starter because it gives the recruiter a chance to fill in any blanks that weren't covered by the job description in the ad. It also lets you know just how much of your day-to-day is actually spent doing what's in the job description, as well as any other tasks you might have to do or skills you might end up picking up.

### In the course of your day-to-day duties, how does the team interact with other teams?

Questions like this give you good shot of not only company-wide dynamics, but also dynamics as they vary from team to team.

### How does the team define success?

Before you can ask what's exopected of you as a successful member of the team, it's important that both you and the team share the same definition of success. Asking outright just ensures that both of you are on the same page.

### What would be expected of me in three months? Six? Nine?

The initial question gives you a good set of goals to work toward for a 90-day review, while the second and third set you up for the half-year and end of the year, respectively. This also lets you

know just exactly what your team expects of you: are you expected to be able to build and ship a document from scratch in the first month, or is getting the sign-off on a document plan after your first month more what's expected?

# With those questions answered, there are also some more technical and process-oriented questions you can ask to get more of a feel for the company's inner workings.

## Do you have an established document development process? How does it work?

This is a great place to start. First and foremost, it gives you insight into whether or not the company you're working with even *has* a development process for their documentation, or if documentation is written on a more ad-hoc basis. If the company does have a document development process, asking how it works will ensure that you're not blindsided when it comes to your first few days.

## How do first drafts get written?

Asking this is a good addendum to the first question: it lets you know if *you* are in charge of writing the first draft of documents as the tasks come across your desk, or if first drafts will be compiled from code comments, written by developers, etc.

## What is the relationship between writers and SMEs? How do writers get access to the software and to engineers to get the info they need?

This will let you know not only how dependent on the other teams at the company you need to be, but also how indepedent you can be. Do you need to talk to management before talking to a SME, does a SME need to approve a document before it goes to QA, etc.

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When you've asked all the quesations on your list and the interview seems to winding down, ask the interviewer about the next steps. This is a great way to finish off the interview -- at the very least, it shows the interviewer that you're interested and want to hear back.