

21 Ways to Avoid Job Interview Anxiety

Preparing for the interview will help you feel and look confident.

by Karen Burns

Career experts often offer helpful tips for reducing job interview anxiety. But you don't want to reduce job interview anxiety; you want to avoid it altogether. Before you say, "But that's impossible!" let's clarify: You don't actually have to eliminate the anxiety. You only have to avoid letting it show.

Anxiety is a turn-off. In a job interview, you want to come across as confident, competent, and ready to go to work. Anxiety detracts from the strong, positive impression you want to make. It's also contagious—your jitters can infect and distract your interviewer, making him less able to focus on you.

The bottom line: It's okay to feel anxious. It's not okay to display it.

How can you prevent yourself from looking nervous? By preparing for the interview. Preparation will boost your confidence and help you make that positive impression. Even if you feel nervous, you won't look it if you're prepared.

To put an end to anxiety, follow this preparation checklist:

1. Visit the interview site the day before your interview, so you don't get lost looking for it right before you're supposed to arrive.
2. Arrive at the site 10 or 15 minutes early. Take time to collect yourself, visit the restroom, and sneak one last peek in the mirror to make sure there's no spinach in your teeth.
3. Thoroughly research the company and the position you're seeking within it. This is huge. Read newspapers, magazines, and blogs. Talk with industry insiders. Study the employer's website. The more you know, the better prepared you'll be.
4. When the interview is arranged, try to find out who you'll be talking to. The project manager? An HR manager? If you know who you'll be meeting with, you can better prepare for that conversation. But be flexible. This could change at the last minute.

5. Make sure what you plan to wear is clean, in good condition, fits you properly, and suits the environment where you seek to work. The classic tip is to visit the workplace, check out how people there dress, and then wear something a little nicer.
6. Get enough sleep the night before. If you can't actually sleep, then at least get some rest.
7. Exercise that morning. Feeling better physically translates to feeling better mentally, and exercise helps project energy.
8. Eat breakfast that morning. You'll need the fuel; besides, you don't want your stomach growling mid-interview. Go easy on the caffeine.
9. Make a list of questions to ask the interviewer, and bring them with you. That way you won't draw a blank when asked if you have any questions.
10. Identify your strengths. Practice talking about them. Knowing your worth can make you feel more confident.
11. Identify your weaknesses. Practice ways of talking about them that are honest, yet also put you in the best possible light.
12. Practice talking about why and how you left your last job. The tone you use is important here. Try to keep it positive.
13. Here's a biggie: Practice talking about what you, specifically, can offer this employer. You do this by relating your strengths to what you know about the company's needs.
14. During the interview, focus on your interviewer. Listen carefully. Take notes. Ask questions. Putting your attention on someone other than yourself is a time-tested way to "forget" anxiety.
15. Breathe from your diaphragm. Long, deep breaths, before and during the interview, will steady you.
16. Think of this meeting not as an interrogation, or even as an interview, but as a conversation. You are two people working toward the same goal—filling a need.
17. Remember that you're allowed to think before answering. It's okay to pause for a few seconds before speaking. You can even say, "That's a very interesting question. Let me think about that."
18. Have your references ready, a typed list that you can hand over. Make sure your references know in advance that the potential employer might contact them.

19. Bring a notebook, two pens, extra resumes, business cards (if you have them), and your calendar (in case they want to schedule another interview!).

20. Have a cell phone with you, just in case something unexpected happens that causes you to be late. Traffic does not count as unexpected, so give yourself extra time to travel to the interview site. Don't forget to turn off your phone during the actual interview.

21. Don't schedule anything immediately after the interview. If it goes long, you don't want to have to rush out. Or worse, cut it short.

In a way, a job interview is like a theatrical performance, with the proviso that everything you do and say is true. You're putting on a one-man or -woman play, starring your best possible authentic you. With enough preparation, you may not feel anxious at all.

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