

Be prepared for open-ended questions, and make sure you provide real information that will help the interviewer evaluate you. For example, if you are asked to describe a time when you had to handle an unreasonable customer, choose an example with a positive outcome that reflects your interpersonal skills.

Make sure you have prepared a clear, concise summary in answer to the common question, "Tell me about yourself." You should carefully prepare a short statement that summarizes your education, experience, and skills that apply to this position. When you are thinking about and refining this summary of your qualifications, it may help you to write it out, or to make a bulleted list of points you want to make. However, do not read it to the interviewer. Your statement should not sound like a memorized recital. It should sound like a simple story you are telling to describe how your background fits the job.

If the interviewer's questions fail to uncover everything you'd like the interviewer to know about you, volunteer the information. Look for opportunities to make job-benefit statements. A **job-benefit statement** is a brief explanation of how an individual's skills can benefit the company.

Lauren was interviewing for the newly created position of marketing coordinator at a small electronics firm. She explained briefly how she would apply her skill with various software packages to support marketing initiatives.

Often, an interviewer gives you this opportunity toward the end of the session, but be prepared to take the initiative.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS



Make sure the interviewer's first impression of you is a good one.

Arrive for your interview a little early. You are neatly dressed and well-groomed. A calm, composed job applicant will make a better impression than a rushed, frantic one. If someone gives you a ride, ask the driver to wait nearby until your interview is over. Have your documents, pens and pencils easily accessible. You do not want to fumble for things when you need them. Before the interview starts, turn off your cell phone. You do not want a ringing phone to interrupt the interview and annoy the interviewer.

Introducing Yourself

Introduce yourself to the person at the reception desk. Give your name and the name of the person you are scheduled to meet, making certain to pronounce the interviewer's name and title

correctly. It is important to greet this person with a friendly smile and a confident voice. Be courteous and professional to everyone you meet. Remembering and using the names of people you meet can help them to remember you. If the person at the desk is not too busy, it is alright to engage in some small talk about the weather, or how long the person has worked for the company. You will no doubt be asked to take a seat and wait until the interviewer is ready for you.

Body Language and First Impressions

Your **body language** is the nonverbal signals you send, including your posture, bearing, stride, handshake, eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions. Whether you introduce yourself to the interviewer or the receptionist introduces you, smile, make eye contact, and shake the person's hand firmly if a hand is offered. You do not want your handshake to be limp, nor do you want it to be crushing. Use the interviewer's name, making sure you have the pronunciation right. For example, you might say, "Good morning Ms. Schmidt. I'm Peter Wayne. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me this morning."

As you enter the interview room or office, remain standing until you are invited to sit down. Your sitting posture should be straight but not rigid. Focus on looking relaxed and confident. Do not slouch or fidget. Do not put your bag, briefcase, or papers on the interviewer's desk. Place them in your lap, at your side, or on the floor until you need them. Figure 15-10 has some tips about effective body language.

Responding to Questions

As the interviewer begins asking questions, answer each question honestly and specifically. It is likely that you will be asked open-ended questions that will give you an opportunity to describe your skills and accomplishments.

When you prepared for the interview, you wrote a clear, concise summary in answer to the common question, "Tell me about yourself." When you answer this question, look the other person in the eye and *tell* about your-

"I'm looking for the chemistry that would fit well in our environment and how articulate they are. Can they communicate effectively, which I think is extremely important."

WHAT IS SAID WITHOUT WORDS

- An upright, confident posture reflects your sense of self-worth.
- Eye contact shows you are listening and are interested in what the interviewer has to say.
- A smile shows that you are relaxed and confident. Keep your facial expressions friendly, calm, relaxed, and positive.
- A firm handshake conveys that you are professional and enthusiastic. Avoid a weak or overly aggressive handshake.
- Leaning slightly forward toward the interviewer conveys that you are interested. Leaning back can give the opposite impression.
- Be aware of the interviewer's body language to help you sense when you are losing the person's attention or when you are going into too much detail.

FIGURE 15-10 Body language in an interview.

self in a smooth and conversational tone. Your statement should not sound like a memorized recital. It should sound like a simple story you are telling to describe how your background fits the job.

Another common question may be, "Tell me what you know about our company." This is where your homework will pay off. Show that you are familiar with the overall structure of the company, its products or services, and its leaders. If the company has been in the news lately in a positive context, you should mention that you read about it. If there has been a recent development or trend in the field, or a new product introduced, you can show that you are well informed about the matter.

The interview was almost over when the interviewer leaned forward and smiled sweetly and asked Jenny the question everyone told her to expect: "What is your greatest weakness?" Jenny had prepared an answer that presented one of her strengths as a weakness. She replied, "It's important to me to do what I say. I can get impatient when something isn't completed on time."

Listening

Because the interview is a two-way communication process, listening is an essential skill in a job interview. Before answering any question, be sure that you have really listened and understood it. If you are not quite clear about what the interviewer is asking, restate the question in your own words

APPLY IT!

Are you ready for the job search? Use this checklist to prepare. Place a check beside each item as you complete it.

I have:

1. ☐ Determined my qualifications and interests.
2. ☐ Discussed my aptitudes with others.
3. ☐ Networked with friends and people who may be able to help me find a job.
4. ☐ Checked other sources of job leads.
5. ☐ Prepared my resume.
6. ☐ Practiced interviewing.
7. ☐ Prepared my list of references.
8. ☐ Prepared a job application letter.
9. ☐ Proofread my application documents.
10. ☐ Reviewed the job application and filled it in carefully.
11. ☐ Planned what to wear and what to take to the interview.
12. ☐ Studied the prospective employer (products and/or services, etc.).
13. ☐ Prepared questions to ask the interviewer.
14. ☐ Sent a thank-you follow-up note or letter.

and ask, "Did I understand that correctly?" Many interviewers like to ask questions such as "Tell me about a time when you had to complete a task or project that you disliked, and how you managed to complete it," or "Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a conflict between your personal life and your job." It is alright to pause for a moment to think about your answers, saying, "Let me give that some thought."

Do not interrupt the interviewer by jumping in too quickly with your answer. Pause to make sure the interviewer has finished asking the question before you start to reply. You want to answer the interviewer's questions thoughtfully and thoroughly without burying the points you want to make under too much detail. If you see the interviewer's eyes and attention drifting, wrap up your answer so that you don't lose your audience.

If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the interviewer honestly that you do not know. You can easily get yourself in difficulty if you try to fake knowledge or skills that you really have not mastered. You might add, however, that you are a quick learner and are confident that you could get quickly up to speed in this area of the job. You might want to mention something similar that you have recently mastered on your own to show that you have the ambition and aptitude to learn. Eagerness to learn and grow is a quality highly valued in the job market.

Dubois Publishing, the company where Samantha wanted to work, used Microsoft Access software for its database. Samantha had never used the program, although she was very familiar with other Office products. In the interview she was asked about her experience with Access. "I have worked with three other database software packages, but I haven't used Access yet," Samantha told the interviewer. "However, I'm confident that I can learn it quickly. It's installed on my computer, and I started taking the online tutorial a couple of days ago. I see lots of similarities with the database programs I've used. I also bookmarked several free tutorials for learning Access."

Asking Questions

At some point in the interview, usually near the end, the interviewer will likely ask you if you have any questions about the job or the company. The interviewer may already have told you about what the job pays and what the benefits the company provides. But if not, now is *not* a good time to ask how much the job pays, what the fringe benefits are, and how much vacation time you will get. Questions regarding these matters may lead the interviewer to conclude that you are interested only in what the company can do for you rather than what you can do for the company. Save those questions to ask when and if you are offered the job.

Your impression will be more positive if you ask questions that show you are really thinking about how you will fit into the company and where this job might lead. You could ask what qualities and skills the interviewer thinks most important to success in the position, and then take the opportunity to

*The best way to
the person who
is most likely to
provide the best
possible answer
to your question.*

GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK¹¹

How would you describe the responsibilities of the position?
How would you describe a typical week/day in this position?
Is this a new position? If not, what did the previous employee go on to do?
Whom does this position report to? If I am offered the position, can I meet him/her?
How many people work in this office/department?
What is the typical work week? Is overtime expected?
What are the prospects for growth and advancement?
Would you like a list of references?
If I am extended a job offer, how soon would you like me to start?

FIGURE 15-11 Sample interview questions to ask.

point out examples in your background of those qualities and skills. Or you might ask about the working relationships within the department in which you will work.

Before the interview, prepare a list of questions you might ask. Place the list in a folder where you can easily refer to it. Figure 15-11 lists some questions to ask if the interviewer does not provide the information.

Do not ask questions that make you look uninformed (What does the company do?) or interested in the wrong things about the position (How long is the lunch break? How long would I have to work until I'm eligible for a raise?).

Closing the Interview

The interviewer will decide when to end the meeting. He or she will signal to you that it is time to go by thanking you for your time, standing up, and perhaps escorting you to the door. Thank the interviewer for giving you this opportunity to interview. Express your enthusiasm for the job, and briefly summarize how well your background fits the company's needs. Do not expect a job offer during the interview.

This is a good time to ask the interviewer when a hiring decision is expected, and whether it would be appropriate for you to check with the office in a few days or a week to find out if the job has been filled. If the interviewer tells you to wait until the company contacts you, be sure to wait. You want to appear eager, but you do not want to pester them before they have completed all the interviews and made a decision.

Many job hunters make the same mistakes. Avoid these common errors:

- **Poor eye contact.** You may be nervous and a bit unsure of yourself, which may cause you to avert your eyes. Fight this tendency.
- **No goal.** Don't say things like, "Any job will do" or "I'm looking for anything." Don't sound desperate.
- **Poor appearance.** Wear appropriate clothing that makes you look and feel your best.
- **No questions prepared.** If you don't ask questions, you will appear unprepared or uninterested.
- **Lack of enthusiasm.** The interviewer is looking for someone who is interested and eager.
- **Asking about the salary and benefits too soon.** Wait for the interviewer to bring up these important issues or until you are offered the job.
- **Not asking for the job.** Tell the interviewer you are interested (if you are) and indicate that you think the job is a good match for you.

FOLLOW UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

While the interview is fresh in your mind, jot down notes to help with future interviews. Reflect on the interview and what you learned from it. What better answers could you have given? When similar questions come up in another interview, you want your responses to be more polished. Think about points you made that seemed effective and points that would have been better left out. Discuss the interview with a friend or relative. Ask their opinion of how you could have responded better to difficult questions.

Immediately after the interview, send the interviewer a thank-you note or letter. Thank her or him for the time spent interviewing you and telling you about the position. Make it clear where you can be reached when a decision is made. This is an opportunity to mention any brief point that you may not have covered in the interview. It would also be alright to enclose a sample of a particular kind of work discussed in the interview, such as a sample spreadsheet you have created. Mail the thank-you note or letter right away so that it arrives promptly. There is no harm in also thanking the interviewer via e-mail. Figure 15-12 is a sample thank-you note. Sample thank-you letters are available on the website for this textbook.

Dear Mr. Hamish

Thank you for meeting with me this morning to discuss the opening you have for a records processor. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about Hamish Enterprises and hope you agree that my qualifications and your needs are a good match.

If there is any further information you need to help you make your decision, please call me at 513-555-4449 or email me at beverly.smith@gnet.com. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely

Beverly Smith

FIGURE 15-12 Sample thank-you note.

If the interviewer has encouraged you to check back with the company, make sure you do so within the requested timeframe. Ask to speak directly with the interviewer, if available. If not, leave a simple message that you are checking in with the company about the opening and express your continued interest in the position. Leave your name and phone number for a return call.

AFTER LEARNING THE EMPLOYER'S DECISION

If you are offered the job and have accepted it, your career is on its path. If you interviewed with other companies, inform them that you have accepted another position. If you did not get the job, be gracious and grateful when you are informed that someone else has been chosen. Make it clear to the

company that if any other positions open, you would like to be considered for them. You may go through several interviews before you find the right job. Make each interview a learning experience.

checkpoint

1. List three common questions asked in job interviews.

2. Explain how body language can affect the outcome of an interview.

3. What are some of the things you might want to know about the company before your interview date?

4. Why is it important to listen carefully during an interview?

5. Why is it important to follow up after the interview?
