

# A Guide to Job Interviewing

## What is the purpose of a job interview?

The purpose of an interview is:

- **For the employer to find out if you are the best candidate for the job.** They've seen your resume and cover letter, and now they want to meet you to fully understand your experiences.
- **For you to find out if this a good opportunity for you.** Does this job fit your career goals? Is this the work setting you want?

## What do you wear to a job interview?

When picking out an outfit for the interview, know how the other employees at the company dress. Most employers are business-casual or business-formal. For a more detailed description of job interview clothing, see page 5 of the guide.

## What do you bring to a job interview?

Bring copies of your resume for you and the employer to reference. If it is relevant to your profession, bring a portfolio containing samples of your work. Having a pad of paper and pen will allow you to write down relevant information from the interview.

## How should you prepare for an interview?

Before the interview, you should:

- Do your homework about the company and the job description and requirements.
- Practice: write down examples that demonstrate your ability to do the job, practice speaking your answers, and schedule a mock interview at Career and Employment Services.
- Develop a compelling story to tell about who you are and what you are trying to accomplish.
- Prepare a small list of your own questions for the interview.
- Make sure you are wearing appropriate interview attire.

For a more detailed description of interview preparation, see pages 2-4 of the guide.



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# How-to Prepare for a Job Interview

*So you used your resume and cover letter to land yourself a job interview! Now what? The following steps will help ensure you are prepared and ready for your interview.*

## Preparing for the Interview

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### 1. Prepare your personal brand.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos sums it up by saying, “Personal brand is what people say about you when you leave the room.” In other words, your brand is YOU. You can easily develop your brand by the way you handle yourself in an interview, making the interview a key part of attaining a job.

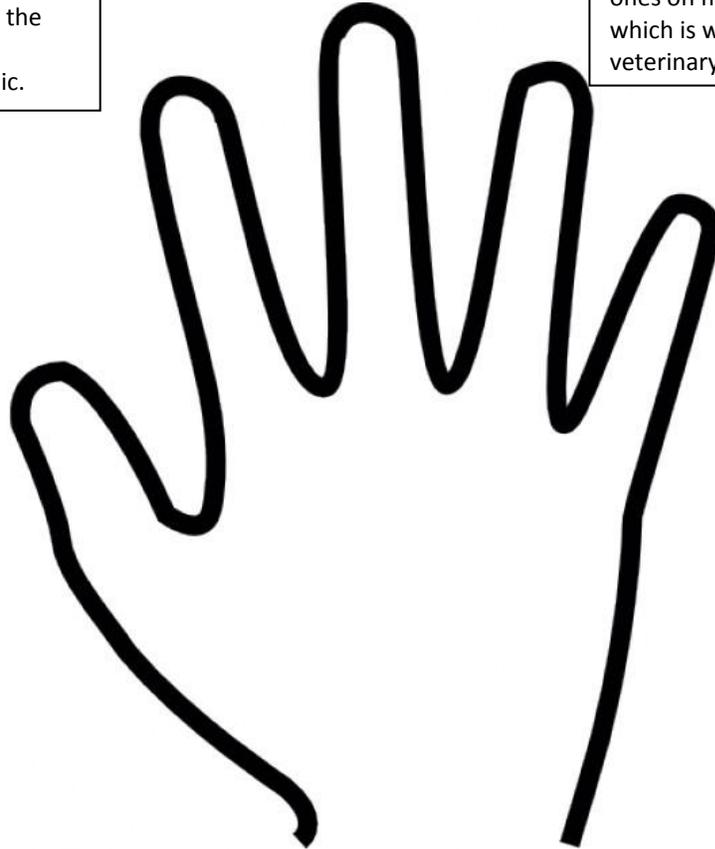
Before you get to the interview, determine what you want to convey to the employer and interviewer. What strengths do you want to share and how will you share them? What do you have to offer that other people don’t?

There are a number of things you can do to enhance your brand:

- Actively listen to determine the employer’s needs.
- Speak positively about current or past work experiences.
- Audit your online presence: What does your digital footprint say about you? What comes up when you google your name?
- Answer only what they are asking.
- Be purposeful in what you share, in and out of the interview (see STAR method and 5 Finger Pitch for purposeful topics in the interview).
- Practice an answer to the “tell me about yourself” question.

A great way to introduce your personal brand is with the **5 Finger Pitch**. The 5 Finger Pitch is a way to help you remember **5 things you want the employer to know about you by the end of the interview that may or may not already be explained in your resume and/or cover letter**. This pitch is customizable to every individual, but here are some suggested guidelines for your fingers:

1. *Who are you?* This could include your current status in school or employment.
2. *Passions.* These aren’t your hobbies, but your professional passions. Explain why you chose your program and career path.
3. *Qualifications.* What experiences in school or work have qualified you for this position? You don’t have to go into great detail, but mentioning key tasks or experiences you’ve had will give the employer a preview of things you will talk about later.
4. *Goals.* What are your professional goals? How can you contribute to the company while personally growing?
5. *Why you want to work at this company.* Be specific. It will help to do some research on the company prior to your interview for this one (hint: see step 4!).



3. In the last few years I've held many positions at local veterinary services in Dane County including being a boarding helper at Love Pets Inn and at Verona Pet Care. In my vet tech program I've had the opportunity to practice technician skills during some internships at the Dane County Animal Hospital and MATC's Pet clinic.

2. My passion for animals started when I was a kid. My grandparents lived on a farm and I frequently would visit the animals and care for the sick ones. I realized that I wanted to spend the rest of my career helping animals like the ones on my grandparents' farm, which is why I chose to enter the veterinary technician program.

4. Upon completing the vet tech program in a month, I hope to start using my skills right away, helping as many animals as I can, adding to the success of this veterinary clinic.

5. Your clinic's mission is to provide the most comprehensive and individualized care to animals, a philosophy I believe and practice when working with animals on my grandparents' farm and in my clinical experiences. I want to continue to practice that at your company in order to be a successful vet tech.

1. My name is Wolfie and I am a student at Madison College in the veterinary technician program.

## 2. Prepare for, and practice, answering key questions.

A great way to improve and enhance your communication skills is to prepare for common questions you may be asked. The questions listed below are not all-inclusive; employers may ask you other versions of these questions or completely different questions. These, however, are the most common. Take time to think of a response that answers the questions appropriately and effectively.

- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you consider your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- What are your long-term and short-term goals and objectives and how have you prepared to achieve them? What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing? What led you to choose your field of study?
- Why should I hire you?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- Why are you interested in this industry? Our company?

- What questions do you have about our organization?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you? The ideal work environment?
- What do you know about our company?
- Are you free to relocate?
- What geographical locations would you prefer? Why do you want to work there?
- What is your style of work?
- What are your major accomplishments? Your failures? Your disappointments? What did you learn from each of these?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Tell me about a time when you used team-work effectively to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time you had a disagreement with a co-worker.

*Curve-ball questions:* Some interviewers will ask questions that seem, at first glance, to have little to do with the job. There is no way to prepare for these questions. They are used to see how you problem-solve and think on your feet. Examples:

- If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
- What song best describes your work ethic?

How you answer all of these questions is a key to provide the employer a glimpse of who you are and what you are capable of. For more information on specific behavior techniques, see the “Types of Interviews” section of the guide.

### 3. Do your homework.

This is not the best time to try and “wing it.” In order to show that you really want the position for which you are interviewing, then you must demonstrate your interest by finding out everything you can about the company and the position before the actual interview.

Things you should know about the company include:

- How long has the company existed?
- What services does the company provide or what products does it make?
- Who are their major competitors?
- What divisions or subsidiaries exist?
- What geographical areas are covered?
- How many people are employed by the company?

You can find out many of these things by exploring the company website and the company itself (don’t be afraid to stop by their office and pick up some information). Additional places to look for company information include: LinkedIn, Facebook, [www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com) and [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com).

This research can spark questions you may wish to ask in the interview. Asking targeted and intelligent questions will demonstrate you have done your homework and research and are motivated to do well if you get this job. Here are some example questions:

- What do you do in a typical work day? In a typical work week?
- Why did you choose to work for this company?
- What is the natural career progression or path for employees with my skill?
- How would you describe your company’s culture?
- What kind of internal and external training do you provide?
- What are your plans for expansion in terms of product lines, services, new branches, etc.?

- How would you differentiate your company from your major competitors?
- What does success mean to you?

For guidance on ‘doing your homework’ for interviews, use the *Interview Prep Handout* at the end of this guide. This includes information about the company as well as questions about yourself you may want to think about before your interview.

## 4. Ensure you have proper interview attire.

When picking out your outfit for the interview, know how other employees at the company dress. Many companies are business-casual, with some being business-formal. Generally, it is best to dress more conservatively and formal for an interview.

General attire tips:

- Bottoms: khakis, slacks, dress pants, skirts (must go to your knee)
- Tops: collared shirt, tie, suit jacket, blouse, sweater
- Shoes: closed-toe dress shoes, closed-toe heels, flats, boots
- Jewelry and makeup should be limited, as too much can be distracting

General grooming tips:

- Be mindful of perfume and cologne: use it minimally
- Check your hair: make sure it is out of your face, nicely placed so you won’t be tempted to touch it during the interview
- Fingernails: since your hands are used for greetings and speaking, make sure they are clean
- Beards and mustaches are generally acceptable when nicely groomed

## During the Interview

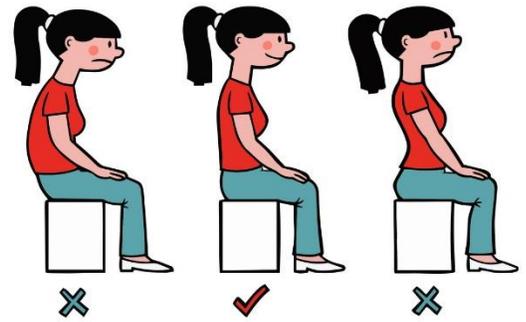
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Now that you have prepared for your interview, it’s time to execute. Use the following tips to help you effectively communicate your qualifications and experiences.

### *Professionalism*

- Verbally:
  - Keep a positive attitude; avoid speaking negatively about yourself or others, including organizations you have engaged with in the past.
  - Politely ask for clarification of a question that you do not fully understand.
  - Know and use the interviewer’s name. It is always safest to use Ms. or Mr., unless they advise you to call them by their first name.
- Nonverbally: Nonverbal communication encompasses everything from how you shake hands to how you sit in a chair. It is 80% of communication and plays a major role in the impression you give to an interviewer. To maintain professional nonverbal communication, remembering **P.I.E.:**
  - **Poise.** Posture, how you hold your body, sends a strong signal. Be sure to sit upright in your chair and avoid slouching. Avoid gestures such as crossing your arms, which can send a defensive signal to interviewers. Try to use a firm handshake too.

- **Interest.** Eye contact is a great way to show the interviewer you are engaged. Make sure the eye contact feels natural and not like staring. You can also express interest by leaning forward in your seat towards the interviewer. Avoid fidgeting because it makes you appear distracted.
- **Expressiveness.** Expressiveness can be shown through smiling and laughing when appropriate. By doing so, you appear at ease and confident.



### Information Delivery

Now that you have done your research on the company, the industry, and how to interview, focus on the delivery of the information during the interview.

- Stress the positive points about yourself in a confident, factual, and honest manner. Be concise and specific when representing yourself.
 

*Example: What is your biggest strength? "Through my previous work experience, I've found that my biggest strength is attention to detail. During my time at Wolfpack Techies, I was often given the most difficult technical dilemmas, as I was the most experienced student there. In order to solve any of the given cases, I had to listen to what the customer's concerns were as well as focus on the technical problems at hand."*
- When talking about your weaknesses, make it something that you are currently working to overcome or have a plan to improve upon in the new job.
 

*Example: "I have always been very nervous about public speaking. To overcome this, I took advantage of opportunities to observe colleagues who were strong presenters; my supervisor allowed me to run small staff meetings and get more comfortable presenting to a group. In this job, I hope to continue taking advantage of these opportunities and push myself to step outside of my comfort zone."*
- When talking about a position that you were fired from, choose your words carefully. State facts and try to keep emotions out of the conversation. Move on to express what you learned from that situation and how the experience helped you; take the negative and turn it into a positive.
 

*Example: "Although circumstances caused me to leave that position, it led me to do more self-exploration regarding what I want in a position and the kind of environment I can be most successful in. Your company has the type of work environment I excel in and also needs someone with my expertise."*
- Have a strong introduction that begins to highlight your skills and how you developed them. Be able to "walk the interviewer through your resume."
 

*Example: "I became interested in veterinary work when I was growing up. My family had many pets and I always wanted to help them whenever they were sick or hurt. I wasn't sure if I wanted a career in veterinary medicine so I started volunteering at Hickory Hills Kennels in Madison. I was able to play with the animals and also see the veterinary staff in action. To get even more experience, I started working at Pet Resort in De Forest as a pet admission staff. In this role I had the opportunity to ..."*
- Convert opinion into fact by preparing specific examples of your accomplishments as illustrations of your skills/abilities/traits.
 

*Say this: "During my time at Mad-Designs studio, I collaboratively created a graphic design project with the team facing a short deadline of 3 days. I led the presentation, with the help of my co-workers, and a few days later we found out the company accepted and signed for our \$5,000 project."*

*Not this: "I was a graphic design assistant and frequently helped with whatever projects were going on. I helped out with one project that was accepted that was really big for the company."*
- Take time to reflect in a quiet manner, if necessary, before answering (process your thoughts!).

## After Your Interview

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At the close of the interview, you want to **ensure that you will be remembered**. You can do that by:

1. Stating your interest in the position and briefly summarizing how you would be a “good match.” Do this by summarizing your top 3 skills, based on the skills the interviewer feels are important.
2. Asking what the next steps are in the interview process. Find out what stage the employer is currently in, and when you could expect some kind of a response.
3. Giving a firm handshake, a confident smile, and maintaining eye contact.
4. Getting the interviewer’s business card or contact information so you can send a thank you note.

## Send a Thank You Note

This is an opportunity to show your appreciation to the employer and also restate your interest in the job, summarizing key points of the interview, and adding any further information to help your chances of getting the position. This simple courtesy can make the difference between selection and rejection. A thank you note should be between 3-5 sentences, preferably handwritten or typed and mailed. Email notes are acceptable as well.

## Reflection

Reflect on and write down points of the interview that you felt good about/need to improve. You can use these to help you prepare for future interviews and also help you decide if this position is right for you or not.

## Managing the Next Steps

- If you receive an offer, you do not need to accept on the spot. In fact, we encourage students to wait and think about it. Show appreciation for the offer and ask about the timeline the employer requires a response. This is also a great opportunity to negotiate! Things you may be able to negotiate include:
  - Salary/pay rate
  - Start date or flexible scheduling
  - Benefits such as vacation time
  - Additional opportunities you would like to have
  - Activities you have concerns about
- If you do not receive an offer, be respectful and professional. Send a note showing appreciation for being considered and indicate that you are interested in keeping in touch about future opportunities.
  - Consider asking for feedback. *Example: “I am really interested in working for your company in this type of position. Is there any advice you could give me on what I could do to better position myself next time?”*

# Types of Interviews

There are a few different kinds of interviews: in-person with a person or a panel, phone interview, video-chat interview, and/or an interview over a meal. Each kind holds specific considerations, so be sure to prepare for the type of interview you will attend.

## *In-Person Behavioral Questions*

In this sort of interview, the interviewer tends to ask questions about situations, with the interviewee being asked to describe how they did or would handle a specific problem. The goal of this interview is to assess the candidate’s ability to respond to the sorts of situations that the job may present.

The interviewer is interested in: (1) the thought process used, (2) the values of the candidate, and (3) the outcome of the situation. Prepare for these types of questions with the **STAR Method**. STAR is an acronym for **Situation or Task, Action and Result**.



*Example: Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.*

**Situation or Task:** “As an intern for the Register Mail newspaper, I wrote for the Sports page, covering high school sports. Last year, I covered the women’s Division I state basketball tournament. Because the tournament ended at 7:30 pm and the paper went to press at 10:00 pm, I had to finalize interviews with the winning team, record all relevant scores, and write the article within two and a half hours.”

**Action:** “First, I established a schedule breaking down my available time. I identified the top scorers for the winning team and interviewed them, making sure the coach knew I wanted an interview with her as well. Sticking to my schedule, I wrote the story on my laptop, referencing the data I gathered ahead of time. Finally, I emailed the article to the Sports editor and had time to call and make sure he approved of my coverage.”

**Result:** “Getting the article done in time gave me a lot of confidence and proved to me how much I enjoy working under deadline pressure. We received 11 letters from our readers commending the coverage. I learned that establishing a schedule and sticking to it is crucial for good time management.”

It may help to use this chart when coming up with examples prior to the interview:

Trait or competency listed in the job description	Situation or Task	Your Action	The Result
Describe a time you used problem-solving skills to solve customer issues.	<p>A customer called complaining that they waited more than two weeks for a reply from our sales team regarding a product query.</p> <p>I needed to address the client’s immediate query and find out what went wrong in the normal process.</p>	<p>I apologized to the customer, got the details, and passed them to our head salesperson, who contacted the client within the hour. I investigated why the query hadn’t been answered. I discovered that it was a combination of a wrong mobile number and a generic email address that wasn’t being checked. I let the client know and we offered her a discount on her next order.</p>	<p>The client continued to order from us and also posted a positive customer service tweet.</p>

## Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are often a first-round screening to see if you're a fit to come in for a full interview. Phone interviews can also be used if the location of the job is far from where the interviewee lives (such as if you were applying for a job across the country).

Because phone interviews don't include the face-to-face interaction, it is important to remember these key steps so you make the best virtual impression you can:

- *Clarify the details.* If you are not in the same time zone as the interviewer, be sure to clarify the time of the interview for both of you.
- *Use notes to your advantage.* You can use your homework notes and have them in front of you (and the interviewer can't see them). Have a copy of your resume in front of you, experiences or skills you want to mention, and a full list of questions written out ahead of time.
- *Make sure the environment is appropriate.* Make sure you will answer the call in a distraction-free environment. Avoid background noises like dogs, TVs, stereos, street noise, and other people talking. Also, make sure your phone is fully charged!
- *Dress the part.* It might seem unnecessary since the interviewer can't see you, but looking nice puts you in the mindset to be professional.
- *Be enthusiastic and assertive.* Remember that you don't have the benefits of body language and eye contact to show your excitement and interest, all you have is your voice. Don't forget to smile; smiling can impact your tone and enthusiasm too.

One of the benefits of having a virtual interview is that the employer can't see your preparation. In other words, you can have papers and notes in front of you to help remind yourself about certain points you'd like to make. We encourage you to have your resume, cover letter, job description, and other related documents spread out on your desk. Avoid having a stack of papers to rustle through, as the noise and time can be distracting to the employer.

## Video-Chat Interviews

Video-chat interviews are becoming more widely used as opposed to a phone interview because they allow employers to actually see you, making the interview seem more like in-person. Here are some tips we suggest:

- *Dress to impress.* Although the interviewer may not be able to see your entire outfit, you still want to dress professionally. Certain colors, like many shades of blue, look great on video, while others like red and vibrant colors can be too bright and distract the interviewer.
- *Give a digital handshake.* As in your in-person interview, first impressions really matter. The first step to creating the digital chemistry is a digital handshake; a confident, professional, firm nod with eye contact or a small wave to the camera. This simple gesture shows that you're excited to be there and ready to get down to business. After that, continue to focus your eyes on the camera, not on the view from your screen.
- *Use appropriate body language.* Unlike during phone interviews, the employer can see your nonverbal and verbal gestures. Use body language to show that you're engaged. See page 5 for more tips on professional body language.
- *Make sure the environment is appropriate.* Be sure to find a quiet location, with a clean and simple background that looks professional and does not distract the interviewer. Make sure the lighting is soft and natural in order for the interviewer to see you best.
- *Ensure proper equipment.* The essential part of the digital job interview is the camera. Make sure your camera is high-quality enough for the interviewer to see and hear you. Upgrade your microphone to ensure every word you say is heard loud and clear.



## Interview over a Meal

Interviewing over a meal is a way for employers to assess your professionalism in a social setting. Here are some tips to keep in mind when interviewing over lunch, dinner, or coffee:

- *Prepare.* If you know the name of the restaurant, go to its website and double-check the location. While there, take a look at the menu and decide in advance what to order. The morning of the interview, be sure to read the newspaper or watch the local news; dining interviews often involve more chitchat than other types.
- *Be aware of basic dining etiquette.* Place your napkin on your lap. Eat your meal with a knife and fork (avoid sloppy foods). Do not eat too fast. Don't eat extremely slow either. Don't ask for your leftovers wrapped up. Fold your napkin loosely when you are done eating.
- *Maintain professionalism throughout the entire meal.* It is easy to get too comfortable in a social setting and make errors in judgement. For that reason, avoid alcohol, even if it is offered. You want to keep a clear head while answering questions. Additionally, be polite to everyone you encounter during your interview; a recruiter will be assessing how you represent yourself in a social setting.
- *Keep your conversation topics appropriate.* This is true in any type of interview, and especially meal interviews where the conversation can sometimes appear less formal. Avoid conversation regarding political views, religion, or anything involving vulgar humor or stories that would cause someone to lose their appetite.
- *Remember it's not about the meal.* During your interview, you will find that you are doing more talking than eating, so don't worry about whether or not you are enjoying your meal. Order something that won't be difficult to handle or messy and is in line with what your interviewer and others are ordering. Thank your host for their hospitality and let them pay the bill and the tip; you are their guest.
- *Be gracious to the end.* Once you have said your goodbyes to your interviewer, don't linger in the lobby or your car in the parking lot making phone calls. Make a professional exit and drive away. Be sure to follow-up with a Thank You note.

## Panel Interviews

Panel Interviews are those in which there are multiple interviewers (2-5) present. There is often one person who "leads" the interview, though all of those who present are important. Panel interviews allow multiple stakeholders to assess candidates in a short amount of time.

- *What are panel interviewers looking for?* They are assessing your ability to handle the stress of "rapid fire" questioning, observing your interaction and style of communication with people in different positions within the organization, viewing your flexibility in communication, and seeing if you are able to build rapport.
- *How does it work?* Each panel member will usually take turns asking questions relevant to their interests. It is important to address the panel member asking the question, but also acknowledge the other people present, making eye contact with everyone.
- *Do:*
  - Introduce yourself to each person.
  - Engage each member with your answers.
  - Ask questions relevant to each member.
  - Follow up (with a Thank You note) with each person.
- *Don't:*
  - Forget to take enough copies of your resume for each member.
  - Neglect to write down each person's name and title and refer to them accordingly.
  - Look at just one person on the panel.



## How-to Handle Discriminatory Questions

Various state, federal, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you. An employer's questions-whether on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process-must be related to the job you're seeking.

If an illegal question is asked, you have 3 options:

- You can answer the question if you wish. However, if you choose to answer an illegal question, remember that you are giving information that could harm your chances of getting the job.
- You can refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Be careful how you phrase your refusal; you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational which can harm your chances of employment.
- You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply for the job. For example, the interviews asks, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" You could respond with, "I am authorized to work in the United States."

The following are examples of illegal questions and legal counterparts.

Inquiry Area	Illegal Question	Legal Question
National Origin Citizenship	Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your "native tongue"?	Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read/speak/write fluently?
Age	How old are you? When did you graduate? What is your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
Marital Family Status	What is your marital status? With whom do you live? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your child-care arrangements?	Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary?
Personal	How tall are you? How much do you weigh?	Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
Disability	Do you have any disabilities? Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? What was the date of your last physical exam? How's your family's health? When do you lose your eyesight? How? Do you need accommodations to perform the job? (This question can be asked only after a job offer has been made).	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?
Arrest Record	Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of _____? (The crime named should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)
Military	If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

## Interview Prep Handout: Doing Your Homework

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Company name:

Company address/website:

Key contacts/decision makers:

### **Information Gathering**

What are the company's main products or services? Which ones interest you?

What do you like about this company?

What are the company's values?

Who are the company's main competitors?

Who in your network might have done business with or have contacts with this company?

Job description highlights for this position:

Key words and competencies from the job description to connect your talents to THEIR needs?

Describe how working for this company matches YOUR career growth goals?

Five Finger Pitch



Strengths	Weaknesses

Task or Competency from job description	Situation/Task	Your Action	Results

Questions I would like to ask the employer:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Interview Checklist

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## Before the Interview:

- Fill out the Interview Prep Handout
- Do your homework on the company for whom you are interviewing
- Think of examples that reflect your skills and abilities that are relevant to the job for which you are applying
- Ensure you have a proper and appropriate interviewing outfit
- In-person interviews:
  - What is the address of your interview?
  - How long will it take you to get there? Ensure directions and transportation.
  - Do a practice run of some common questions
- Online or over the phone interviews:
  - What time is your interview? Are you in the same time zones?
  - Prepare your environment to be interview-friendly (see Phone Interviews and Video-chat Interviews section for more detail)
- Arrive 5-10 minutes early to the interview

## After the Interview:

- Ask what the next steps are in the selection process and when you should expect to hear from them
- Thank the interviewer for the interview
- Make sure you have the interviewer's name for the after-interview Thank-You note (ask for a business card!)
- Send thank-you note either through email or hand-written note within 24-hours of the interview
- Follow-up with interviewer if you have not heard back by the time they said you should

**Please note:** This Reference Guide was created by the Career and Employment Services staff at Madison Area Technical College. It is intended to be a guide and may not be all-inclusive to meet your specific needs. If preparing these documents for a class, be sure to follow the directions given by your instructor. For additional assistance or to make an appointment, contact us:

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