Interview Preparation Packet

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Basic Interviewing Tips

- Research the company and the position. Understand the company’s products and services, clientele, culture, etc. Don’t expect to learn all about the employer at the interview! It makes you look less interested.

- Take a test drive to the location of the interview prior to the interview date.

- Dress appropriately, conservatively, and professionally. No excessive jewelry or other accessories that distract the interviewer from focusing on YOU.

- Prepare questions (At least 3).

- Prior to your interview, review your resume and rehearse key points you want to communicate. Be sure to mention qualifications that fit the job requirements.

- Arrive early (Preferably 10-15 minutes).

- Bring a professional folder (portfolio) with a notepad, pen, EXTRA RESUMES, and a list of references.

- Be personable. Greet the receptionist, staff, and interviewer with a smile.

- Offer a solid handshake whenever you get the chance (Usually upon arrival and departure). Show enthusiasm and interest! Remember to SMILE!

- Do not sit down before the interviewer. Wait to be shown where to sit or to be asked to be seated. Sit up straight with upright, yet relaxed posture.

- Make good eye contact with everyone at the interview. Do not fidget with pens, paper, or your hands. Try to keep hands still or folded in your lap.

- Speak slowly and clearly and don't be afraid to pause a moment to collect your thoughts. Silence is better than filling the time with “um’s” and “uh’s”.

- Do not criticize previous employers, supervisors, professors, etc. When explaining your reasons for leaving, communicate your rationale professionally.

- Be honest. Don't try to cover up mistakes. Instead, focus on how you learned from them.

- Be assertive. Remember, the interview is a way for you to learn if the job is right for you.

- If you don't understand a question - or need a moment to think about it - say so. Never pretend to know something or someone when you don't.

- Don't inquire about salary or benefits until you have been offered the job. If the interviewer asks about your salary requirements, give a range based on your research of the job market, but indicate that you’re more interested in professional development than in a specific salary.

- Remember and pronounce the interviewer’s name correctly.

- Ask the interviewer for a business card and send a thank-you note or email within 24 hours.
Common Interview Questions

➢ Tell me about yourself.

Keep response related to the job you are applying for. You may include educational experience, interests, goals, dreams, recent activities, etc.

Another approach is to give 3 examples of traits that describe you best:

EX: I am a hard-working, creative, and organized individual who likes to work with elementary students. I have been a student teacher for the past year and would like to encourage children to achieve their potential.

➢ Why are you the best person for the job?

Focus on how you fit with the description of the position. What skills/experience can you bring to this position?

EX: Your ad described that you are looking for a person with ________, ________, and ________. I have experience working with_______ and have ________ experience and ________ skills.

➢ How has your educational training prepared you for this job?

Explain how coursework, internships, volunteer experience, projects, or workshop have contributed to your learning and have helped you gain skills for the job. Give concrete examples.

EX: My courses in childhood development gave me insight into the developmental stages of elementary students. I also worked on a project with my peers which helped to gain skills in assessing students’ needs. By working at an elementary school this past year, I have gained hands-on experience with the students as well as with teachers in the field.

➢ Discuss your work experience.

Focus on jobs that are related to the job you are applying for, but you may consider mentioning skills that you acquired from unrelated employment. Make sure to give examples of accomplishments and overall skills that you have learned from your work experience.

➢ In what work environment are you most productive?

Explain what work environments you have had experience in. Then, explain what your ideal working environment would be.

EX: My ideal working environment would be one where I could utilize my ________, ________ and ________ skills.
➢ Name 3 adjectives or descriptors that best describe you.

Be honest and give examples to back up the 3 descriptors.

EX: I am hardworking, creative, and intelligent. I have pursued my degree while working, achieved a GPA of 3.6 and have accomplished projects and assignments that have been creative and unique at both work and school.

➢ Why do you want this job?

Discuss the position and how you are qualified for it. Again, give examples of how you are a match for the hiring position. Make sure you really want the job you are applying for!

EX: The position describes someone who has strong organization and leadership skills. For example, I have been a leader as a coach for girls’ high school basketball team for 2 years and have strong organization skills that I used to plan and implement practices and games.

➢ What are you looking for in a position?

Share how you would like to contribute your skills. Discuss how you wish to service the clientele you will be working with. You may mention that you would like to gain experience and the opportunity to grow in the field. Additionally, a good reason to want a certain position is to gain a sense of purpose or fulfillment.

➢ What are your strengths?

Strengths may be different from descriptors. Discuss what your abilities are and share what you are best at accomplishing.

EX: Some of my strengths include that I communicate well with others, pay high attention to detail, and problem solve well. (Provide examples of your strengths)

➢ What are your weaknesses?

Name a positive weakness. Share a weakness that is work-related. Do not include any weakness that deal with your personal life or your relationships. Give examples as to how you are improving your “weakness”.

EX: “I can be too ambitious” or “I can take time to make decisions”

EX: I am working on becoming more assertive and confident in my decision-making and have made great strides.

➢ How would co-workers describe you?

Give specific traits and examples. Include personality traits that fit with the job description.

EX: Co-workers would say that I work well under pressure and keep a level-head in times of crisis. I also have a friendly nature and set people at ease.
➢ What are your greatest achievements?

Keep answers relative to the job and consider including one personal achievement. This shows that you have life goals/accomplishments aside from work. Provide examples.

➢ What does success mean for you?

Be honest and focus on what is most fulfilling for you. Give an example related to the career you are pursuing.

EX: Success to me means reaching for goals and not giving up or giving in to negativity. It also means having close relationships with friends and family. Success also means using my gifts and talents to work with children and make a positive difference in a child’s life.

➢ What do you know about our organization?

Do your research. If you cannot answer this question, then you have not properly prepared for the interview.

EX: I have heard that your company services [describe clientele] by providing [describe services]. I like that your company [describe one positive aspect of the company].

➢ What are your short term goals?

Hopefully that position you are applying for is one of your short term goals. This is a good opportunity to explain your career goals and how you would like to include the position you are applying for as one of your career goals.

➢ What are your long term goals?

Demonstrate your knowledge of potential career paths in your field. You can do this by speaking to others who have advanced themselves. Describe that you wish to progress and advance if this is desired. Share job positions of interest to you and mention that the position you are applying for is a good opportunity for growth.

EX: I hope to expand my skill set and contribute to the field of [______].
I would like to grow and learn in the field to eventually become a [______].

➢ What are your salary requirements?

Try to stay away from mentioning ONE exact figure. You may over estimate or under estimate and this may cause you to not be considered for the job or be offered a lower salary. Giving a salary range helps you determine the minimum amount that you will be willing to accept and the maximum amount you believe that you are worth for this kind of work. But, a good way to respond is to avoid being boxed in to a particular amount. This is not rude, but rather, helps the interviewer focus on whether or not they want to offer the job to you based on your skills, experience, and qualifications.

EX: I’m hoping that you will consider my experience and skills that I would bring to this position and compensate me accordingly. OR EX: My salary requirement is negotiable at this time.
Behavioral Questions

The following questions may be asked to determine how you behave. Employers often ask these questions to gain a better understanding of who you are and what you do. These questions provide the perfect opportunity to follow the S.T.A.R.

Explain a related **Situation**
- the **T**ask at hand
- the **A**ction taken...
- and the positive **R**esult.

These are just a few examples of different behavioral/descriptive questions that an employer may ask. Remember, the employer will ask you behavioral questions relative to the position you are applying for:

- How do you deal with pressure or deadlines?
- How do you respond to criticism?
- Can you describe how you deal with conflict?
- How do you react to crisis situations?
- Describe a difficult problem that you tried to solve. How did you identify the problem? How did you go about trying to solve it?
- Describe a time when you tried to persuade another person to do something that he/she was not very willing to do.
- Describe a time when you decided on your own that something needed to be done, and you took on the task to get it done.
- When have you felt overwhelmed? Tell me about it.

*Other questions are more specific to the kinds of skills the employer is looking for. The key is to provide **EXAMPLES, EXAMPLES, EXAMPLES**!*

**Explain your skills in/experience with:**

- Decision-making
- Problem-solving
- Leadership
- Motivation
- Communication
- Planning/Organizing
- Technology
- Teamwork

- Analysis
- Adaptability
- Goal-setting
- Persuasion
- Creativity/Innovation
- Thinking on your feet
- Taking initiative
Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Before the interview, prepare at least three questions to ask the interviewer. This can be done AFTER you have researched the company and the position. (If you ask questions that could have been easily answered through research, this shows lack of preparation.) Write down anything about the job that you need to have clarified. Do NOT ask about salary or benefits unless the employer speaks about them. The following are examples of questions that you might ask:

1. If hired, would I be filling a newly created position or replacing someone?
2. How would you describe a typical work day in this position?
3. Could you explain your organizational structure?
4. How would I be trained or introduced to the job?
5. What do you consider to be the organization’s strengths and weaknesses as compared to its competition?
6. What is the organization’s plan for the next five years, and how does this department fit in?
7. What do you enjoy most about your work with this organization?
8. How is this position important to the organization?
9. What are the department’s goals for the year?
10. What are the goals for this position this year?
11. How will I get feedback on my job performance?
12. Do you have a formal performance review process? Can you describe it?
13. If hired, would I report directly to you or someone else?
14. What is your management style?
15. How would you describe the work environment here?
16. Is there an emphasis on teamwork/independent work in this department?
17. What is the potential for advancement?
18. Is it possible to transfer from one division or department to another?
19. Do you tend to promote from within?
20. Are opportunities for professional/educational development provided?
21. How much flexibility is allowed for working hours?
22. How much travel is associated with this job?
23. What is the organization’s policy on transfers to other cities?
24. What is your timeframe for hiring?
25. What do you consider to be the most important qualification for the job?
Illegal vs. Legal Questions

The following questions are illegal for an employer to ask. You do not need to answer these questions and they are provided for your reference only. Basically, any question that refers to your age, religion, ethnicity, personal status is not required to be answered.

ILLEGAL:
- How old are you?
- What is your maiden name?
- Are you single/married?
- What is your native language?
- Were your parents immigrants?
- Do you have any health problems?
- Tell me about your family.
- Do you have a religious affiliation?

LEGAL:
- Are you over the age of 18?
- Have you ever used a different name?
- Do you speak/read/write languages other than English?
- Are you able to perform the duties of this position?

A good way to respond to questions that you wish to not answer is to question the relevancy:

“I am unsure how this information relates to this job. Can you explain?”

or simply state:

“Please respect that I do not wish to answer this question.”
The Thank You Note

A thank-you letter is an essential follow-up step to an interview. It is a courtesy that is expected and noticed by interviewers.

It allows you to:

- Address specific concerns raised during the interview about whether or not you have the qualifications the organization is seeking
- Mention a specific area of related expertise that you did not have an opportunity to discuss in the interview

You may e-mail your letter if you know that the hiring time line is drawing to a close. If you had multiple interviewers, vary your letter!

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December 8, 2012

Mr. Thomas A. Jones
Marketing Analysis Services Manager
MassMutual Financial Group
1295 State Street
Springfield, MA 01111-0001

Dear Mr. Jones:

Thank you for meeting with me last Friday. I found our discussion to be very informative and am excited about the possibility of joining your staff as a Marketing Associate.

As I mentioned in the interview, I can offer many skills and insights that are essential to the marketing efforts of the MassMutual Companies. In particular, I have played an integral role in the marketing of several newsletters and other publications, including the coordination of direct mailings and the compilation of specialized marketing lists.

You described this position as being mid-level management. As a Marketing Associate with Textiles Publishing, I have been responsible for numerous group projects that require overseeing the cooperation of several divisions within the company. In addition, I have a solid record of meeting deadlines and have developed a keen appreciation of bottom-line issues.

I am confident I can make a valuable contribution to MassMutual Financial Group. I am impressed by the long-term possibilities with your organization and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Raymond C. Rivera