



INTERVIEWING

**A smile is a curve that sets
everything straight.**

INTERVIEW PREPARATION AND PROCESS

It is very important to be well prepared for an interview, emotionally, physically and mentally. Common reasons employers give for not hiring an applicant are: attitude and the inability of the applicant to fully explain the contents of his or her resume. The candidate is expected to be able to discuss in detail every item listed on the resume and to give examples when asked.

There's one essential question to ask yourself before arriving on time for that first interview. What attitude are you taking with you and going to show during the interview?

Employers continually seek new employees with a positive, flexible attitude—people who demonstrate that their personal values match the company's corporate values.

Interviews can be over in as little as 15 minutes or last more than an hour. The bulk of the interview will involve the interviewer asking the candidate questions about his or her job history, work style, personality and other factors relevant to the job. The candidate will usually be given a chance to ask questions at the end of the interview.

TECHNICAL INTERVIEW

It is quite acceptable for a potential employer to ask you to demonstrate your skills. For example, you may be asked to create a document, draft an email or reconcile a bank statement. You could also be asked to take a short math test or language assessment. This practical approach to interviewing can help the employer to more accurately assess your skill level. Read this chapter carefully and work on preparing the answers to some typical interview questions listed at the end of the chapter.

Be honest, be yourself and put your best foot forward.

Practise a positive 30-second answer to "Why did you leave your last job?"
Employers want to be sure that your reasons make sense.

PREPARATION IS THE KEY

Employers hire people, not paper. So while a good resume will get you an interview, it typically takes two or more interviews to get you the job offer. It is no longer enough to dress up and head into an interview ready to wing it. Today, it takes preparation and practice to learn to sell yourself in an interview.

Giving well thought out answers that demonstrate your skills is certainly important. Being relaxed and sounding confident are equally important. In fact, the way you present yourself accounts for more than half of the overall impression you make. Things like appearance, tone of voice, friendliness and body language are an important part of your message.

DRESS FOR THE INTERVIEW

Appearance counts. This includes your clothing, haircut and grooming. Dress conservatively in clothing that fits well. Clothing should be recently cleaned and wrinkle free. Limit, or even eliminate, perfume or aftershave. If you need to shop for the right outfit, consider it a worth-while investment in your future. The general rule is to dress 'one step up' from what you would wear to work if you got this job.

Are your interview outfits clean, pressed and ready to go?

ATTIRE FOR MEN

For a sales position you want to consider the type of environment you would be working in. This could mean a jacket and tie with a white or pale blue shirt. A navy or gray suit might be preferable depending on the kind of work and the formality of the office. Or, if it is a more casual environment a pair of khaki pants with a golf shirt could be appropriate. Shoes should be well shined.

If you are applying for a service-oriented job, you can consider wearing pressed, casual pants with a dress shirt or golf shirt, as appropriate.

ATTIRE FOR WOMEN

If applying to work in an office environment dress pants or a modest skirt and a blouse would be appropriate. Beware of large patterns that can be distracting. Shoes should be closed-toe with a medium heel. Flats are acceptable.

Although many of the same principles apply for service-oriented work, you can simply wear a shirt and pants as an appropriate outfit.

INTERVIEW WARDROBE CONSIDERATIONS FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

1. Dress for the job you're applying for. For example, if you want to work in construction, a suit is not appropriate and you would be overdressed.
2. Avoid statement shirts. These are shirts with slogans, words, or large graphics.
3. Avoid wearing hats or caps.
4. Do not wear sweatshirts or hoodies to an interview.
5. Ensure your clothing is clean and in good condition with no stains, wrinkles or holes.
6. Avoid wearing strong perfumes or cologne. Some workplaces may have a no scent policy.
7. Wear closed toed shoes, avoid flip flops or runners.
8. If you are carrying physical copies of your resume with you to the interview, ensure they are in a folder to avoid folding them
9. Ensure your hair is clean and brushed.
10. If you choose to wear makeup, ensure it is appropriate for the position you are applying for.

HOW TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPRESSION

Do your homework

Bring yourself up to date on the industry and company/organization you'll be meeting with by doing research. Review information from online articles, trades magazines, press releases and social media. The minimum requirement for research is that you have checked the organization's website. Remember to also research the company's competitors.

Use your contacts to uncover some first-hand information about the business. Find out something about the company's history, its product or service, size, locations, expansion plans and charitable works. It pays to ask around. You may have a friend who knows someone who has worked there. You can also check out the company's product or services by talking to people who have used them.

Practice talking about yourself

Review your resume. Practise your answers to common interview questions. Listen to yourself on a voice recording, or get creative and videotape yourself to hear how you sound, see how you look and evaluate the content of your answers.

ATTITUDE AND BODY LANGUAGE IN INTERVIEW GREETINGS

A firm but painless, palm-to-palm handshake is a good way to launch an interview. Combine that with a genuine smile, direct eye contact and a clear "Thank you for seeing me", and you're off to a good start. To make your handshake work, offer your hand by holding it straight out with your thumb raised so you get a good grip. Walk with energy, stand up straight, and keep your shoulders back and your chin raised. As you make eye contact take a few seconds to notice the colour of the other person's eyes. This will help you to hold eye contact rather than just giving a quick glance. Look pleased to be there rather than nervous and hesitant. Confidence and poise count.

Smile

Did you know that the majority of people forget to smile during an interview? It is the most common mistake that interviewees make. When you are stiff and uptight, smiling just doesn't come naturally. So relax and lighten up. Be friendly and open with your interviewer, not formal and controlled.

Look for opportunities to smile such as when talking about your accomplishments or your people skills. Hold your smile for a few seconds to make sure it registers with the interviewer. Chances are you'll discover that they're smiling too. It's a great way to build rapport and it's a natural relaxer. Close the interview the same way you started it, with a smile, a handshake and a heartfelt "Thank you!"

Eye contact

Take your cues from the interviewer, and match the amount of eye contact you make with theirs. Break away occasionally when they do, or when you feel too uncomfortable. Don't stare! You can look at the interviewer's eyebrow or forehead or something on their desk from time to time.

When asked a question that may have a negative answer, it is important that you look the interviewer straight in the eye and give them a direct answer. This would include questions like, "Why did you leave that job?" or "Why were you not promoted?" Practise an honest, well thought out response to these questions. Your honesty will help to earn the interviewer's respect.

Posture

The way you sit, walk and stand can speak volumes about your energy level, your confidence and even your mood. Walk with purpose and put a bounce in your step. Sit straight and well back in the chair. Don't perch on the edge of the seat, slouch into it or lean over on one elbow. You can deliberately shift your position from time to time, but fidgeting will make you appear restless and uncomfortable. Sit with your arms resting on the arms of the chair or in your lap. Fold your hands if that's comfortable for you. Do not cross your arms across your chest. This can be interpreted as defensive and unfriendly.

Gestures

When you sit in front of a desk, your interviewer has only a head and shoulders view of you. That's why it's important to bring hand gestures into your conversation to emphasize points in your answers. Hand gestures are an important part of communication. Use them effectively and they will add to the impact of your answers. Overuse them and they will distract from your message.

Nodding slightly at some point when the interviewer is speaking will show that you are paying close attention. You can also nod and smile to show that you agree with something the interviewer has just said.

Facial expressions

Many of us wear our hearts on our sleeve and our thoughts on our face. Interviewers will believe what they see before they believe what they hear. In other words, if your response to a question about your last boss includes a frown and an unconscious sigh, the value of the words you speak will be diminished by your expression. Discrepancies like this can make your answers less believable.

Body language to avoid

- shrugging or pointing
- exaggerated head-shaking
- frowning or sighing
- eye-rolling
- excessive blinking
- lip-biting
- playing with jewellery, tie, pocket change or keys
- smoothing hair or moustache
- constantly shifting position
- arms crossed over chest
- gripping the arms of the chair
- tapping your feet or pen

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are different types of interviews you may participate in during the hiring process, such as referral, screening and selection interviews. Every interview has the same general objective: getting to know you better. But different types of interviews may be used at various stages of the process and may take one of several very diverse forms. It is not always possible to know what to expect while preparing for an interview. It is important that you understand different types of interviews to ensure you are prepared.

The purpose of a typical job interview is twofold:

1. For you, it's finding out if the job is right for you, should you be offered it
2. For the interviewer, it's finding out if you can do the job AND fit into the existing team

Referral interview

A referral interview gives an employer the chance to meet you and assess your skills and fit in preparation for future opportunities. You could have the chance to participate in a referral interview as a result of networking, developing a meeting through common

contacts or a professional event referral. This type of interview can put you in front of valuable contacts.

Screening interview

The purpose of a screening interview is to give an employer a means of narrowing the field of applicants by ensuring that candidates meet the minimum qualification requirements. The interviewer will review your qualifications to determine whether to accept or reject your candidacy. This type of interview is often conducted by a Human Resources representative. It is recommended that you follow the interviewer's lead during a screening interview and keep your answers concise.

Sometimes HR professionals are the gatekeepers. If they are conducting screening interviews, they often have a well-honed ability to determine whether there is anything that might disqualify you for the position. Remember - at this point they do not need to decide whether you are the best fit for the position, only whether you are not a good fit. Screeners will focus in on gaps in your employment history or pieces of information that look inconsistent. They may also want to know salary expectations from the outset to determine whether expectations are in line with what the position offers.

Some tips for maintaining confidence during screening interviews:

- highlight your accomplishments and qualifications
- at this point, getting to know your personality is not as important as verifying your qualifications
- answer questions directly and succinctly
- be tactful in addressing income requirements; it is best to give a range
- if the interview is conducted by phone, it is helpful to have a copy of your resume next to you.

Selection interview

The selection interview is usually conducted by a department manager, supervisor or other hiring authority who typically conducts the interview. During this interview, the interviewer is trying to determine if you are the right fit for the position and the organization. Your best approach during this type of interview is to emphasize your interest in the position based on previous or current experience, which ideally also reflects the company's needs.

INTERVIEW FORMATS

The most common forms of interviews are: behavioural, directed, structured, unstructured, telephone, video, panel, group, follow-up and case interviews.

Traditional interviews focus on questions that are hypothetical, leading, open-ended and resume-based.

Directed interview

The directed interview is highly organized and is used for screening purposes. Generally, in this type of interview, the employer or recruiter works from a checklist or script and asks a series of questions. These types of interviews can be conducted either one-on-one or by a panel, in person or over the telephone.

Structured interview

In this style of interview, the interviewer has a clear agenda that he or she follows. Sometimes companies use this rigid format to ensure parity between interviews. Interviewers ask each candidate the same series of questions and make careful note of the responses so that they can more readily compare the results. You might feel as though you're being asked an exhaustive number of questions, or you might find that the conversation develops naturally.

Unstructured interview

The less formal unstructured interview has an open and relaxed feel. Questions asked by the interviewer are broad-based, but it is important that you don't get too relaxed or share more than you should. You'll find that many interviews are a blend of the directed and unstructured formats.

Telephone interview

Many employers conduct an initial telephone interview. The employer or recruiter may use a phone call to make the first contact. Questions are asked to confirm your qualifications or to present additional details about the job before a regular interview is scheduled. This type of interview can be challenging because you're not face to face with the interviewer, so judging their response and reaction to what you say is difficult. You may be given a scheduled interview date and time, or they may call you and expect an immediate interview. If you are not prepared to give an interview at the time they call, do your best to schedule a time that is convenient for both of you.

Listen carefully and ask good questions. Although the open format allows you to significantly shape the interview, running with your own agenda and dominating the conversation means that you run the risk of missing important information about the company and its needs.

Video interview

Video interviews are becoming more commonplace in the workplace. As hiring becomes more global, both for employers and candidates, video interviewing is a way to expedite the interview process. Hiring managers and recruiters can conduct first-round interviews more quickly, save on transportation costs and get the interview process started much faster using video conferencing than they can scheduling in-person interviews.

Panel interview

The panel interview is conducted by two or more interviewers. There is often a moderator, but not always. Most participants will take turns asking you questions, but some panels intentionally include members who do not speak and only take notes during the interview. Maintain good eye contact with all members of the panel, but always start with the person asking the particular question, then look at the others while giving your answer. Remember to return your attention to the person who posed the question before you finish your answer.

Group interview

A group interview is typically used when an organization is looking to hire a large number of people to fill multiple positions. By using this format the hiring managers or HR representatives can use their time more effectively, rather than interviewing each individual separately. In this type of interview it is very important to draw on your previous experiences to help you stand out of the crowd. Most likely, each candidate's answers will be similar, so providing a memorable answer will give you the upper hand.

The follow-up interview

Companies bring candidates back for a second and even a third or fourth interview for a number of reasons. Sometimes they just want to confirm that you are the amazing resource they first thought you to be or they are having difficulty deciding between a shortlist of candidates. Other times, the interviewer's supervisor or other decision-makers in the company want to get a sense of you before making a hiring decision.

Follow-up interviews could go in a number of different directions, and you must prepare for each of them.

When meeting with the same person again, you do not need to be as assertive in the communication of your skills. You can focus on cementing rapport, and understanding where the company is going and how your skills mesh with the company's vision and culture.

Alternatively, you might find yourself negotiating the details of an offer—including your compensation package.

A more typical follow-up interview would be with an individual that you have not met before. In this case you are often 'starting from scratch' in terms of selling yourself and your ability to fulfill the needs of this position. Be sure that you are clear on who this person is, where they fit in the organization and how their role intersects with the position you are interviewing for.

Some tips for managing second interviews:

- Be confident; accentuate what you have to offer and your interest in the position.
- Probe tactfully to learn more about the internal company dynamics and culture.

TIPS FOR ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- avoid simple yes or no answers; explain your answers in more detail
- vary your answers in length
- look for opportunities to use examples or accomplishment stories to illustrate skills
- add numbers, titles, timelines, dollar values and other details to boost their significance
- relate your skills to the job and emphasize your ability to contribute to organization
- talk in a conversational manner; speak up to be heard; add emphasis and enthusiasm to your answers; vary the pace of your speech; pause to gather your thoughts
- keep your posture and body language positive, including eye contact, open gestures, facial expression, smiling and nodding
- ask for clarification of questions that seem unclear by asking, "Could you repeat that?" "How do you mean?" "Could you clarify that a little?" or simply stating, "I'm not sure I understand what you're asking"
- postpone questions about salary, benefits and holidays until the second interview, or when you know that there is real interest in you for the position

Be aware that your answers can help to eliminate you if they are:

- scripted and formal in tone
- wordy and long-winded
- unfocused and rambling
- confusing and poorly organized
- delivered in a lecturing style
- concerned with salary and benefits too early in the process

THE FIVE SOUND BITES

An excellent way to prepare for interviews is to create and practise a five-part script that answers the questions most frequently asked of job seekers. This five sound bite method requires you to organize your thoughts and deliver your key points thoroughly, yet concisely. You will plan how to present your career history, choosing which accomplishment stories to include so that every claim you make about who you are and what you can do is backed by a statement of proof from your past.

Your five sound bite script will include your reasons for previous job changes and significant career transitions. It will dispel concerns about your current motives for seeking a new opportunity, and explain how your experiences, interests and values create the rationale for your next career step. The five sound bite script offers a format for making the elements of your story congruent and therefore trustworthy. It will be most useful when you are asked, "Tell me about yourself."

An excellent way to prepare for an interview is to create and practise a five-part script that answers the toughest questions. Use the worksheet in section 7A to prepare your "Five Sound Bites."

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Common or Typical – reference section 7B for examples
2. Situational
3. Behavioural Descriptive
 - A form of question that is designed to draw out detailed examples of the candidate's previous behaviour rather than opinions

BEHAVIOUR-BASED QUESTIONS

Understanding the process

Behaviour-based questions have become very popular in the past few years. There are books written about this technique, and many companies send their managers on training courses to learn how to conduct this type of interview. All of this interest is for good reason. Behaviour-based interviews allow job applicants to demonstrate that they are right for the job by describing exactly what they have done in the past.

The interviewer prepares by thinking about the most important kinds of situations or problems that will come up in this job. Then, they plan a question that gets you talking about a similar situation. An example of this type of question is:

Tell me about a time when you dealt with a difficult customer.
What was the problem and how did you handle it?

Don't be nervous. Answering behaviour-based questions is easy once you are prepared. All you need to do is relate a very specific and detailed example from your past work experience. The best way to do this is to actually relive the example in your mind and tell it exactly as it happened. Utilizing the SOAR method, be sure to talk about:

- challenges you faced
- steps you took
- skills you used
- help or resources you used
- results you achieved
- things you learned

Preparing for behavioural questions

The interviewer will expect you to pause before replying to a behaviour-based question. You need to gather your thoughts and think through your story. Take your time answering. It should take two or three minutes to tell the story in detail. Any less time may mean that you have not provided enough detail. If you talk longer, you risk rambling on and boring the interviewer.

To prepare, think about your most relevant skills and strengths for the position. Recall a story or two from the past where you used each of those skills. Be ready to talk about a specific situation, what you did and the result. With six to eight well-prepared examples from your past, you can easily answer several behaviour-based questions.

You may also be asked to elaborate on any number of the bullet points you have included in your resume, so be prepared to describe them in more detail. The more you practise telling your stories, the better you will come across in a real interview.

HOW TO ANSWER BEHAVIOUR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q - Tell me a time when...?

When asking the question, the interviewer wants to learn about what is important to you. There is no right answer ... but there is a wrong one. The wrong answer is to try and guess what they are looking for and make up a response.

Formula: In your mind think of a time when you had this experience. Then use the SOAR principle to walk the interviewer through the story. ALWAYS USE THE SOAR PRINCIPLE.

- Overall: What are the 3 key messages you want to communicate to the interviewer?
- Focus a greater amount of time on the accomplishments in your last one or two roles.
- Paint a visual picture of yourself and your career with words. Provide the interviewer with a before and after picture.
- Decide what strength or personal attribute each accomplishment describes.
- Prepare multiple accomplishment stories using the 'SOAR' format:

SITUATION

Say "At that time..." Begin with an outline of the situation or problem you faced, titles of people you worked with and any quantification related to the situation.

OBSTACLE

Obstacles or challenges you faced and how you handled them.

ACTION

Actions taken — the actions you actually took, the decisions you made and the skills you used throughout the situation, deadlines and other time factors, methods you used to handle the situation. Use "I".

RESULT

Results delivered — how did the company benefit? Quantify the business result—the results of your efforts, feedback you received from others and any follow-up you did.

Tip: Relate the incident from your past, exactly as it happened. The greater your ability to relive the incident, the more you will spark the interest of your interviewer and involve him or her in the listening process. Remember to stay focused and relaxed.

Here is an example of a good answer to the question about dealing with a difficult customer:

I remember one time when I was on cash on a Friday evening before a long weekend. It was almost closing time, the lineup was really long, and I spotted one of our most important and most difficult customers in line. He was getting very impatient, and, sure enough, I got him!

He had a cheque from a property insurance company for \$3,000 that he wanted to deposit. He also said that he wanted to get \$3,000 in traveller's cheques because he was leaving for holidays the next morning at 6:30 a.m. I knew I was in for a scene because the cheque was not properly endorsed, and he only had \$600 in his account. I offered the client two options.

I offered to get the traveller's cheques ready while he went and got his wife to endorse the cheque, and I asked the manager to stay late with me so that he was sure to have money for the trip. The other option was to use his personal line of credit, although this would have resulted in interest charges.

Much to my surprise, he stayed calm. He actually thanked me for my suggestions and left quickly to get the endorsement. Everything worked out, and my manager and I ended up leaving only about half an hour late.

For sample questions, refer to section 7C. Behavioural-Based Interview Questions

For sample questions to ask your interviewer, refer to section 7D.

DEBRIEFING AFTER THE INTERVIEW

As soon as possible after an interview, sit down and make some notes so you'll remember the details that were discussed. Debriefing thoroughly and making notes is an excellent way to prepare for a second interview. It's also a great way to help you understand how you can improve your interviewing skills. For some self-reflecting questions refer to section 7E.

TIPS FOR WRITING THANK-YOU LETTERS AND EMAILS

- Write your thank-you letter within 24 hours. It's your most important and immediate task after an interview. In addition to being courteous, writing the thank-you letter shows initiative and follow-through.

- Remind the interviewer of who you are. An interviewer may be seeing ten or more job applicants each day. It is easy to forget who's who. Your thank-you letter helps to refresh the interviewer's memory of you and keeps your application front and centre.
- Repeat your strengths. Here's a great opportunity to sum up your qualifications and strengths as they relate to the job. Add any backup numbers or details that are relevant.
- Reinforce your suitability for the job. Refer back to something the interviewer said and tie it into your experience.
- Restate your interest in the job. Let the interviewer know that you are ready to take on the responsibilities and challenges of the job. Share your enthusiasm for the opportunity.
- Clear up any concerns the interviewer may have expressed. If there were some specifics about your experience or skills that the interviewer seemed to be concerned about, address them confidently in your thank-you letter.
- Oops, I forgot! Often as you debrief after an interview, you will realize that you missed an opportunity to sell yourself and your ability to do the job. You can add this information to your thank-you letter to cover all the bases.

SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTERS

Use your debriefing notes as an outline for drafting thank-you letters.

The next two pages contain samples of these letters. You can see that they are shorter and more informal than cover letters. Try for a friendly, conversational approach. Avoid being too general by making specific references to the interview.

Remember, your thank-you letter will likely become part of your application file and may be read by several people. It may take several tries before you have a thank-you letter that demonstrates your enthusiasm for the job, sells your abilities and makes a positive impression.

Keep your resume and a pen and paper handy in the house or with you when you are out. When employers call, you'll be ready.

For sample Thank You letters refer to file 7F.

THE SALARY OR CONTRACT RATE DISCUSSION

It's best for you if the detailed discussion of pay, benefits, holidays and other perks is left until a job offer is on the table. It's also best for you if the company/organization tells you what salary range they have in mind before asking about your requirements and expectations.

However, an ad might say, "Please state salary expectations", or you may be asked this during an interview. How do you handle questions like these? If you name a figure that is too high, you may be eliminated. Go too low and you may either be eliminated or end up working for less than you should. Neither prospect is very appealing. Your best response will be based on good research.

Salary negotiation

You can feel more empowered in the salary negotiation phase of your job search by preparing and researching company information ahead of time. The negotiation process should be smooth and professional, help you move toward the final step of accepting the position and should result in a win/win situation for all.

Even though you may be tempted to, do not bring up the subject of salary, benefits or vacation time in a first interview. This makes you look more interested in the compensation than the job. Asking these questions too soon makes a very poor impression. The time and place for this discussion is when the interviewer raises it or when you have made it past the initial cut. You don't want to leave this question until the job offer stage as that may be too late to make any possible or necessary adjustments.

To successfully manoeuvre through the salary negotiation discussion, you must have a good sense of balance. Knowing your value and your worth will help you feel more confident about staying in step during the salary negotiation process.

The employer takes the lead and you follow as you move together through the interview process. The salary negotiation dance is never confrontational or harsh, but smooth and focused.

It is not uncommon for the first step to begin on the phone. The interviewer asks for your salary requirements, what salary you are currently making or what you made in your last position.

It is sometimes possible to postpone this discussion until you have more information, but be aware that you have to proceed with a great deal of caution. You could try a response such as: "Could you tell me the range budgeted for this position?" or "What salary would you typically pay someone with my background and experience?", but understand that if they ask the question again, it is in your best interest to answer it directly. If you try to evade this question any further, you risk putting off the interviewer and blowing any chance you had to proceed to the next step in the process.

Postponing the salary discussion, at least until you have more information, may well be most desirable for you, but is often not possible to do. By doing research ahead of time, you will feel more confident that you know your own worth.

There is a point during the interview when either the company's salary range for this position or your salary range expectations will be revealed. If possible, it is always helpful to have the interviewer lead this exchange and give out their information first.

The offer

If the interviewing employer determines that you are right for the job, this person will take the lead and make an offer. It is now your turn to move the salary negotiation to the next stage. It is important that you first evaluate the package and review the following:

- base salary or contract rate per hour
- alternative compensation—bonus, commission, stock options, profit-sharing
- benefits—premiums for insurance, paid time off, working conditions
- other perks—car, education reimbursement, job training, laptop computer, discounts

Basic calculations will tell you how closely the offer meets your needs, values and worth.

Communication with the employer or hiring manager

If, as is often the case, you are not prepared to accept a job offer on the spot, it is essential that you communicate your timing to your potential employer/hiring manager. You will need to indicate how long you need to review the job offer. The maximum recommended time is 48 hours. When you receive a job offer in writing, contact the employer to let them know you have received it. If you have questions and concerns, scripting your dialogue ahead of time will give you confidence to be succinct and clear regarding what you want.

For example, the interviewee may state: "Based on my 5 years' experience as a site manager, clean safety record, and my proven ability to set and meet project budgets and build teams, I feel that the base salary offered is low." followed by a question such as: "Is there any flexibility here?"

Interviewer or hiring manager may then ask: "What do you have in mind?"

Staying patient and calm during the offer negotiation process is critical and is far easier to do if you've done your pre-work and have a good sense of your value and worth. You will be able to more effectively sell yourself based on what you bring to the organization.

Interviewee response: "Based on the research I have done, I feel that someone with my experience and background should be in the upper level of the range we have been discussing." Allowing a pause in between your statements or questions and being comfortable with silence is key, as silence is a strong tool in salary negotiations. To achieve that, try counting to 10 in your head. Be prepared for them to say that they will get back to you.

The final steps of salary negotiations

Whether you are negotiating for a higher salary or for perks such as benefits, a bonus or commission, more stock options, training or education, allow the interviewing employer to lead and you follow.

Research the typical salary or contract hourly rate range

If you take the time, it's not that hard to figure out a reasonable salary range or contract rate per hour range for a job. For example, if the ad is for a receptionist, ask someone you know who has either been a receptionist, hired a receptionist or can refer you to a receptionist, to help you determine the range. Check with local placement agencies and see if they will share the information. Follow local ads to track any salaries that are posted. Call a training school or college to find out the current salary ranges for graduates they have placed in similar positions.

After doing the research, you can include a sentence in your cover letter such as,

"Based on your posting, I believe a position like this would be in the \$30,000 to \$35,000 range."

Keep in mind that once you name a range, you have let the employer know the minimum salary you are willing to accept. Make sure your stated minimum is slightly higher than your actual minimum. Remember, you can always negotiate down, but it is much harder to negotiate up.

Options

Salary or hourly rate questions that your interviewer introduces early in the process are usually ways of screening out candidates. If you are asked point-blank what you were making in your last job, you have to be honest. Be sure to specify base salary or total compensation and, if the latter, include all bonuses, benefits and perks. If you are asked to give your expectations you have some options as to how you might respond.

If the question comes up in an early interview, you can defer it honestly by saying,

"I would need to know more about the job before I can answer that. Can you give me more details about the responsibilities of the job?"

"Now that I understand the details of this position, I would be interested in knowing what salary range the company had in mind."

Another way to handle this is to try to find out more by saying,

"That would depend on the total package. Can you tell me more about the benefits package? Performance bonus? Vacation policy?"

If you are feeling especially brave, you can refer it back to the interviewer by saying,

"I'm not sure I have a complete understanding of the job at this point. Can you tell me what range you had in mind?"

The total compensation package

The best way to handle salary and/or hourly (contract) rate negotiations is to do your research and defer the discussion until you are offered the job. That's when your bargaining power is highest. What employer would want to hire their second choice when they can have their ideal candidate for a bit more money? You also want to delay negotiations until you are speaking directly to the decision-maker. Here is a list of the items that you might need to consider as you negotiate a job offer:

- start date
- vacation time
- immediate inclusion in the benefits package
- flexible or staggered working hours
- probation period
- training courses
- incentive/performance bonus
- branch/office location
- commission rates
- equipment upgrades
- performance review date
- salary increase expectations
- sales targets/quotas

NOTES