# Preparing for Interviews

Your success at interviewing with potential employers depends on how well you prepare ahead of time. Employers will typically ask questions that are similar to what other employers will ask. Knowing this means you can improve your success at interviews by being prepared for those questions you are most likely to be asked.

When I led an executive search firm, all our recruiters were senior-level seasoned executives. This enabled us to develop interview questions based on our own prior experiences as well as what we knew our clients would be asking. We focused on behavioral-type questions, which asked interviewees about their personal experiences rather than hypothetical situations.

Experienced interviewers will usually have a specific position they are attempting to fill. Consequently, their questions will focus on assessing whether you have the skills and experience to do what **they want you to do**. Even when they do not have a specific position in mind at the moment, they will want to know the skills and experience you can bring to them **that they need**.

Interviews are two way conversations. Use a balance 60% / 40%. You talking 60% of the time and the interviewer answering your questions 40% of the time. Never exceed 2 minutes in any reply.

The questions you are most likely to be asked are grouped into the following categories:

1. Your most recent job
2. Work-related issues
3. Education and career objectives
4. People skills
5. Decision-making and judgment processes
6. Personal style, perception of yourself, leadership skills, and other

**How to use this worksheet:**

1. Read each question and enter keywords that will trigger your thoughts as to how you would answer. Do not enter sentences you would need to memorize.
2. Answer all questions even if they sound similar. Think about what would be the purpose of the question in the context of what you think they want to know.
3. Answer all questions as honestly as you can. Be candid and forthright in ALL responses. Interviewers can immediately detect answers which are disingenuous.
4. Review all the questions and highlight the ones you think will be challenging to answer. Use two or three colors. Choose one for the most critical, and others that are less so.
5. Before you attend any interview, review this worksheet focusing on those that are highlighted as being the most important ones you need to be prepared to answer.

Enter text in the boxes in the following pages. Try to limit to two lines but the boxes will expand to accommodate the text you enter.A. **Your most recent job**

1. Tell me about the main products and services of your most recent employer.

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1. Who were its strongest competitors, and how did your company differentiate itself in the marketplace?

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1. What were your primary responsibilities there?

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1. What aspects gave you the most satisfaction in that job?

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1. What did you consider the most crucial aspects of the job?

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1. Tell me about a difficult situation you were in at your last job and how you dealt with it.

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1. Who were you responsible to, and for what?

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1. What aspects did you like least about the job?

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1. What was your biggest challenge in your last job?

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1. You will be asked about your leaving your most recent employer, such as: “Why were you let go from X Company?”, “Why are you leaving (or considering leaving) X Company?”, “What are the circumstances of you leaving X Company?”

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1. What did you see in your current (or last) job that led you to accept it?

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1. Looking back, if you had one thing that you would do differently, what would it be? (Be prepared for: “How would you do it differently”?)

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B. **Work-related issues**

1. What is your greatest achievement so far? (They’re interested in career-related achievements, since the interview is for a job, not personal or family issues.)

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1. What are your three most important skills? (Some may ask for five.)

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1. What fringe benefits are most important to you?

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1. What do you consider your most important areas of experience?

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1. What limitations would you have about traveling and working away from home?

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**C, Education and career objectives**

1. What factors led you to choose the career you’re in?

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1. How do you feel about your progress so far?

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1. Given the choice, what schooling or training would you like to undertake at this stage in your career?

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1. What are your career goals?

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1. Where would you like your career to be in one (three or five years)?

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1. What skills and abilities do you most enjoy using?

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1. What do you consider the most significant trends in your field today?

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1. If you were 18 again, is there anything you would do differently in your education or career? If so, what?

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1. What would your ideal job description say?

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**D. People skills**

1. How do you motivate your staff? (Be prepared for a follow-up question asking for an example.)

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1. What qualities do you particularly respect and admire in others?

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1. What experience have you had with difficult people at work, and how have you dealt with them?

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1. In your experience, what traits have bothered or concerned you about your superiors?

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1. Do you prefer to work in a team or on your own?

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1. How do you think your colleagues and those reporting to you would describe your communication skills?

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1. If you were assigned as part of a team, what would be your natural role on that team? Why?

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**E. Decision-making and judgment processes**

1. What types of decisions do you agonize over? (examples)

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1. How would you describe your ability to delegate?

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1. How do you keep track of work you have delegated? (examples)

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1. What experience have you had appraising others’ job performance? (examples)

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1. What are your views on formal appraisals?

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1. How do you make decisions when you’re leading a team? (examples)

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1. When you participate in a team effort, which role is your natural style? Can you give me an example?

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1. What experience have you had recruiting staff? (examples)

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**F. Personal style, perception of yourself, leadership skills, and other**

1. What are your three greatest strengths? (If your answers here and your answers to question 14 about your skills are different, bridge the gap for them as they may not distinguish between skills and strengths.)

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1. What are your three most significant weaknesses? (Be open and honest. Add how you compensate for your weaknesses, not how you have overcome them.)

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1. What particularly motivates you?

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1. Who is your role model or hero? Why?

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1. What leadership skills do you most admire in others?

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1. How would you describe your own leadership skills?

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1. Has a previous employer ever hired a coach for you? If so, what were the circumstances?

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1. Which leadership skills would you like to develop or improve?

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1. Which leadership skills have you been told you need to improve?

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1. How would you describe your administrative skills?

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1. How would your close friends describe you?

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1. What do you do to counteract pressure or stress?

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1. What types of stress do you consider unnecessary?

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1. How would you describe your sense of humor?

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1. In what areas do you feel your communication skills are particularly strong?

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1. What do you see as the most challenging tasks for you in this position?

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1. What do you most want in life?

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1. Tell me about yourself. (Think about this for a moment before responding. Tell highlights about your career in an outline fashion and do not exceed two minutes. If they want more details, they’ll ask for them.)

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1. Why should we hire you? (Confirm with them your understanding of what they want you to do in this position and then address the skills and experience you have that will enable you to accomplish what they want.)

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