

# Interviewing and Following Up



*An employment interview is simply a meeting between you and a potential employer to discuss your qualifications and see if there is a fit.*

## Sell Your Qualifications

An interview is an opportunity for an employer to see if you are a good fit with the position, department and company; it is also your opportunity to see if the employer is a good fit for you. The employer wants to verify what they know about you and to talk about your qualifications. When you have been called for an interview, be confident that the employer already knows that you are qualified for the position. Your goal in the interview is to show that you can fill the employer's need and be of value to their bottom line.

Most employers form their first impression within the first seven seconds of the interview. Interviews can be stressful, and the key to feeling confident is to be prepared. Preparation will help win the interview and improve interview success. Generally, interviews last 30–60 minutes. Find out as much as possible about the interviewing process of a particular company before you go.

## Do Your Research

The more you know about the job, the employer and the industry, the better prepared you will be to target your qualifications. You may want to ask a question or two at the interview to show the employer that you know about their business. There are many sources of information: ask the employer's human resources department for a more detailed position description; research employer profiles on company websites, at any Chamber of Commerce or at a local library; and network with anyone you know who works for the company or for a related company.

## To Do List:



- Research the companies you are applying for
- Develop skill statements to show employers you meet their qualifications
- Construct an interview commercial
- Prepare examples to answer common interview questions
- Participate in a mock interview
- Thank the employer for the interview, and always send a formal thank you note
- Use the worksheets included at the end of the section



## Develop Skill Statements

Once you have identified your transferable skills, you can develop them into skill statements that you can use in an interview to show employers that you meet the qualifications of the job.

## Construct Your Own Interview Commercial

Interviewers will likely ask you to “tell me about yourself.” An interview commercial is a brief professional summary of your experience, skills and strengths that explains why you are a good fit. Do not give personal information, such as number of children, marital status and political or religious affiliation.

*Step 1:* Briefly describe any experience that is related to the position you are interviewing for.

*Step 2:* Identify the skills, qualities and accomplishments you have to offer the employer.

*Step 3:* Close with the greatest strength you bring to the employer and why you are a good fit for the company.

Write a paragraph using the information from Steps 1, 2 and 3. Read through each sentence and add relevant detail. Edit your 30–60 second commercial and say it out loud until it sounds conversational and natural. You want to appear confident, enthusiastic and professional.

**An interview commercial is a professional summary of your experience and skills.**

### Example of an Interview Commercial:

“I have over three years of experience as a customer service and sales representative at Atlas Communications. My goal was to provide outstanding service by greeting each customer with a big smile, to listen with my full attention and to thank each customer by name. I was proud to receive ‘Employee of the Quarter’ five times for providing excellent customer service and exceeding sales goals. I will bring my passion for excellent customer service and my ability to exceed sales benchmarks to this position.”



Download the Interview Commercial template at [jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/60second.pdf](https://jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/60second.pdf)

## Answer Questions Using Examples

### **SITUATION—ACTION—RESULT (SAR)**

The SAR technique answers behavior-based questions and provides examples that show your skills and experience. These examples can be used for different positions as long as they address the question the employer is asking.

**The S stands for SITUATION.** Describe a specific event or situation. Give enough detail so that the interviewer can easily understand. Use an example from a previous job, a volunteer experience or another relevant event.

**The A stands for ACTION.** Describe what you did to address the problems and challenges of the situation. Keep the focus on you.

**The R stands for RESULT.** Describe the result of your actions. What happened? How did it end? What did you accomplish? How did it benefit the company? Always end with positive results.

Example:

**Question:** Tell us about a time you dealt with an angry customer.

**Situation:** “When I was working for Voltage as a customer support specialist, I got a call from a very frustrated customer. She had already called a couple of people but had been passed from person to person without any resolution.”

**Action:** “I walked her through resetting and reprogramming her device. When we got to a technically difficult part of the process, I patiently coached her through it and stayed on the line until she could complete the process successfully.”

**Result:** “After much persistence and patience, I solved her problem. When we finished, she thanked me for being willing to go the extra mile to help her. She also sent an email to my supervisor, outlining what I had done. I was then recognized on the company website for the excellent customer service I provided. As a result of my actions, the company retained a customer that could have switched to a different cell phone service provider.”

## Participate in a Mock Interview

As the job seeker, put yourself in the shoes of an employer. How would he or she respond to your answers, body language, preparation, knowledge of the company and position during an interview? Ask others to help you prepare for interviewing by putting you through a mock interview and then providing feedback. Encourage them to be honest and constructive because it will help you improve and be better prepared. Remember that the goals of the mock interview are to recognize strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for improvement.

## Be Prepared

Here are some basic tips for helping you prepare for an interview. Following them will help you relax and give a better performance.

- The day before your interview, gather all the information and documents you may need. Bring extra copies of your resumé, a typed list of references and letters of recommendation. You may also want to bring school transcripts, licenses and certifications. If you have them, work samples are also powerful tools (e.g., designs, drawings, writings). Finally, bring a pen and pad of paper for taking notes.
- Match your qualifications to the requirements of the job and be ready to discuss.
- Get a good night’s sleep the night before.
- Map out the location ahead of time and get directions before you leave.
- Give yourself enough time to find the interview site and arrive 15 minutes early.
- Turn off your phone.
- Don’t chew gum.
- Always come to the interview alone.
- Arrange for child care and transportation ahead of time so you can be on time and relaxed during the interview.
- Find out who called you to schedule the interview. Ask who you will be interviewing with and what he



Write your own SAR examples using the template at [jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/writingsar.pdf](https://jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/writingsar.pdf)

or she does. When you get to the interview, the person at the front desk may not be aware of your interview. It helps if you can relay whom you spoke with and why you are there.

- Be polite and professional to office staff while you are waiting for your interview.
- When you walk into the interview, smile and shake hands with each interviewer. Remember their names or write them down to refer to during the interview and to address thank you notes after the interview.
- Be yourself.
- Take your time in responding and make sure your answers are positive. Answer the entire question, and if you are unsure about a question, ask for clarification.
- Do not ask questions about pay, benefits and vacation. Save that for when you are offered the job. Also, do not discuss illegal or discriminatory subjects, such as race, religion, age, national origin or gender.
- Close the interview in a friendly, positive manner. Thank the interviewers and let them know if you want the job. Summarize your qualifications and let them know why you would be a good fit.



## Interviewing Tips

- Dress appropriately for the position — one step above what you would wear on the job
- Shake hands and offer your resumé to each interviewer
- Maintain good eye contact
- Be aware of distracting behaviors like pen clicking and fidgeting with objects
- Use the interviewers' names
- Research the company and prepare questions
- Be yourself; share positive, honest and skill-based answers
- Practice role-playing in person and on the phone

# Interviewing and Following Up

## Be Mindful of Your Body Language

Your body language in an interview speaks volumes. Dr. Linda Martin, coordinator of the Communication Program at Louisiana Tech University, says, “People believe what they see over what they hear. Facial expressions and gestures account for 50 percent of meaning.” Your body language sends a big message.

You communicate your professionalism verbally and nonverbally.

- When you sit, maintain good posture with your head up and your back straight. Do not slouch; this can make you look sloppy and uninterested.
- Do not sit too stiffly; this can make you look nervous or uptight.
- Do not lean towards the door; this can make it look like you are anxious for the interview to end.
- Do not sit with your arms folded across your chest; this can make it look like you are closed and unfriendly.
- Maintain good eye contact and lean in slightly to show interest.
- Make eye contact when you shake hands. If more than one person is interviewing you, make eye contact with everyone the same as you would during a group conversation.
- Do not stare blankly. It can be uncomfortable for those you are staring at. Do not maintain eye contact for longer than is natural or comfortable. Do not look down; it shows low self-esteem.
- Keep an interested expression that is natural and relaxed. Nod and smile when it is appropriate.
- Be aware of what you are doing with your hands. The best place to put your hands is

loosely clasped on the table in front of you or in your lap.

- Do not rock in your chair, drum your fingers, play with your hair, bite your lip or rub or touch your nose. Be aware of what you do when you are nervous and keep it in check.
- Don't give handshakes that are too soft or too strong. Either can send a negative message about you.

People believe what they see over what they hear. Facial expressions and gestures are as important as what you are saying.



## Professional Appearance

The way you present yourself, including dress, grooming and behavior, are important to employers whether you are an applicant or an employee. As an employee, you would represent the company. Your appearance reflects your attitude toward your job and affects your ability to grow within the company. As part of your preparation for the interview, find out the company dress code and meet that standard. Try your outfit on the day before wearing it. Pay attention to your personal hygiene.

- Make sure clothing is clean and ironed
- Limit jewelry
- Maintain a neat and professional hairstyle
- Be aware of strong smells, such as cigarette smoke, food and perfume
- Make sure nails are clean and manicured
- Brush and floss your teeth
- Cover tattoos
- Use makeup sparingly
- Make sure facial hair is well groomed

- Dress shirt or polo
- Slacks or dress pants
- Blazer or business jacket
  - Shirt and tie
- All clothing clean, pressed and in good repair

It is better to over dress than to under dress. Smile, and make a good impression.

- Knee length skirt or dress
- Dress or business shoes



## Be Prepared to Answer Common Interview Questions

**T**he interview is like a sales meeting where you are both the salesperson and the product. The fundamental question in every interview, whether spoken or not, is “Why should I hire you?”

Generally, basic interview questions will ask for your qualifications, experience, skills and motivation. Be prepared for situational or behavioral-based questions that require specific examples. You might be asked open-ended questions, such as “Tell me about yourself?” “Tell me what you know about our company?” or “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”

These are broad, general questions that allow you freedom to answer in great detail. Sell yourself to the employer using your 30–60 second commercial.

### Common Questions Asked in an Interview:

#### 1. What is your greatest strength?

Discuss attributes that qualify you for the job. Share a SAR (Situation–Action–Result) example.

*“When I commit to a deadline, I do whatever it takes to deliver. For example, I was having difficulty getting data I needed for a report, but through persistence, excellent communications skills and time management I was able to get the data and complete the report on time.”*

#### 2. What is your greatest weakness?

Avoid repeating the word “weakness.” Describe a weakness that you have professionally, not personally, and focus on what you are doing to improve.

*“I found recently that there were aspects of Excel that I didn’t feel comfortable using. I have been working on that by taking an advanced course in Excel and by taking on projects where I can use my newly gained knowledge.”*

#### 3. What did you like least about your last employer or supervisor?

Stay positive and don’t bash your previous employer.

*“My last supervisor and I had different ideas about who to include on projects. However, when I focused on the expertise she brought to other aspects of project management, I began to appreciate her much more. It made it easier for me to work with her on projects.”*

#### 4. Why did you leave your last job?

This is not an opportunity to badmouth your former boss or company. Be upfront but positive.

*“I would like to be upfront. I found myself looking for more challenges. I am a dedicated employee and didn’t want my lack of satisfaction to impact my work for the employer.”*

#### 5. Explain the gaps in your work history.

Be honest and prepared with an answer about what you have been doing. Let the interviewer know that you have been actively engaged in something, whether community service or obtaining more education.

*“I have been volunteering for a literacy program at an elementary school where I have learned skills in training, preparation and mentoring.”*

Learn to create your SAR with the template at [jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/writingsar.pdf](https://jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/writingsar.pdf)



### **6. Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Connect your answer to the job you're applying for.

*"My long-term goals involve growing with a company where I can learn and produce quality home products for its customers."*

### **7. What do you know about this company?**

Use your research to answer this question.

### **8. Why do you want this job?**

This is another opportunity to talk about what you can do for the company.

*"Your company is one of the top in its field. You have several new products that you are ready to market and release soon, and I want to be a part of helping your company be successful."*

### **9. What do you think is reasonable pay for this position?**

This is another place to show you have done your homework.

*"Based on my research, people in this position with my level of expertise earn between \$\_\_\_\_\_ and \$\_\_\_\_\_. I would be willing to negotiate in that range."*

## Questions to Ask in an Interview

An interview is a two-way street. Usually the employer will ask you if you have any questions for them at the end of the interview. Be ready with questions that demonstrate your knowledge of the company. For example, "I read on the company website that employees have recently done presentations at XX conference. Is that a typical opportunity for the job for which I am interviewing?" *Remember: Don't ask about pay, benefits or retirement.* Sample questions might include:

- Why was this position created?
- What are the primary duties during the first six months?
- What is the most urgent or challenging part of the job?
- What are the expectations of the supervisor?
- What is your company's management style?
- Can you tell me about your performance appraisal system?
- When will you be making your decision?
- How would you describe the culture of this company?

## Protect Yourself Against Discrimination

The law does not limit the employer's right to seek full information about your work experience or other qualifications. There may be some unusual questions on the application form or in a job interview. Some employers may ask questions such as "What are your child care arrangements?" or "Do you own a car?" In most cases the employer just wants to make sure that you will be able to work. In responding to these questions, it may be best to simply say, "arrangements have been made."

However, the law does restrict employers from asking questions about race, religion, disabilities or other subjects that could lead to discrimination. The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate pre-employment inquiries.

### Age

*Appropriate:* "Are you over 18 years of age?" "If hired, can you submit a work permit if under 18?" "If hired, can you provide proof that your age meets legal requirements?"

*Inappropriate:* Questions that tend to identify applicants as 40–64 years old.

### Birthplace

*Appropriate:* "After employment, can you submit a birth certificate or other proof of U.S. citizenship or age?"

*Inappropriate:* Questions about an applicant's birthplace or the birthplace of the applicant's spouse or relatives or a requirement that the applicant submit a birth certificate.

### Character

*Appropriate:* "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?"

*Inappropriate:* "Have you ever been arrested?"

### Citizenship

*Appropriate:* "If you are not a U.S. citizen, do you have the legal right to remain permanently in the U.S.?" or a statement that if hired, the applicant may be required to submit proof of citizenship.

*Inappropriate:* Questions about whether an applicant, spouse or parents are naturalized or native-born U.S. citizens or date when applicant or spouse or parents acquired U.S. citizenship.

### Education

*Appropriate:* Applicant's academic, vocational or professional education and schools attended.

*Inappropriate:* Date last attended high school.

### National Origin or Ancestry

*Inappropriate:* Applicant's nationality or ancestry, length of residency in the U.S., nationality of applicant's parents or spouse, or "What is your native language?"

### Photograph

*Appropriate:* Statement that photograph may be required after employment.

*Inappropriate:* Requirement or request for any photograph before employment.

### Physical Conditions

*Appropriate:* "Do you have any physical limitations that may limit your ability to perform this job?" or a statement that the job offer may be made contingent on passing a physical exam.

*Inappropriate:* "Do you have any physical disabilities?" or questions about general medical conditions or receipt of Worker's Compensation.

### Race or Color

*Inappropriate:* Any questions regarding complexion or skin color.

### Relatives

*Appropriate:* Names of relatives already employed by the company or names and addresses of parent or guardian if applicant is a minor.

*Inappropriate:* Marital status or number of dependents, names and addresses of relatives of adult applicant, or "With whom do you reside?"

### Religion

*Inappropriate:* Questions about applicant's religious affiliation or religious holidays observed or "Do you attend religious services?"



## Be Proactive After the Interview

What you do after the interview can also have an impact on how the employer views you and your chances for being hired. Here are some tips on what to do after the interview:

- Always thank the interviewer.
- If you haven't heard anything from the employer in a week, make a follow-up call to find out if a decision has been made and to reconfirm your interest in the job.
- Be prepared to do a second interview. Many employers will interview top candidates more than once.
- Make the interview a learning experience. You may not be hired, but each interview you have will teach you something new that can help you with your next interview. Ask yourself these questions:
  - ♦ What points did I make that seemed to interest the employer?
  - ♦ Did I present my qualifications well? Did I overlook qualifications that were important for the job?
  - ♦ Did I learn all I needed to know about the job?
  - ♦ Did I ask questions about the job?
  - ♦ Did I talk too much? Too little?
  - ♦ Was I too tense? Too relaxed?
  - ♦ Was I too assertive? Not assertive enough?
  - ♦ Was I dressed appropriately?
- Make a list of specific ways you can improve your next interview. Remember, practice makes perfect. The more you interview, the better you will get.
- Send the employer a follow-up thank you letter.

If you do not get the position, continue to follow up on that position or others that might become available. If you were interviewed, it means you qualified and have high potential. Learn from this experience to do better next time.



### Ten Skills Employers Seek From Forbes.com

1. Ability to work in a team
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
3. Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work
4. Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell and influence others



## Sample Thank You Letter

Date:

Dear Ms. Stanford:

It was very enjoyable to speak with you about the assistant account executive position with Valley Programming. The job, as you presented it, seems to be a very good match for my skills and interests. The creative approach to account management that you described confirmed my desire to work with you.

In addition to my enthusiasm, I will bring strong writing skills, assertiveness and the ability to encourage others to work cooperatively with the department. Also, my research background will help me to work with researchers on staff.

I neglected to mention that I worked for two summers as a temporary office worker. This experience helped me to develop strong skills in programs such as Word, PowerPoint and Excel.

I appreciate the time you took to interview me. I am very interested in working for you and look forward to hearing from you about this position.

Sincerely,

Joan Anderson

### Write a Strong Thank You Letter

After the interview, follow up with the employer. Write a thank you note or letter to each person who participated. Thank the interviewers for their time, restate your interest and qualifications and remind them of your intent to follow up. Let them know you are looking forward to hearing from them in the near future. Hand-deliver your follow-up letter. If you send one in the mail, it may arrive after the employer has decided whom to hire. Email is appropriate if the time frame is limited.

Download a thank you letter template at [jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/thankyou\\_wre.pdf](https://jobs.utah.gov/jobseeker/oltools/thankyou_wre.pdf)



## Mock Interview Evaluation and Feedback

As the job seeker, put yourself in the shoes of an employer. How would he or she respond to your answers, body language, preparation and knowledge of the company and position during an interview? Use the form below as you prepare and practice your interview skills. Give the form to others so they can score each category. Encourage them to provide honest feedback to help you improve. The goals of the mock interview are to (1) recognize strengths and weaknesses and (2) set goals for improvement.

**Personal Appearance** — Rate the applicant on the criteria below on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=poor and 5=excellent).

Criteria	Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Dressed appropriately for the interview					
2. Organized: had all of the necessary materials on hand in a professional, well-organized format					
3. Presented him or herself professionally (no gum, drinks, food, cell phone, etc.)					
COMMENTS					

**Body Language** — Rate the applicant on the criteria below on a scale of 1 to 5.

Criteria	Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Handshake					
2. Eye contact					
3. Voice level					
4. Facial expressions					
5. Posture and body position					
6. Self-confidence and comfort level					
7. Control of nervous habits					
COMMENTS					

**Quality of Response to Questions** — Rate the applicant on the criteria below on a scale of 1 to 5.

Criteria	Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Effectively shared examples using the SAR technique					
2. Presented an effective 60-second commercial					
3. Responded to questions appropriately					
4. Effectively described strengths, skills and abilities					
5. Came prepared with questions for the employer					
6. Used power words					
COMMENTS					

### Overall Presentation

Provide any additional feedback on your impression of the interview:

Download this form at [jobs.utah.gov/opencms/jobseeker/oltools/mock.pdf](https://jobs.utah.gov/opencms/jobseeker/oltools/mock.pdf)