

STEP 3: PREPARE FOR QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE ASKED DURING THE INTERVIEW

While most candidates dread having to answer questions during the interview, it's **your greatest opportunity to prove that you are the best person for the job!** The key is to give better answers than anyone else. To do this, you must:

- (1) **Anticipate likely questions;**
- (2) **Develop excellent answers;**
- (3) **Practice! Practice! Practice!**

ANTICIPATE LIKELY QUESTIONS

By studying the Job Description, you should have a fair idea of the kinds of questions you will be asked. Some questions will be generic in nature and fairly standard for most interviews, while others will be specifically related to the position you hope to fill.

Put yourself in the hiring person's shoes... what would **you** want to know about potential candidates? What kinds of questions would you ask to determine the best person for the job? Most questions will relate either to your ability to do the job or to the type of employee you will be.

If you do an Internet search for the phrase "job interview questions and answers," you'll find many sites that offer free advice on the most common questions and the best ways to answer them. Do this, but don't rely totally on this research.

Interview questions can only be predicted to a certain extent. **There are endless variations and no way to know every question in advance.** I was asked this question during an interview for a Community Affairs Representative position: "If you're

talking to a resident about the need to put a pipeline through her back yard and she asks that you first locate, dig up, and relocate the remains of her dead pet duck, how would you respond?" Believe me, you'll never find **that** question among the samples available online!

But that doesn't matter. Because **you know there will be unexpected questions**, you will not freeze up or freak out when they pop up, as some applicants will. Instead, you will **turn them into opportunities to shine even more brightly**.

No one knows you better than you. Memorize a list of your best assets, your best selling points. Then use every opportunity and question to mention these. For instance, in the above example, I used that strange question to promote my listening and communication skills by answering like this: "I would listen carefully to her concerns, show her that I understood and was sympathetic, and then explain what we could – or could not – do for her based on the existing company policy for that type of situation."

Also, realize that sometimes what you say isn't as important as how you say it. Prepare to be confident and enthusiastic. A positive attitude and genuine smile can get you through the toughest questions.

*“Flaming enthusiasm,
backed up by horse sense and persistence,
is the quality that most frequently makes for success.”*

(Dale Carnegie)

DEVELOP EXCELLENT ANSWERS

A good technique is to write out your answers to the questions you anticipate. Be sure to emphasize qualities that are mentioned in the Job Description, as well as your best selling points.

Just as you did on your resume (I hope!), **include specifics** in your answers; do not speak in generalities. For example, don't just say, "I increased productivity." Instead, say "I increased staff meeting productivity by 25% in one year by implementing a new video teleconferencing system that allowed meeting participation by employees from remote locations."

Whenever possible, answer questions by telling stories versus just stating facts. Facts tell, but stories sell. Remember, you are selling yourself!

Work the following qualities, valued by all employers, into your answers. Your goal with each answer is to SELL yourself and promote the benefits of hiring you. Edit your answers to make them powerful and concise, and emphasize these traits:

- Communication skills
- Honesty/integrity
- Teamwork skills
- Decision-making skills
- Self-motivation
- Interpersonal skills
- A strong work ethic
- Organization/project management skills

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Practice your polished answers out loud, over and over, until you know them inside and out. Don't worry about memorizing every word. The interviewer won't know if you left anything out. Just be sure to remember the most important points, and you'll do fine.

If you can have someone help you do a "mock interview," that would be a great way to practice. Or even better, use a video camera. In addition to noting which answers you

need to work on, a video (or friend) can help you to determine if your body language needs improving, as well. (I'll touch more on that later.)