



# The interview

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*Quality In Everything We Do*

# Go for it!

A job interview is the first big step in your career. You're not just looking for a job – you're launching yourself on a lifelong journey. With so much at stake, the interview process can be stressful. But it doesn't have to be.

If you go in adequately prepared, you'll be able to communicate your skills, achievements, motivations, potential and career objectives to the interviewer in a confident, clear and articulate manner.

We've prepared this guide to help. At Ernst & Young, we're always striving to help people achieve their potential. The techniques we discuss will help you do that. By considering your strengths and achievements in light of the criteria many employers use to evaluate candidates, you can prepare for interviews and distinguish yourself from others. By applying these techniques, we hope you'll find your interview experience interesting, enjoyable and successful.

We wish you the best. Go for it!



# Preparation

The interview should be a two-way dialogue between you and the interviewer. A company's recruiting brochure and your resumé provide important background information, but the interview allows both you and the employer to dig deeper.

The interviewer will try to determine your skills, abilities and personal attributes, and how they relate to the job. You should be prepared to demonstrate your qualifications for the position. A well-prepared presentation – supported by facts and examples – can create a very favourable impression.

## Structure and content

Most interviews follow the same basic structure, regardless of who conducts them. Depending on the type of interview being conducted, however, the time may vary from 25 to 60 minutes.

At Ernst & Young, for example, a full interview will typically consist of two back-to-back, half-hour interviews, each with a different Ernst & Young representative.

### Phase I: Introduction

*2-3 minutes*

The introduction helps establish a rapport. The interviewer wants you to be relaxed so that you'll talk freely. After the personal introductions, the interviewer will often begin by outlining what will take place during the interview.

### Phase II: Employer questions

*20-35 minutes*

The evaluation process begins in Phase II. The interviewer will be evaluating your skills, abilities and other qualities that satisfy the requirements of the position.

Interviewers' styles will vary, and so will their questions and interviewing experience. The types of interviews they conduct may also vary.

## Traditional interviewing

One type of interview is the traditional interview, which focuses on your resumé and questions that get you to evaluate yourself (for example, "What are your strengths?"). You can easily anticipate traditional interview questions and prepare appropriate responses.

While an interview conducted using the traditional approach may "feel good" because you can anticipate questions and even prepare and rehearse your answers, the interview typically will not provide much meaningful information about your skills.

## Behavioural interviewing

Another type of interview that many employers favour is the behavioural interview. Behavioural interviewing differs from the traditional approach primarily in its emphasis on bringing out "real life" examples. By providing relevant examples or stories of what you have done in specific situations in the past, you'll demonstrate that you possess specific competencies – motivation or good communication skills, for example – that are essential for success in a given position.

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In evaluating your interpersonal skills, the interviewer may want to know how you dealt with a particularly challenging assignment or frustrating person. The interviewer will keep asking probing questions to get a detailed understanding of the situation, your actions and the result.

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Behavioural interviewing is based on the premise that past behaviour is a good predictor of future behaviour. By evaluating examples of your past behaviour, interviewers can determine whether or not you possess the particular qualities necessary for success on the job. This way, the interviewer doesn't have to rely on gut feelings or intuition.

Behavioural interviewing tries to determine whether you have the requisite skills and abilities by asking questions about how you've handled success, routine and stressful tasks, working on teams, setting priorities and so on.

For example, instead of asking traditional questions that produce basic, superficial answers – “Do you work well under pressure?” for example – the interviewer will explore real instances in which you've experienced pressure by saying something like “Describe for me the most high-pressure situation you've dealt with in the past six months.” Your response will help the interviewer understand the pressure you experienced, how you handled it, the result and what you learned. This will give the interviewer a better indication of your capacity to work in a stressful environment.

Behavioural interviewing looks for answers that use the past tense: “I did this, then this happened. I responded by doing this, and as a result....”

For example, an interviewer interested in whether you possess good project management skills might ask, “Give me an example of a situation where you had to prioritize competing deadlines.” A good response might be one that demonstrates how you delegated work, established priorities and negotiated project expectations.

To prepare for a behavioural interview, you should examine significant roles and responsibilities you've held. Be prepared to provide interviewers with examples of situations that illustrate your abilities or personal attributes. For example, if you've been part of a team, attributes like sensitivity, coaching, teamwork, initiative, consensus-building, good communication and leadership may have been integral to the team's success. If you can recount specific experiences in enough detail to highlight some of these attributes, you'll be well on your way to a successful interview.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate all of an interviewer's questions. By recalling your own experience, though, you will have an added advantage in most interviewing situations.

Understanding and preparing for the behavioural interview will better prepare you for any type of interview.

### Phase III: Evaluation

During the evaluation process, the interviewer will likely concentrate on the competencies and qualities that will satisfy the requirements of the position. These may include the following:

- ▶ Technical skills and abilities
- ▶ Client-service focus
- ▶ Leadership
- ▶ Flexibility
- ▶ Teamwork
- ▶ Motivation and initiative
- ▶ Communication skills
- ▶ Intellectual competence

In addition, employer questions will focus on such topics as education, relevant experience and career goals.

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By telling detailed stories as examples, you'll become more memorable to the interviewer.

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### Phase IV: Your questions

*5-6 minutes*

This phase of the interview process is just as important as your ability to answer the employer's questions. Each question you ask should seek important information necessary for you to make your decision.

Remember – the interviewer's evaluation of you continues throughout the interview, so be prepared to do more than just "ask questions." Well-thought-out questions will send the employer the message that you're prepared and interested in information beyond basic recruiting literature.

At this stage, the most important questions you can ask will focus on the responsibilities of the position, career path, advancement, and further information about the organization that will help you evaluate it from the viewpoint of a prospective employee.

A good rule of thumb is to enquire about areas of real interest to you.

### Phase V: Close

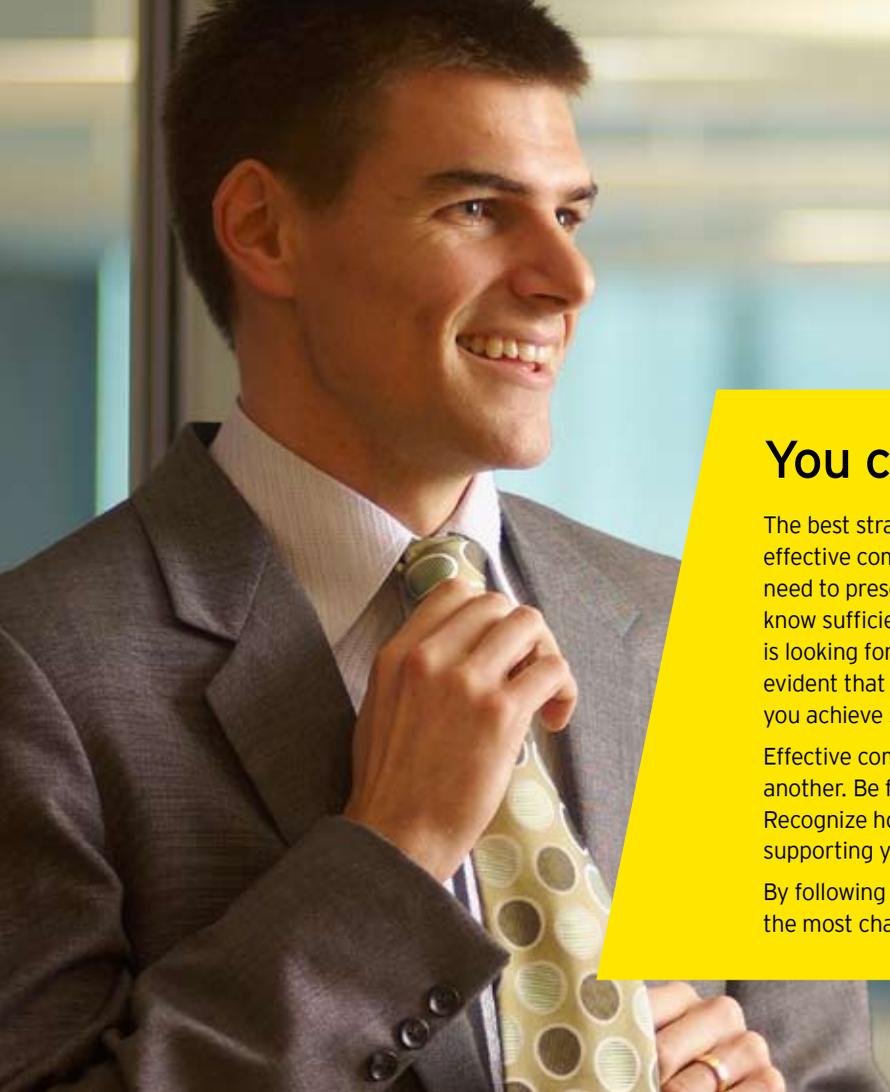
*2-3 minutes*

The last phase in the process is the "close." Typically, at this point, the employer will ask whether you have any final questions, review what will happen next and end the interview. This can be a good opportunity to emphasize your interest in the position or make a final statement about your qualifications.

### Phase VI: Follow-up

If you're successful in your interview, you may be offered the job, or you could be called back for more interviewing. At Ernst & Young, a successful interview will result in an offer of employment and an invitation to visit the office.

So it's important to be prepared after your interview is complete. Taking notes immediately will give you a good start. Include a summary of major points discussed during the interview and points for follow-up during your decision-making process.



## You can do it

The best strategy for interviewing success includes advance preparation and effective communication. Prior to the interview, analyze what information you'll need to present about yourself, prepare a clear statement of your career goals, know sufficient facts about the employer, and understand the qualities the employer is looking for. Being well prepared will impress the interviewer because it will be evident that you've spent time thinking about how your accomplishments will help you achieve success in the future.

Effective communication is more than simply responding to one question after another. Be familiar with the type of interviewing style that's used in the interview. Recognize how the interviewer's questions interrelate, and the importance of supporting your qualifications with facts and examples about yourself.

By following these strategies, you should be well prepared for all interviews – even the most challenging. Good luck!

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