

INTERVIEW PREP GUIDE

BY RECRUITING SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (WWW.RSIJOBS.COM)



The average person has roughly 10 jobs in their lifetime, which means the total number of times you interview in your life is likely relatively low. **RSI has been fortunate enough to have helped over 5,000 professionals make job changes over the past 50 years.** We adapt our interviewing guide annually to stay abreast of new interviewing techniques, questions, and thoughts based on feedback from our hiring managers. Hopefully, this guide is helpful to you and your interviewing journey! Please feel free to share it with others on their career-advancing journey.

Interviewing is an art! Even the best professional/communicator or suave salesperson will benefit from interview preparation in advance. It can help you negotiate a better salary, ensure the right fit/culture, and make the experience more enjoyable with some preparation in advance.

Note: All of our clients conduct **Background Checks & Drug Tests** prior to employment. If you feel you cannot pass either of these tests, please discuss it with us directly. Many organizations have different policies (for example, even Marijuana-Legal States often do not employ Marijuana positive test results). It varies per client, so we can confidentially discuss this with you at any time!

As always, please call 513-600-6667 (RSI HQ) or your RSI Recruiter to do some 1-1 Interview Prep Practice together. You can also use ChatGPT to run some interview scenarios with you!

Step 1:

You're already doing it. **Prepare!** Your work history alone will not make you a good interviewee. Interviewing takes practice, preparation, and time dedicated to thinking about the role, what you could bring to the company, and finding out if they are the right organization for you. It won't take a lot of work (overpreparing is a thing), but just read this document and think of some examples in advance.

Step 2:

Online visibility is important. One of the first things our hiring managers, and recruiters, do before conducting a phone or in person interview, is **review your online presence**. If you aren't present online, that is okay. If you are, make sure you have done the following:

- Professional picture on your LinkedIN Profile, framed above the chest, attire professional. Doesn't have to be a professional headshot, but just make it look nice. This goes a long way. Our clients often comment to us on the professional or unprofessional nature of a photo online. Add a nice Summary, it's okay if it's an exact replication of your resume.
- Check for misspellings on your LinkedIN profile, so many people have them! Please check your Managers for Mangers etc. Spell check doesn't catch it all. **Also, on your resume – Spell check does not catch CAPITALIZED words.** Go back and read those carefully. Once you have stared at your resume for so long, it's easy to skim over mistakes. Try reading it paragraph by paragraph from the bottom up. This reverse review will catch mistakes you didn't see otherwise. Also make sure your LI profile **MATCHES** your resume.

Step 3:

Research the company. Don't go over the top, but at least understand basics (private/public – look at their stock history), customer base, rough revenues/size, products, markets, etc. Read a few news articles. Browse LinkedIn Recruiter and look at profiles. Just have a good grasp of it all if your recruiting firm is not doing their due diligence for you! (And don't hire recruiters to help you staff your teams that aren't adding this value too!). Be prepared to answer, ***“Why do you want to work for us?”*** Your answer can be as simple as, “I've been following news on your company and seems like you're in a growth phase. How has business been this year for you?” See more on this in Step 4.

Step 4:

Be prepared to answer tricky questions and simple questions concisely. Read the following questions and think through your answer or even type it out. You will be surprised as to how helpful it will be to have thought these through even ONCE.

Prepare some STAR Examples. This is an interviewing technique that will make your interviewing answers very organized, complete, and satisfying for your interviewer. STAR stands for “Situation, Task, Action, Results”.

For example, a hiring manager asks you, “Give me an example of a challenging situation you encountered at work and how you fixed it.”

- You provide a **Situation**: We had a product that was developed with flaws!
- You provide a **Task**: How can we produce this without taking a large financial hit?
- You provide an **Action**: I sat with the Design team to discuss the flaws, potential solutions, and see what was possible. I reorganized the teams so that we had a dedicated group focusing on resolving this issue and set a goal to redesign the product. I worked cross functionally with Quality to ensure mistakes were not made again.
- You provide the **Results**: A minor change saved 20% cost to reproduce the product and the company was saved.

See how nice and neat those examples are? It seems basic but you want to have that checkbox in your mind of S, T, A, R so you don't ramble or get of track. You don't need a lot of info, but you need it structured in a way where the interviewer understands all the steps taken & tout the results. **After you give that clear, concise STAR example ask, “Did that answer your question or would you like another example?”**

Prepare to answer the following questions:

1. Tell me about yourself. Since this is often an opening question (Ice Breaker) in an interview, be extra careful that you don't ramble on about things not relevant to the company/job. **Keep your answer to two or three minutes at most.** Cover four topics: early years, education, work history, and recent career experience. Emphasize this last subject. Remember that this is likely to be a warm-up question. Don't waste your best points on it. I believe it's best to finish your 1-2 minute summary with “What would you like to know more about specifically?” We've had numerous clients complain that this opening question resulted in a 15 min lengthy monologue by the interviewee, and the hiring manager was mentally ruling them out before the rest of the interview was conducted. Let this answer be simple.

2. What do you know about our organization? You should be able to discuss products or services, revenues, reputation, image, goals, problems, history. But don't act as if you know everything about the place. Let your answer show that you have taken the time to do some research, but don't overwhelm the interviewer and make it clear that you wish to learn more. You might start your answer in this manner: "In my job search, I've investigated a number of companies. Yours is one of the few that interests me, for these reasons..." Or finish it with, "I'd love to hear more directly from you about the company, culture, and people that are successful here."

Give your answer a positive tone. Don't say, "Well, everyone tells me that you're in all sorts of trouble, and that's why I'm here", even if that is why you're there.....

3. Why do you want to work for us? The blandest answer you can give is "Because I like people." Here, and throughout the interview, a good answer comes from having done your homework so that you can speak in terms of the company's needs. You might say that your research has shown that the company is doing things you would like to be involved with, and that it's doing them in ways that greatly interest you. For example, if the organization is known for strong management, your answer should mention that fact and show that you would like to be a part of that team. If the company places a great deal of emphasis on research and development, emphasize the fact that you want to create new things and that you know this is a place in which such activity is encouraged. If the organization stresses financial controls, your answer should mention a reverence for numbers. **Touch on a few key points but also end with something like, "I'd love to hear more about the culture/teams/products to see if this is a great match for my career goals too."**

4. What accomplishments are you proud of?

Here you have every right, and perhaps an obligation, to toot your own horn and be slightly egotistical. We have one client in particular that looks for Engineers to specifically say, "I invented this, I invented that." Engineers by nature are often humble and will say, "Our team did this, our team did that." There is a time and place for both team recognition and personal recognition. If you can tout both, do!

Talk about your record of getting things done, and mention specifics from your resume or list of career accomplishments. Say that your skills and interests, combined with this history of getting results, make you valuable. Mention your ability to set priorities, identify problems, and use your experience and energy to solve them.

5. What do you find most attractive about this position? What seems least attractive about it? List three or four attractive factors of the job, and mention a single, minor, unattractive item.

6. Why should we hire you? Create your answer by thinking in terms of your ability, your experience, and your energy. (See question 4.)

7. What do you look for in a job? Keep your answer oriented to opportunities at this organization. Talk about your desire to perform and be recognized for your contributions. Make your answer oriented toward opportunity rather than personal security. "Cultural fit" and "place I can grow within" are both great answers. Employers are concerned about how quickly people are making job changes.

8. Please give me your definition of [the position for which you are being interviewed]. Keep your answer brief and task oriented. Think in terms of responsibilities and accountability. Make sure that you really do understand what the position involves before you attempt an answer. If you

are not certain, ask the interviewer; he or she may answer the question for you. I would phrase it like, "It's my understanding that I would be doingxxxxx..... but please correct me if I have misunderstood the role."

9. How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm? Be realistic. Say that, while you would expect to meet pressing demands and pull your own weight from the first day, it might take six months to a year before you could expect to know the organization and its needs well enough to make a major contribution.

10. How long would you stay with us? Say that you are interested in a career with the organization but it's okay to admit that you would have to continue to feel challenged to remain with any organization. Think in terms of, "As long as we both feel achievement-oriented."

11. Your resume suggests that you may be over-qualified or too experienced for this position. What's your opinion? Emphasize your interest in establishing a long-term association with the organization. Reiterate that titles do not mean that much and as long as you are a solid contributor who is respected, you will be satisfied in the role. Naturally if there were opportunities to grow it would be welcomed, but not expected. **Do not interview BEYOND the role you are interviewing for, or you'll get eliminated. If they say – Where do you want to be in 5 years? "Don't say, in your role!"** Even if you're joking. People say this more often than you think, but it's usually not received well.

12. What is your management style? You should know enough about the company's style to know that your management style will complement it. Possible styles include: task oriented ("I'll enjoy problem-solving identifying what's wrong, choosing a solution and implementing it"), results-oriented ("Every management decision I make is determined by how it will affect the bottom line"), or even paternalistic ("I'm committed to taking care of my subordinates and pointing them in the right direction").

A participative style is currently quite popular: an open-door method of managing in which you get things done by motivating people and delegating responsibility. As you consider this question, think about whether your style will let you work happily and effectively within the organization.

There are some great online quizzes that will tell you what your management style is like. If you haven't done any professional training and don't know your style, take these and read them.

Here are some of the popular phrases (Google them to see what fits you!): Autocratic, Visionary, Democratic, Transformational, Coaching, Laissez-Faire, Consultative, Persuasive, Delegative, Participatory.

13. Are you a good manager? Can you give me some examples? Do you feel that you have top managerial potential? Keep your answer achievement and ask-oriented. Rely on examples from your career to buttress your argument. Stress your experience and your energy.

14. What do you look for when you hire people? Think in terms of skills, initiative, and the adaptability to be able to work comfortably and effectively with others. Mention that you like to hire people who appear capable of moving up in the organization.

15. Have you ever had to fire people? What were the reasons, and how did you handle the situation? Admit that the situation was not easy, but say that it worked out well, both for the company and, you think, for the individual. Show that, like anyone else, you don't enjoy unpleasant tasks but that you can resolve them efficiently and -in the case of firing someone- humanely.

16. What do you think is the most difficult thing about being a manager or executive? Mention planning, execution, and cost-control. The most difficult task is to motivate and manage employees to get something planned and completed on time and within the budget.

17. Why are you leaving (did you leave) your present (last) job?

Be brief, to the point, and as honest as you can without hurting yourself. If you were laid off in an across-the-board cutback, say so; otherwise, indicate that the move was your decision, the result of your action. Do not mention personality conflicts. If you do not answer this question correctly right off the bat, HR professionals and hiring managers will dig, dig, dig for more info. So prepare what you're going to say in advance. The "We agreed to disagree" approach may be useful. Remember that your references are likely to be checked, so don't concoct a story for an interview.

We can tell if someone is honestly immediately by how they answer this question. And we can tell if they will interview well also. Make sure your answer is succinct. Practice the reply. Make it a few sentences. **Chances are, the separation was emotional.** If you were laid off, left on your own, company sold, hated your boss, stuck in a dead-end role....doesn't matter – all of these things leave us as humans emotional. **Leave the emotion out of it.** Vent to someone else. Interviewing is not the time or place even if you are having great rapport with the interviewer.

Here are some example of what you may be thinking vs what you should say....

Your phrase: "I hated my boss. We didn't get along at all."

- **Correct phrase:** "I really loved the role, responsibilities and organization. However, my direct boss and I did not see eye to eye on many things, despite trying to have a diplomatic relationship together. We agreed it was time to part ways. I have many other positive references in the organization I am happy to share with you if you would like."

Your phrase: "I was really stuck in a boring, dead-end role."

- **Correct phrase:** "I was ready for more challenge and growth. I vocalized this to management but it was clear I was not going to be given the opportunity to grow as a professional so I started to entertain opportunities outside of this place of employment."

Your phrase: "I was involved in a Reduction in Force."

- **Correct phrase:** This phrase is correct, if it's true. But everyone says they're involved in a RIF, even if they weren't. It's just a phrase too often used. If you were involved in a RIF, you need to add more to this sentence. For example, "I was involved in a RIF along with 20% of the workforce." If they ask you who else was RIF'd other than you, and the answer is no one, change this phrase. Change it to something like, "The business needs changed and due to a proposed reduction in my specific department, my role was eliminated. They did not backfill my position."

If you have great references – tell them that before they even ask. They are just looking to mentally check off the box that you aren't burning bridges wherever you go....

18. What do you think of your boss?

Reference #17 too. Continue to stay as positive as you can. A potential boss is likely to wonder if you might talk about him in similar terms at some point in the future. If there is something that you disagree with, try using the term 'perspective'. We have different 'perspectives' on X. **Do not complain! This may be hard to do. Don't do it.** Also – if you didn't get along with all of your bosses, they're going to be listening for trends. Be cognizant that your job change reasons aren't all for the same reason. And if they are, qualify your roles better to really find a good match!

19. What do you feel this position should pay? What is your desired salary?

Salary is a delicate topic. If you are asked the question during an initial screening interview, you might say that **“You need to know more about the position's responsibilities before you could give a meaningful answer to that question”**. Or you could say, **“I’m confident we can find a salary range that is suitable for both parties if the rest of the role/culture/position makes sense. Salary is not your driving motivation today.”**

Legally many states cannot ask you what your salary is anymore. This allows you to be in the driver’s seat, but you need to be prepared! This doesn’t mean you aren’t allowed to say what you are making. That is still a good way to ensure good financial fit from the beginning. You could say, “I’m making \$_____ now. Like everyone else, I’d like to improve on that figure, but my major interest is with the job itself.”

**Remember that the act of taking a new job does not,
in and of itself, make you worth more money.**

Please don’t ever say, “You can talk to my Recruiter about salary.” It’s not that we don’t want to help. It just looks like a cop-out and is awkward for everyone involved. Just ensure that you are interested in the role and that it’s “Very hard to determine what this role should pay until you’ve gone through the entire discovery process”.

If you can avoid it, don’t give a range (unless phrased as outlined below). If you give a range, the company only hears the lowest number and you are only wishing for the highest number... it never makes sense. If you feel inclined to provide a range, tie it to something other than your wish.

FOR EXAMPLE (if you have to):

Interviewer: "What salary are you seeking?"

You: "I am very flexible and open to a fair offer."

Interviewer: "Do you have a range in mind?"

You: "Currently I'm making \$80,000 today [omit this if you want]. Finding a long term fit is the most important to me. Again, I am very open minded. I have been looking at jobs that pay between \$90,000 - \$100,000, but again that is just what I have been seeing in the marketplace."

Did you see what we did there? You may find out in the discovery process that you have to work nights, weekends, and holidays! You still want the job, but you feel the role should command \$110,000 now. If you propose that at the end, they can’t say – “Well, you told us \$100,000.” You did not. You told them that you were looking at jobs in that range but this job is more demanding and subsequently should pay \$110,000. These are the types of things we help negotiate for you. Some companies negotiate through us, some negotiate directly. So it’s important you help us if possible, and if going directly, help yourself in the long run.

20. How did you hear about this position? Studies have shown that employers shy away from candidates who are posted on the internet job boards or applied to a role. Whether you were a great employee or a poor employee – hiring authorities are getting the idea that active candidates are not as high quality as other talent. If you get asked the question, “How did you get contacted about this role?” the safest answer is to simply say “Networking / LinkedIn / Referral / etc”.

21. Last but not least, here are some of the questions that are noodling around in your Interviewer's mind as they are interviewing you.

- Are you a job hopper? Are you going to last with us for a few years? I just don't have time to rehire again so I really want someone who is going to stick with us for awhile.
- Are you going to quit when things get tough? Sometimes our job can be demanding and I know I need someone who is mentally tough and can juggle a lot of things at once.
- Do you complain about your bosses/work/everything? I cannot have another negative person on staff.
- Have you learned from mistakes in your life? Everyone makes them, but are you learning value from the mistakes you've made? Are you able to say how things could have been done better? (this is what most hiring managers look for in C-Level candidates, emotional intelligence and ability to learn)
- Could this person be my successor? I really need a good backup so I can get that promotion I wanted. (Don't interview beyond your role but show your ability to want to grow/learn)
- This person is great, but I wonder if we can afford them. I better ask them about salary.
- I wonder if their references will check out and support this story they're telling me. (this is why if you say --- "I'm happy to share references with you!" – it checks off a mental box that reassures the hiring manager that you're legit. (PS, you better be legit.)

Step 5:

Come prepared with Questions based on what you learn in your research, or just some generic questions. It's okay to bring them written and refer to them, you don't have to memorize them.

Sample Questions you could Ask in an Interview (in no particular order):

What are some of the objectives you would like to see accomplished in this job?

What is most pressing?

What would you like to have done in the next 3 months?

What are some of the long-term objectives you would like to see completed?

What are some of the more difficult problems one would have to face in this position?

How do you think these could best be handled?

In what ways has this organization been most successful in terms of products and services over the years?

What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?

How is one evaluated in this position?

What accounts for success within the company?

How active will I be in _____ (Design / Management / Support / Sales / etc)?

What is the profile of your most successful person doing this role today

What is the culture like?

What separates your company from its competitors?

Who are your competitors?

What are the day-to-day responsibilities?

Could you explain the organization structure of corporation?

What is the company's policy on seminars, workshops, ongoing training?

Who is performing this role today?

What would you like done differently by the next person who fills this position?

What is the long-term potential of this position?

Step 6:

Alright! At this point you've done a great job giving thorough examples, asking intelligent questions, and laughing the day away with the wonderful people you're interviewing with!! Your cheeks hurt from smiling.

NOW..... **Get ready to close the interviewer:**

- “Manager, can you see any reason why I would NOT be a fit for this position? ... “ (If "Yes"; attempt to overcome this objection)
- What else can I tell you about my qualifications?
- Are there any other questions I can answer for you?
- I'm very interested... what are the next steps from here?

We often get feedback from companies that they are unsure if the interviewee (you) is interested. Think about interviewing like dating. **They want to be liked. You want to be liked. Tell them you're interested!** They will ask you out again if a good match!

Remember – good eye contact, firm but not overly strong handshake, and SMILE! Tell them you liked them & the job at hand, if you did indeed like them!

Despite what our mothers may say, emailed thank-you's are very appropriate for the business world. (You should still hand write them for many things however! But that's a separate Etiquette document). Email thank-yous are quick, and effective. Send them out within 24 hours, or less of your interview.

Step 7:

We're certain that you are doing a Video Interview at some point due to Covid. Watch this!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQwanxQmFnc>

Step 8: Miscellaneous

Dress to impress. Better to be overdressed than underdressed. If you're debating the suit, wear it (unless it's a trendy start up or more industrial type environment). Women: wear close toed heels even if it's summer months. It's more professional and if you're in an industrial environment you won't get a plant tour if you are in open toe or with a heel. (Bring a back-up pair of flats in your car or briefcase if you want and wear the heels!)

Make sure you eat before you go. I have had clients craft 9:00am – 3:00pm interview schedules, where the candidate did not get a lunch break. Rude, yes, but it happens. Eat in advance and bring a snack bar in your portfolio or briefcase just in case.

Follow-up professionally via email or call weekly but no more than that. Companies are slow to move and often your recruiters are waiting on feedback too. If you give your recruiter feedback immediately after your interview, it usually speeds up the hiring process!

--- Good Luck! ---

As Thomas Jefferson said,

“I’m a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.”

We hope you have enjoyed this Interview Prep. We care about our prospects who interview and their success. We also care about our clients and finding the right long term cultural fit. If you feel someone else will benefit from its review, please feel free to forward it along.

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