



Some think of interviews as an interrogation. It should be a meeting of peers... and much more.

To come out number one among five to ten other finalists requires some personal skills and a well thought out presentation.



## 17 Always interview at your very best

Always use these 6 proven rules for interviewing success.

### 1 Find out what's most important to the interviewer

Ask questions that will get interviewers to articulate what's most important. Of course, you'll need to find out what happened to the last person in the job. Ask about his experiences and those of his superiors.

Find out to whom the position reports and how long that person was in the job. Ask... *"What would be the biggest challenge I would face?"* Find out how the interviewer sees the problem, what the expectations are, and what progress has been made. Of course, once you find out what's most important to the firm... you need to tell them that you have what they want.

### 2 Tell stories that make people remember you

In these stories indicate positive things you did to help organizations. The idea is to show how you demonstrated a particular skill or a personal quality.

Develop SOAR stories that cover situations where you can demonstrate the value of fresh thinking as a means to improve productivity or solve problems. Employers need to feel that you are the answer to one of their problems. If you can show them how you met or exceeded the needs in other places, they may conclude that you can do the same for them.

The idea is to create stories that demonstrate the benefits you bring. Remember, your “tickets” alone (degrees, titles, etc.) will not necessarily motivate another employer to hire you. You must use *action words* and *phrases* that add interest beyond your credentials. In the final analysis, employers hire people for what those phrases imply.

### 3 Surface and deal with any objections that arise

Your next key to interviewing is to be able to overcome objections in a smooth and seamless way. With today’s competition, if you stumble, there are too many others the employer can turn to. So, why play this by ear? Here is a simple method for handling objections, the “ARTS method.” The letters stand for the following:

**A** = Acknowledge the objection.

**R** = Redirect the person’s concern.

**T** = Test to be sure you’ve removed the concern.

**S** = Use a story to make your point.

Whenever someone raises an objection, the tension level rises. In step A reduce the tension level.

#### A= Acknowledge the objection

*“I can understand your concern, and I would like to address it for you.”* Or *“You’ve raised an interesting point. It deserves some frank discussion.”* The phrases are not so important—it’s the feeling you impart. You have acted in a reassuring way; it’s clear that you feel secure about your abilities.

#### R = Redirect their concern

Let’s say the interviewer raised the fact that your experience was in a different industry. *“What qualities are you looking for in an ideal candidate that prompted this concern?”*

Now, you can’t change your past, but you can show that you are someone who contributes quickly (e.g., *“When you raise that question, I understand that you want to be sure the person you put in this job is someone who will contribute quickly. Isn’t that it?”*) The interviewer will reaffirm that you are indeed correct. With just a little thought, it is easy to refocus the conversation toward the positive qualities that are really on the interviewer’s mind.

#### T= Use a testing question

The idea is to see if you removed their concern. Here is an example of asking a testing question: *“If I could show that I could contribute quickly, even when learning new information, would that help?”*

After you get a positive response, you can go directly to your answer, or you can introduce one of your key strengths. You might say: *“If I could show you that I work well under pressure, might that ease your concern somewhat?”*

#### S = Use a supporting story to confirm

The final thing is to use a supporting story. Remember, what really counts is the fact that you did not get flustered. If you’ve done it right, interviewers won’t be that concerned about your exact answer. They’ll be thinking, *“This person handled that situation very well.”* Note: An objection is really a sign of interest. If employers were not interested, they would not bother asking you to overcome the objection.

**A good way to overcome objections is to bring them up and minimize them during your presentation.**

## 4 Answer questions seamlessly and with confidence

Remember, the interviewer is assessing... what can you do for me... do you fit in... and do I like you.

If you want to be at your best, be sure to have answers prepared to these common questions.

- *Why did you join your present firm?*
  - *Why are you leaving?*
  - *Why have you stayed so long?*
  - *What's wrong with your present firm?*
  - *Have you managed people before?*
- 
- *What are your capabilities that will help us?*
  - *What major challenges have you faced?*
  - *Have you fired people before?*
  - *What references can you give us?*
  - *Does your employer know you are looking?*
- 
- *Describe a typical day in your job.*
  - *What areas of your job do you enjoy the most?*
  - *Which jobs have you enjoyed the most? Why?*
  - *How well do you handle pressure?*
  - *What do you look for when you hire people?*
- 
- *How does the firm view your performance?*
  - *Which areas of your work have been criticized?*
  - *What do you think of your ex-boss?*
  - *Why haven't you found a job so far?*
  - *Can you fit into an unstructured environment?*
- 
- *Why do you want to work for us?*
  - *What are your greatest accomplishments?*
  - *Describe your management style.*
  - *How effective are you as a motivator?*
  - *What decisions do you delegate?*
- 
- *What types of controls do you use?*
  - *What is your biggest strength? Weakness?*
  - *Would you classify yourself as a leader?*
  - *How do you handle confrontation?*
  - *How often have you had raises?*



- *What do you think you are worth?*
  - *Why aren't you earning more at your age?*
  - *What would you like to be earning in two years?*
  - *What were your highest earnings?*
  - *What are the key reasons for your success?*
- 
- *Who are your closest friends? What do they do?*
  - *Are you confident about addressing a group?*
  - *How would a friend describe you?*
  - *What types of problems do you struggle with?*
  - *Are you active in your community?*
- 
- *Are you interested in sports?*
  - *Have you ever been arrested or convicted?*
  - *How good is your health?*
  - *How do you spend your spare time?*
  - *Your hobbies?*
  - *What was the last book you read?*
- 
- *Have you been refused a bond? Been bankrupt?*
  - *In what areas can you improve yourself?*
  - *Tell me about yourself.*
  - *What is your view of the political climate?*
  - *How strong is your financial situation?*
- 
- *What people do you admire?*
  - *What kind of work environment are you looking for?*
  - *Where else are you interviewing?*
  - *Other offers received?*
- 
- *If you started over, what would you do differently?*
  - *How would others describe your work ethic?*

## Sample answers to common questions

### What is your biggest weakness?

*“Well, I really don’t feel I have any major weaknesses that affect my working ability. At times I have a tendency to be impatient about getting things done.”*

### Why are you leaving?

*“I want to earn more, have added responsibility, and expand my knowledge in my field. These opportunities don’t exist in my present firm.”*

### With no industry experience, could you contribute?

*“I expect to be able to contribute in a short time. Obviously, it will take some time to get my feet wet. However, there are a number of things I have accomplished before, and I may be able to institute some of them once I gain a better understanding of your firm. I’m a quick learner.”* Support your claim with a SOAR story.

### How long would you stay with us?

*“I’m looking for a career. However, I’m a realist. If I don’t do the job, you won’t want me around; and if there is no opportunity, it won’t be right for me.”*

### What’s wrong with your current firm?

*“I don’t feel there is anything wrong with the firm. I have enjoyed working there, and they have some really top people. It’s a good company, but I am ready for some added responsibility and challenge.”*

### What are your short range objectives?

Keep your answer focused on the job for which you are interviewing. It is not in your best interest to pick short

range objectives that the job or company might be unable to provide.

### What are your long range objectives?

In dealing with this question, it is a good idea to remain flexible. A brief answer that refers to moving up the ladder as quickly and as far as your capabilities permit will suffice.

### How good is your health?

Besides saying your health is fine, you should go on to state that you are accustomed to working long hours and are quite capable of keeping up a fast pace. If you have a health problem that the interviewer could find out about, give a truthful answer. However, point out that your condition has had no adverse effect on performance, attendance or ability to give 100%.

### If you started over, what would you do differently?

*“On the whole I would have to say that I am extremely proud of my career achievements and quite happy with my career progression to date.”*

### What do you think of your boss?

If you think your boss is great, it is pretty easy to answer this question. On the other hand, if you really didn’t get along with your boss, then this question becomes challenging. Never discuss the shortcomings of your boss. Doing so will make you sound like a whiner or troublemaker. Instead, comment briefly on some positive aspects of your boss, be they in his personality or her management style... and leave it at that.

**Why haven't you found a job so far?**

Being apologetic or simply saying that it's a tough market in your field will not help you. Depending upon the length of your unemployment, it may be enough to respond that you are not seeking a job, but are selectively looking for the right career opportunity and have not yet found it.

**What was the last book you read, movie you saw, or sporting event you attended?**

Unless the movie or book is controversial, tell the truth. But, it's important that you have read, seen, or attended whatever you claimed, since more detailed questioning may follow.

**What's your major accomplishment in your last job?**

Pick those that seem to line up well with the major elements of the position. For example, if you have accomplishments in both cost and general accounting, and you're interviewing for a general accounting position, you obviously want to bias your answer toward the position for which you are a candidate. The goal is to always show the interviewer that your accomplishments line up with the company needs.

**What interests you most about our position?... the least?**

The response to the former should be an aspect or aspects of the job that benefit the employer, not you. For example, you might cite the challenge of the problems to be solved, or the opportunity to apply your skills to particular challenges. For the second question, you might say, "At this point I have not heard anything about the job that turns me off."

**Why aren't you earning more at your age?**

If you are in a low paying industry, make sure that you point out that you have received performance raises. Also point out that your industry / function is traditionally low paying, which is one of the reasons you are looking for a new job.

When discussing how much you are making, respond in terms of value of the job. For example, "My position has a range that goes from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, and I am well over the midpoint. Because of performance, I'm one of the better paid in the firm."

**What do your subordinates think of you?**

This is an opportunity for you to sell yourself through another person's viewpoint. Offer strengths and attributes that are relevant to your ability to perform well in the position for which you're being considered.

**Why do you want to work for us?**

If this question is asked very early in the interview, you may not really have a good answer. Therefore, give a response instead like this:

"Based on what I learned about your organization from people I know, I did some research and found that you've achieved impressive sales increases for the last six quarters. Given that kind of growth, I felt that my strong background in \_\_\_\_\_ might be valuable to you."

**People decide if they like you in the first 5 minutes. But, then you've got to keep it going!**

## 5 Read the interviewer and adjust your behavior

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to "read" everyone who interviews you... and based on their personality and behavior, know the kind of candidate they prefer?

To influence the person interviewing you, we have found that you will do best if you can match the style of that person. Most people's personality can be gauged on four levels. Where you and your interviewer fit on personality measurements will affect how well you connect with each other. You want to judge where someone sitting on the other side of the table likely fits.

**The "very strong" interviewer.** *The degree to which a person is a VERY STRONG person... reflects their need to be in control... their need to direct and dominate.* Someone who is very strong is often demanding, forceful and competitive.

This person may maintain a cool or closed posture. Many top executives are high on the scale of being "very strong." When they question you, they focus on "what you did"... the actions you took... rather than "why" you took them. They will be looking for someone who is bottom-line in their orientation. They prefer others who are brief, to the point, and decisive like they are. They often make hiring decisions quickly, and prefer those who seem efficient and goal oriented.

**The "highly social" interviewer.** *The degree to which a person is HIGHLY SOCIAL reflects their need to be involved with people and influence them.* Someone who is highly social is often persuasive, enthusiastic and friendly. These people are often animated and express their feelings quite readily. They tend to adopt an open

posture and are warm by their nature. They will be looking for how you managed people, who you worked with in getting consensus and making your decisions. They will be much less likely to concern themselves with "what" you did, or "why" you did something.

Chances are this person will prefer people like themselves... expressive and sociable. They will focus on how interesting you are, and will enjoy testimonials and war stories. They usually put a priority on people skills and are likely to make hiring decisions based upon emotions or gut feel.

**The "highly service oriented" interviewer.** *The degree to which a person is HIGHLY SERVICE ORIENTED reflects their preference for structure...* situations that are stable and steady. Someone who is very service oriented is often loyal, predictable and patient.

These people tend to be relaxed and warm. They express their feelings and are more casual and open. When they question you, their focus may be on "why" you did something rather than "what" you did. They will be focusing on service to the company, and looking for people who project steadiness. These people often make hiring decisions in a deliberate manner and like to be assured of a person's stability. They dislike unpredictable people whose opinions might represent any form of conflict.

**The "highly cautious" interviewer.** *The degree to which a person is HIGHLY CAUTIOUS reflects their preference for procedures and order,* environments that allow a cautious, systematic approach to solving problems. Highly cautious people are often conventional, accurate and restrained.

These people may adopt a closed posture and be more formal in their questioning. They too will focus on “why you did something”... trying to analyze your response. They usually put a priority on product or service quality and analytical decision-making.

This individual will respond best to you if you demonstrate you are conscientious, accurate, and analytical in your approach to problem solving. This type of person will disapprove of you if you appear to be disorganized, or are unclear when answering questions. They believe in making hiring decisions in an analytical way. Many HR executives are risk-averse and don't want to make a mistake.

It only stands to reason that if you can get an accurate reading on the person who might be responsible for selecting you over others... you will be better able to control the situation and project your image in best keeping with their likely preferences.

When a company is interviewing different people—it's about individual competition. Be at your very best. If you've done your homework and are prepared, it will clearly be evident to the people who interview you.

**Only 7 to 9% of all job seekers are well prepared for interviewing. You can get a great advantage.**

## 6 Develop positive chemistry right at the start

Are interviews just question-and-answer sessions? This may happen, but an interview that turns into a good offer involves far more. Last year there were more than 800 million interviews, and no two were the same.

So how do you prepare? Compare this to a sports contest—there were millions of them and none were the same. In an interview or a contest, you can't plan exactly how things will go, but you can have a game plan for coming out on top.

We guide clients in achieving personal chemistry with executives of all personalities. Here are some ways to make sure that you build maximum chemistry with everyone.

### 1 Build chemistry by researching the firm and being informed

**Did you ever meet a person for the first time who knew a lot about you? It takes you by surprise, doesn't it? It's a great way to make a positive first impression.** One friend of mine, an attorney, attributes his success to research he does ahead of time.

Four out of every five of his clients tell him that he wins their business because he knows a lot more about them than anyone else. When you arrange an appointment, use the opportunity to gather more information. Many people have been able to get job descriptions and brochures ahead of time by requesting them over the phone. Visit the firm's website, but go further to learn about their industry and the person you will be meeting.

## 2 Build chemistry by impressing the front office staff

Building chemistry with the front office staff can also make a difference. Can you guess what percentage of executives say their secretaries influence them? One-third? One-half? Well, about two-thirds of them do.

Not too long ago, I was interrupted by Carol, who stated that Mr. Baxter had arrived for his interview. I had forgotten about the appointment, and it was a busy day. I immediately asked, *“What do you think of him, Carol?”* She didn’t say a word. She just gave a thumbs-down signal.

That was the end for poor Baxter. No one ever taught him how important it is to make a positive impression on the front office staff. I told Carol to have him see one of our assistants, and to provide her opinion first. So, please be attentive to the front office staff.

## 3 Build chemistry by projecting the right image

When we are on the hiring end, many of us reach a negative decision in just a few minutes. Why? Well, if you have the credentials, you establish a good initial impression or you don’t. And what determines chemistry? **People silently react to the image you project, your dress, your posture and body language, the things you say about any subject, and the way you answer questions.** Each of us is continually projecting some kind of image. It isn’t just physical or dress either, although your appearance speaks before you say a word. It’s also a matter of attitude and enthusiasm, and whether you project integrity.

## 4 Build chemistry by paying compliments

Do you like compliments? Do you think others do? You bet they do! So before the interview, read or talk to people about the firm and uncover good things to say. Let the interviewer know you heard them.

You can compliment their facilities, people, ads or many other things. However, be specific. Don’t just say that people you know are impressed by their product. Talk about why they are impressed. All of us like to hear about how our products have pleased customers. By giving details, you show you have given the subject some thought, and that your compliment is not just empty flattery.

Mark Twain once said, *“I can live for two months on a good compliment.”*

## 5 Build chemistry by asking questions

Ideally, you should ask questions for a good portion of every interview. This enables you to assert some control and reduces interviewing pressure. **The way you ask questions and the specific nature of their content will tell a lot about you.** For this reason, we want each of our clients to have a questioning strategy. By asking intelligent questions, you will build your image in the eyes of the interviewer—and you will be building chemistry. You want him thinking, “Certainly, John seems very sharp, well informed... impressive.” Of course, among the key questions you ask should be ones that are designed to find out what is “wrong” with the job or the company.

You must build personal chemistry with everyone you meet in an organization. Keep in mind that when it comes to hiring, people offer jobs to people they like!



You might consider these “offensive questions” as opposed to “defensive questions” when you are fielding the answers. The point to keep in mind is that they need to be questions that, from the perspective of the interviewer, will get right to the heart of what is going on in the organization.

### Types of questions you might ask

- Does the CEO have strong convictions about the approach needed to meet your goals?
- How closely do R & D and sales work together?
- If I were to become VP, how much input would you expect on selecting new products?
- Do you have a strong team in place, or will you expect me to recruit my own team?
- You need to have new capabilities to achieve your goals. Would I be given a free hand to do that, or would that cause political problems?
- Is top management unanimous on the need to develop new lines quickly?
- Would you see the major thrust as positioning the firm for a public offering... or a merger?
- Given you are #3 in your market right now, what is the timetable for improving your future?

## 6 Build chemistry by the way you answer questions

Keep in mind that the interviewer wants someone who can do the job, and wants to find that person in a minimum of time. **The way you answer questions has more to do with building chemistry than what you say.** For example, how do you handle the number one question in interviewing: “Tell me about yourself.”

You’ll want to answer, but chances are you’re not sure what they want to hear. You could start out by talking about the kind of person you are and some of your attributes, but that may not be what the interviewer is interested in. Faced with such a dilemma, a safe way out is to self-qualify your answer: “Charles, I’d be happy to tell you about myself, and I’m sure you are interested in my work experience. I’ll focus on the past few years and how they relate to your position. I can start with my most recent experience if you like.”

When you self-qualify, you give the interviewer an opportunity to respond, and to direct the conversation to another area. That way, you can avoid talking for ten minutes about the wrong things. Be prepared and have your own 60- to 120-second commercial ready.

When you answer questions, gear your comments to potential contributions related to sales, profits, cost reduction, innovations, etc. When there is a silence, make sure you have prepared some questions in advance. Create an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge. Being prepared builds confidence and allows you to be more spontaneous. Always maintain eye contact, and establish your sincerity and integrity.

**When you encounter difficult questions, use the “U-turn” technique.** For example, “You look very impressive on paper, Marge. If you’re this good, you ought to be able to solve all of our problems. Tell me why we should hire you?”

Now, of course, you know the person doesn’t believe you’re that good! However, if you begin to talk about why they should hire you, you run the real risk of going on about all the wrong things. With the “U-turn” technique, you don’t give an answer. Instead, turn the question around in a way that acknowledges the status of the interviewer and pays an indirect compliment.

For example: *“I have a lot of experience I think you could use. But it would be presumptuous of me to tell you what you need before I’ve shown the courtesy of listening to what you think the priorities are. If you’d be kind enough to share some of your thoughts on them, perhaps I could give a more intelligent answer.”*

### Comments on chemistry

- *“Most of my interviews were with medium-sized firms in Arizona. Their selection processes were heavy on personal fit, chemistry with others and attitude.”*
- *“Chemistry is where it’s at. When it’s down to a few candidates, competency rarely is the issue.”*
- *“Obviously, connecting to openings is important, but in the final stages, working at building chemistry with everyone you meet is just as important.”*

# enthusiasm!

Show enthusiasm... with everyone you meet. And do it in your phone conversations... your face-to-face interviews... and your follow-up letters. It creates immediate chemistry.

*“Nothing great is ever achieved without enthusiasm.”*  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

*“If you can give your son or daughter a gift, let it be enthusiasm.”*  
—Bruce Barton

## A classical follow-up letter

*Dear Mr. Carson:*

*You’re probably surprised to hear from me so quickly. But, I left your office with such enthusiasm that I felt compelled to mention some added thoughts.*

*First, let me thank you and your associates for a most interesting afternoon. Everything about Sigma Systems is professional, and I was very impressed. Second, I wanted to focus on your need for an action-oriented person who can produce short-term results, because I am confident I am that person. Consider my performance in the last two years.*

*Under my direction, operating costs were reduced by \$2,000,000 and profit jumped by 121%. In addition, the above were achieved with a staff reduction of 8%.*

*There is no question that I can do at least as well for Sigma, if not better. Judging from your comments at our meeting, I suspect you agree.*

*The one concern you did express related to my financial needs. Over the years, I’ve learned that one major factor determines whether something is cheap or expensive. It’s the marketplace that ultimately determines a person’s value.*

*In this case, I believe that your first consideration is with the results I can deliver. I have to believe that the return to the company would be substantial. Thanks again for your time, and I hope you’ll consider me for what I know is a great opportunity for both of us.*

*Sincerely,*

**Janet Wilson**

Janet Wilson

## Other basics for interviewing

- Try to avoid arriving more than 7 minutes early for your face-to-face interviews. If you are kept waiting too long, then explain that you have another appointment and ask for another time you can come back.
- Never bring packages or unnecessary materials to carry with you to an interview.
- If you are at lunch, always avoid smoking and take a cue from the other person relative to drinks.
- Never read mail on your interviewer's desk.
- Never drum your fingers, look at your watch or exhibit other signs that might reflect disinterest or boredom.
- Avoid discussions on race, religion or politics. And don't provide responses that make you seem like a "yes-man."
- Never be a braggart and risk being exposed because of exaggerations.
- Use "name dropping" sparingly... if at all. If you do name drop, you must be very smooth about it.
- If some of your liabilities are pointed out, handle them in accordance with the discussions elsewhere in this chapter. Never apologize for your liabilities.



- Never say anything critical about your past employers or bosses. Never be negative about anything.
- Don't let an interview carry on too long. When a discussion peaks, diplomatically lead to an end of the meeting.
- Never linger after an interview... or stay around the hallways of a company speaking with others.
- Emphasize recent experiences, use recent stories and project diversified interests and a strong work ethic.
- There will always be questions for which you won't have answers. Don't let it bother you.
- Don't be controlling. Keep an eye on your interviewer's body language and your own.
- Read between the lines. Find a way to answer questions that should have been asked, but were not!
- Follow up every interview with an enthusiastic letter that emphasizes why you are a "good fit."
- It's a bad sign if an interviewer accepts a number of phone calls. It's a signal that there may not be much interest or things are not going well.
- It's a good sign if the interviewer does more talking than you do, or if he begins to ask or talk about you solving his problems.

**50% of all hires are people who employers simply "liked the best."**

## If you want to make a positive impression... build chemistry and tell good stories to overcome objections!

How to differentiate yourself from competition

- Be better prepared
- Be more engaging
- Build friendships better
- Ask better questions
- Project more value
- Suggest more ideas
- Be more comfortable
- Tell better stories
- Project more confidence
- Overcome objections better

*“The secret to success in life is for man to be ready for his opportunity when it comes.”*  
—Benjamin Disraeli



**#17 RECAP**

Proven rules for interviewing success

Successful interviewing depends on finding out and reacting to what's most important to the interviewer. You'll also need to tell stories that make people remember you... surface and deal with objections... answer questions with confidence, and read people appropriately. Building chemistry is most important.

### Quick action steps for interviewing

Try to reasonably master the information provided, follow the 6 proven rules and especially our methods for building chemistry. Have your SOAR stories prepared, as well as your approach for handling liabilities. For our clients, JMAC is a source for market intelligence on employers and industries before interviews. On your own, you can find other sources which can be accessed online. If a recruiter is involved, always ask them to provide background information on the employer and the executive you will be seeing.