# Interviewing

Congratulations! You got the call! They want you to come in for an interview. After you come down from Cloud 9, it is time to start preparing for your interview. Sorry, your work doesn’t end when you get the call. If anything, it has just begun.

You have sold them with your CV and cover letter—now it is time to sell them on you. There are steps to getting ready for the interview before you even walk in the door. Most employers schedule interviews for a certain day or days for logistical reasons. If you are lucky, you may have a week or at least a few days to prepare for the interview, but it could be as spontaneous as the next afternoon or later that day.

# Getting to the Interview

Showing up and showing up on time is the first and possibly most important step in being a serious contender in the field of job candidates. You have about thirty seconds to make a good first impression. Sitting in the reception area for a long period of time or rushing into the interview—flustered and out of breath will certainly not get you off on the right foot.

Before you hit the send button on a job application, think about how you will get to this employer if you are hired. It is natural to want to apply for every job you might have a chance at, but if the commute is two hours each way, or if there is absolutely no public transportation, taxi, Uber etc. this needs to seriously be taken into consideration. If the employer is in the same general area where you live, chances are you have a good idea of where the company is located. Do your research! Can you get there easily via public transportation? How long would it take? Would Uber, taxi, or other ride sharing services be a financially viable option? It is best to figure these things out before you even apply for a job rather than after you have accepted a position.

Okay, you can get to the jobs for which you have applied and for which you are interviewing.

On interview days. You might want to consider a taxi. You don’t want to chance a broken-down bus or train on your big day. You are going to be naturally nervous and keeping the stress to a minimum will help you focus fully on the interview. Taxis or car services can be scheduled the night before to pick you up at a certain time. It is fine to have a friend or family member drive you to the interview and drop you off. Don’t even let them come in the building with you. Remember it is all about you. Have them wait at a nearby coffee shop, go get groceries, anything but sit in the reception area. Employers may ask other staff who may have interacted with a potential candidate what their impressions were. They will ask for feedback on any interaction other employees in the office may have had with the candidates and candidates’ support people on the day of the interview. You wouldn’t want Aunt Myrtle chatting up the receptionist or security guard about what a great worker and asset to the company you would be. This could be misinterpreted as being a little too pushy. You, not Aunt Myrtle, need to convince the company they can’t live without you.

It is highly possible you may get an interview out of town or in another part of the country. Though a four-hour car or bus ride, or a short plane trip on the same day as the interview may be tempting, it is well worth the expense for a hotel to travel up the day before. Yes, often an employer will give out of town candidates the option of video interviews, and this is becoming more commonplace, however, if possible, try to go in. Interviewing with an employer face-to-face not only gives the employer the opportunity to meet you but gives you the opportunity to check out the potential working environment.

An employer will usually confirm your interview via email—giving the time, place, and often names of persons involved in the interview process. Make sure you understand where you are to go. Buildings often have multiple entrances, levels, campuses and locations. It is alright to ask questions—even if you are not disclosing your vision issues. So, if you have chosen not to disclose preinterview, asking questions like where to go when getting off elevator or what entrance to come in is perfectly fine.

You may also want to ask what type of interview it will be.

You want to get to your interview as close to the time as possible—allowing time for finding the elevator, getting through security if necessary, and finding the correct room. Fifteen minutes early is doable, if you happen to arrive earlier than this, wait outside, find a coffee shop, or if necessary, explain to the receptionist that you are early for your appointment and are happy to wait. You might even request that they not notify the interviewer until closer to time. Often there are breaks between interviews, so the interviewers can take a tea break, check emails, or discuss the interviewees they have already met.

Sometimes things do happen such as traffic tie ups and road detours. Employers get this, but if you are running late, call and apologize and say you will be there soon. If you are running extremely late, it may be necessary to ask if the employer needs to reschedule the interview.

# Preparing for the Interview

You are the cream of the crop. The employer likes your experience and the bit of personality you show in the cover letter. Chances are they have probably Googled you as well. Now it is time for you to Google them. You know the job you are applying for, and you probably know a little about the company. Unless they tell you specifically how the interview will go, you have no idea what kinds of questions they will ask, or what answers they will expect. Research the company thoroughly. Visit the company’s website. Dive into the website. Read it cover to cover, click every link—especially media kits, press releases, and annual reports and financials. You want to know as much—if not more about the place you are interviewing with than the people working there. Ninety-nine percent of interviews will ask what you know about the company. You don’t want to sound like a Wikipedia article. Here is an example. I really liked the way the organization was portrayed in the article in the newspaper about the placement of Rachel Smyth at the Ministry of Magic. You might want to throw in something like that latter sentence which might not be obvious from just looking at the website.

But don’t limit your research to just the company’s website or news articles. Visit the competition or similar company’s websites. What sets company A apart from company B? If you know the names of the people you are interviewing with, Google them. This may give you insight into their professional interests which you can try and incorporate into your interview answers.

If you will be working in a specific department, focus your research on reading about that department and how it relates to the entire organisation. In today’s multitasking workplace, you will be expected to work with other departments and staff.

There will be a time in the interview for you to ask questions. Some job seekers may find this the hardest part of the whole process. Use your research to try and formulate some questions about the company. Write them down as you read so they will be fresh in your mind.

# I Have an Interview, and I don’t have a thing to Wear

Yes, we are judged on our appearance. It is a sighted world whether we like it or not. Looks count. You do want to choose clothes, accessories, hairstyle, and makeup that will flatter you and be appropriate for the interview. These days, it is hard to know what exactly office attire means. Business casual can refer to a blazer and khakis for men, and a nice pant or skirt suit for women, but even this is up for debate. Corporate is usually conservative suits with ties for the men and dark blazers and hose and heels for the women.

You will want to stick to colours such as navy, grey, or black.

If you want to add a little flash to your outfit, a bright shirt or blouse is appropriate.

You don’t want your outfit to distract the interviewer from what you are saying.

If you have concerns, look the company up online or have a sighted person do so. Chances are there may be photos which may give you a better idea of the dress code.

Before you choose your outfit, consult with someone you trust to tell you what the outfit you have chosen looks like. Does it still fit well? Is it still in style? Is it the right colour and texture for the current season? Store clerks can be helpful, honest, and really know their fashion, but others will sell you anything—even if it isn’t right for you. Some departments store and boutiques have personal shoppers who will—discuss your style and find things they think might work. This can get expensive, so if you have a friend or family member you can trust, take them shopping with you or into the bowels of your closet. There are non-profit organizations which will give clothes to people actively seeking employment. The most famous of these is Dress for Success—an international non-profit working with women. There are others, so if you can’t afford nice career clothing check in your area. Some of these organizations may require a referral or that you go through their program, but they are worth looking into. Don’t rule out consignment shops.

Work and Income also has a clothing allowance for job seekers, or you may be able to borrow from a friend or family member.

Prior to wearing your outfit, have someone check to see if it is clean. If this isn’t possible, take it to the dry cleaner. You don’t want to walk into an interview with a big coffee stain down your front.

# Jewellery

We all have our lucky pieces—that favourite ring, tie pin, bracelet. But try to stay away from heavy necklaces, dangling earrings, and jingling bracelets. These can cause a distraction for the interviewer and for you too. If you have a watch that talks, vibrates or whistles, put it on mute before the interview begins. This goes for cell phones as well, as they have become as much a part of our personal attire as clothing and jewellery.

# Shoes

You want to wear a nice pair of comfortable shoes. For men this could be a good pair of loafers, and for women a low heel or any nice work shoe. You may have to walk some, and you want to be comfortable before, during and after the interview.

Our shoes take a beating, and you want to make sure the ones you wear are in good condition. This may mean polishing them or even buying a new pair if necessary. The back of our shoes is the last thing people see.

# Personal hygiene

Take a bath or shower the day of the interview, staying away from overpowering perfumes and aftershave. A lot of offices have gone fragrance free due to allergies. You want to wow them with your personality and experience, not overpower them with cologne.

# You are what you eat!

It is advisable to stay away from spicy or garlicky foods the night before and day of the interview. Spices can stay in your system and secrete through the skin, especially if you are sweating from nerves, no matter how much you wash or brush your teeth. However, do eat something, so your tummy won’t be the one chiming in on the interview.

# Hair, long beautiful hair

Whether you wear your hair long or short, crew cut or curl, a visit to the hairdresser or barber prior to an interview might be a good idea.

# Makeup

If you are comfortable applying makeup, wear it. Understated is best. This is not the time for electric blue eyeshadow and deep ruby red rouge. However, if you have had no experience applying cosmetics, the day of the interview isn’t the time to do it yourself. Blind women can wear makeup, but like any skill it takes time and practice to get it right and to make sure the colours you use match your skin tone. If you really want to go full out, there are mobile makeup artists you could schedule to come to your home prior to the interview.

# Nails

You will shake hands—probably more than once during the interview, so make sure your hands and nails are clean. Nails should be clean with no polish or a light polish. This goes for feet as well if you are wearing open-toed shoes or sandals; however, most career professionals advise staying away from this latter type of footwear.

# The Big Day

Remember the first day of school jitters? Well, magnify these times ten, and welcome to the day of the interview. It is perfectly normal to feel bats swooping about your abdomen the day you bare your soul to a total stranger in hopes they will hire you.

Attitude is altitude! If you feel confident about yourself, it will show during the interview. There are some proven exercises and techniques to use the day of the interview that will help you feel more confident.

# Breathing exercises

When we are nervous or scared, our heart rate increases and not enough oxygen is reaching our bloodstream, sending us into panic mode. Spend a few moments of quiet in front of your mirror. Yes, even if you can’t see yourself, there is something about confronting your image. But you can also sit in a favourite chair. Take long deep breaths—holding them in and letting them out slowly. Try to clear your mind, don’t dwell on the upcoming interview, let your emotions float through you but not take hold. If they can’t find a thought to latch on to, they will soon leave.

# Self-talk

As you are gazing at your reflection or sitting in your chair, tell yourself how fabulous you are, go ahead if you want to swagger a bit. “I rock.” “I can do this.” “I am the best.”

# The Power Pose

One trick advised by human resource professionals is to do the power pose. You might want to do this before you leave home. Place your legs hip widths apart and put your hands on your hips. It releases testosterone in the body, giving you a sense of confidence.

# Interview types

It is appropriate to ask beforehand what type of interview you will be having, and many employers will explain this in the initial phone call or confirmation email.

# One-on-one interview

A one-on-one interview is where you are interviewed by one representative of the company, most likely, the manager of the position you are applying for. They will want to get a feel for who you are and if your skills match those of the job requirements. Questions will relate directly to the job and your experience to determine your suitability for this position. Often this is an initial interview, and you may be called back for further interviews.

# The panel interview

This type of interview is the most common. The panel usually consists of different representatives of the company—a manager or supervisor, co-worker, and possibly the person whose job you will be filling. Sometimes they may have a representative from human resources or another department within the company to get an outside impression. The panel interview is popular for logistical reasons—it saves time and can get a collective opinion of a candidate from several professionals at once. There are usually a series of questions, and each member of the panel takes turns asking them.

# Behavioral interview

Whether it be panel or one on one, the behavioural interview seems to be the most popular style of interviewing lately. In this setting, the interviewers will ask you questions based on common situations of the job you are applying for. The logic behind the behavioural interview is that your future performance will be based on a past performance of a similar situation. Types of questions to expect in this type of interview are:

* Tell us about a time you had to prioritize tasks?
* Tell us about a time you had to deal with a difficult situation, and how was it resolved?
* Tell us about a time you were part of a team?

These can be hard interviews to prepare for as often the questions seem quite vague.

# Group interview

This is exactly what it sounds like. An employer may do this to pre-screen the applicants and give them the chance to quickly learn about the company to see if they want to work there. It may begin with a short presentation followed up with short one on one interviews with each candidate. In some cases, the candidates may have to take assessment tests to determine if they will be invited to the next stage of the selection process.

# Phone interview

An initial phone interview may be used as a pre-screening tool—especially for jobs where there has been a high number of applications. Usually, it is someone from the human resources department who will then narrow the field for the manager, but this isn’t always the case. You may be asked typical questions or behavioural questions.

Phone interviews, like in-person interviews, are normally scheduled for a specific time. Treat a phone interview the same way you would a face-to-face meeting. Turn off all distractions—such as call waiting, TV etc. It may sound a little silly, but evidence suggests that if you dress professionally for a phone interview you feel more confident than if you were sitting in sweat pants or jammies. If you are using a cell phone for your phone interview, make sure you will be in a good coverage area with plenty of battery life.

# Interview Questions

There are hundreds of sites on the net that will give you the most common interview questions. We have covered what types of questions may arise in a behavioural interview. Other questions that may be asked are:

# Tell us about yourself?

This almost always is asked on an interview, and This doesn’t mean the last book you read, how many kids you have, how many pets you have, or your favourite pizza toppings. They just want a brief summary of your professional skills as it relates to the job. You will have to tailor your speech every time you interview depending on the position.

# What do you know about this position?

Here is where your research on the website and internet comes into play. Also be familiar with the job description as outlined in the job ad.

# What makes you the right candidate?

Be confident, not cocky. Don’t say you are better than your competition. A good answer to this question might be that you know they have a lot of great candidates for the position, but you offer a unique perspective—giving examples from your professional experiences to back your statement up.

# Where do you see yourself in five years?

Never answer in their position or head of the company. You may know this is not permanent, and you want to move on as soon as you can, but don’t be that honest. Especially if it is an entry level job without much chance of upward mobility. If you are just getting your foot in the door, mention that you want to do a great job and learn more about the overall working of the company—hoping to grow personally and professionally.

# What are your strengths?

Remember your CV? Briefly outline your accomplishments and skills.

# What are your weaknesses?

Please don’t tell them you have trouble getting up in the morning, drink too much at rugby games, and liberally drop the F bomb. They want weaknesses you can spin into strengths.

For example “I am a perfectionist, and I feel this sometimes holds me back.” “I try to do too much and have trouble saying no.”

# Words of Wisdom

Try to keep your personal life out of the interview. Keep your answers directly related to professional experience. Leave the jokes, quips, and sarcasm at home. You can usually gauge the mood of a room within seconds of entering it. If the interviewer or interviewers seem very serious, no-nonsense types, reflect that attitude. If they are more relaxed, it is appropriate to let a little of your personality come out. Example, in the “tell me about yourself” part, you could mention that you like pepperoni pizza. Never-ever, whatever you do talk negatively about a past employer—even if they treated you hideously. It speaks badly about you as a person, and the employer will wonder what you might say about their company if you were to be hired.

# Questions for the Employer

The interviewer will often answer the questions you might have during the interview, but it is essential that you find something to ask, so the interviewer will feel you are engaged in the process. You may think of questions as the interview progresses, but here are some standard ones to get you started.

* What is your management style?
* How would you describe the culture of the company?
* What can I do for you?
* What is your biggest challenge?
* How does this role fit in with the rest of the team?
* What opportunities are there here for professional development?

Never ask about salary unless they bring it up. If they ask you what salary you expect, a neutral answer is “I am willing to negotiate”. You don’t want to price yourself out of a job, nor do you want to sell yourself too cheap.

# Body Language

Your physical attitude can convey a lot of how you are feeling. It’s ok to be nervous, and the employer will understand this.

# Greeting the interviewer

Eye contact is so important for sighted people, this is how they communicate. Once the employer has greeted you, stand and stick out your hand for the first handshake. Have a firm shake, but don’t break their hand and don’t hold it too long. The employer may be stunned that a blind person has the ability to get out of the house, let alone show up for an interview, and this can be disconcerting for them. You have the upper hand here. The employer may be at a loss as to how to assist you—they may ask you how or they may grab your arm. Please, smile, be polite, and say I will follow you or take your arm. Keep up a steady stream of polite conversation as you walk.

When you enter the room for the interview, wait a few seconds before sitting. Some interviewers will tell you to have a seat, while others won’t. Keep a smile on your face at all times. If this is a panel interview, turn your face to each person as they speak. Sighted people rely on eye contact and are much more comfortable if you are looking in their direction, even if you can’t meet their gaze. Don’t fidget, but don’t sit like a statue either, glance about the room, lean forward to show engagement. Place your hands in your lap and if you are a leg crosser, try to cross ankles instead of knees. Upon leaving, again shake hands with all around the table and thank them for their time. If they have business cards, take them. Most likely they will apologize for not having them in braille.

After the interview, it is appropriate to ask when a decision will be made.

If you haven’t heard anything from the interview in about two weeks, you can follow up with a quick email stating you are still very interested in the position and wonder when a decision might be made. It does sometimes take time.