



# INTERVIEW PREPARATION GUIDE



**CAREER SERVICES**  
 CAREER ADVISING | JOB SEARCH RESOURCES | RÉSUMÉ REVIEW  
 NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES | DIVERSITY COACHING | WORKSHOPS

## Career Services Alberta

It takes more time to find work than to have work, and it is easy to find yourself stuck on how to start. You may feel your only option is sending out resumes to job postings. CPA Alberta supports your career success, and you can obtain further support from Career Services. We offer free services, including:

- Job Search Support, including one-on-one meetings:
  - Help to develop your job search strategy
  - Cover letter and resume reviews and coaching
  - Interview coaching
  - LinkedIn profile reviews and tips on how to effectively use all platform options
  - Tips on networking for job leads and informational interviews
  - Guidance to become a “Careerpreneur” and build your brand
  - Monthly job search networking events: Monday Meetups
  - Free job search webinars and an archive of past webinars
  - Job Board and Volunteer Opportunity Board
  - Support on breaking through unconscious bias and barriers in your job search
- Career Development Support, including one-on-one meetings:
  - Career coaching
  - Career mentorship annual program with mentorship training
  - Webinars and an archive of past resumes
  - Help in building your career capital and career intelligence
  - Coaching on responding to an offer letter, promotions, and obtaining a salary increase
  - Assistance in making career changes, mapping out your career path, and determining next steps in your career.
  - Preparation for difficult conversations with role playing



### Additional for-fee services:

- Psychometric assessments
  - Emotional Intelligence: EQi-2.0®
  - Intercultural Effectiveness (Dealing with difference): IDI®
  - Intercultural Conflict Style: ICS®
- Resume writing
- LinkedIn profile creation/writing
- Extended one-on-one services

Even if you're still working while searching for a job, you may experience various cycles of emotions: anger, sadness, elation, grief, and more. These emotions may become overwhelming and begin to impede your ability to function or maintain healthy relationships, or exacerbate mental illness triggers. If you need to access help, CPA Alberta provides CPAs, CPA PEP candidates, and their immediate family with health and wellness support through the CPA Assist Program.

For more information, visit [cpa-assist.ca](http://cpa-assist.ca) or call 1-855-596-4222. If you find yourself in crisis, either please call 211. If 211 is not available in your area, call 780-482-4636.

## Understanding the Interview

An interview is a discussion between you and the person at the other end of the table. In an interview, you can control your narrative and decide what and how much information to deliver. You get to evaluate the company, the recruiter, and the hiring manager as much as they will evaluate you. Often candidates forget that the scales of power do not only lean towards the employer's favour.

An employer evaluates if you can do the job and if you will do the job. They also assess «fit.» Fit is an ambiguous concept that most managers can't define. It covers everything from how you will get along with the team to how easily you will start the job with minimal training. This concept of fit can seem like an uncomfortable excuse to not hire a candidate, but it can be for the best. You can get a job with a company you love, but if you don't fit with the team, you may end up leaving—voluntarily or involuntarily.

Your role in the interview is to make sure that you articulate that you can do the job and want to do the job. You need to align with the company's expected behaviours, beliefs, and values. Lastly, for yourself, you can ask the interviewer(s) meaningful questions related to the environment and responsibilities. You will need this information to make an informed decision on whether or not the company will be good for your career and your mental and physical health.

## Job Journal

### Exercise #1. Action Verb Exercise

Skip trying to write your job description on your resume and start here. Listing your work experience in bullets that start with strong action verbs is the best approach to putting together your resume. It will personalize your resume so it stands out amongst your peers.

1. Look at the action verb list and highlight every action verb that applies to you.
2. Write notes on where you performed the action verbs, as well as a quick summary of outcomes.

### Exercise #2. Accomplishments

Look at your action verb list and pick your biggest accomplishments out of your notes. Write them out in detail to include specific tasks, actions, and results. You can also add awards, key acknowledgements, projects, and other details.

### Exercise #3. Likes and Dislikes

Write the details of what you liked and what you didn't like about past employment. By doing so, you are defining your own job description and ideal corporate culture. This will allow you to narrow your job search and ask effective questions in interviews.

### Exercise #4. Gap Analysis

This is a good exercise to evaluate what you have been missing in past employment and what you may be missing to make a career change.

A template for a job journal is online at the CPAA Career Center, or email [careerservices@cpaalberta.ca](mailto:careerservices@cpaalberta.ca).



# Interview Preparation



## Day Before the Interview: Checklist

- Dress Code.** When you book your interview, make sure you ask what the dress code is. In general, a man should wear a dress shirt and tie; for a woman, wear a collared shirt or blouse. In a formal interview, wear a two-piece suit.
- Etiquette.** The pandemic has changed the etiquette for formal greetings—shaking hands may no longer be appropriate, and you should note some alternatives. Some may do nothing, or just nod their heads. Others may bump elbows, tap shoes, put hand on chest and nod, or bow. Ask your interview coordinator how interview etiquette has changed since the pandemic.
- Interview outfit.** Examine clothing and shoes closely for any holes, stains, or smells. Now is the time to discover if something needs to be cleaned or replaced. An interviewer will look at you from head to toe. Some may be more thoughtful regarding where you are coming from; most will not. Make sure you have a proper, modern, formal outfit, regardless of the weather.
- Hygiene.** Fun fact: Did you know that in Canada’s criminal code, “offending a place with a bad smell” is illegal? It’s an archaic law that is never enforced, but this law highlights the importance of being “scentsless.” Smells and scents are very personal or cultural, but they can trigger allergies. Aim for scentslessness when attending an interview. A scent alone can turn off an interviewer and cut the meeting short.
- Directions.** Research the location and make sure you know how to get there, where to park, and whether there is any road construction and alternative routes in case of a traffic surprise. Hiring managers and recruiters frown on lateness. Pable lateness is When it cannot be helped, it is essential to be proactive and call to let them know you will be late.
- Review your job journal.** Review your resume and job journal so all the accomplishments and challenges you have faced are fresh in your mind. You will ask better questions at the end of an interview to help you make the right decision for you and your career.
- Final review of the company.** Don’t just pay attention to their history. Make sure you familiarize yourself with their values, mission, and language used on their website. Take note of awards and news releases. Use LinkedIn to look up information about their team. Make sure you understand the industry, know their competitors, and where the organization fits into the bigger picture.

## Emotional Regulation Exercises

### Managing Anxiety

It is important to understand that part of a successful interview is to self-regulate any emotions like nervousness that may prevent you from presenting yourself in the best possible light. You are responsible for controlling your inside voice. You can make it harder for yourself with negative self-talk and the pressure you put on yourself. Make sure the self-talk is helpful. Self-deprecating remarks and dwelling on past mistakes do not define you.

### Gratitude

Congratulate yourself and be proud of yourself! This interview means you have been selected over many other individuals to meet with this company. Be grateful for why you are interviewing, whether it is because you are unemployed, leaving an unhappy job, or looking for growth. These situations put you in a position to change your narrative and direction of your career.

### Meditation

Deep breathing. Visualization. Mindfulness. Meditate on your accomplishments and the positive things you have been told about yourself. Think about why you are interested in this job and how you would benefit the organization and its team. You must be very clear on your brand, and what the employer can expect from working with you.



## Interview Day: Checklist

- Physical presentation. Double check head to toe that everything is clean, pressed, together, and shined.
- Hygiene. Ensure that you have showered, shampooed, brushed your teeth, used a mildly scented deodorant, trimmed and cleaned your nails, and done your hair. An excellent tip: remember to bring a Tide pen or an extra pair of nylons so you are prepared if an accident happens.
- Sounds. Turn your cell phone off or put it in airplane mode before you walk into the office, and keep it off until you leave the office. Don't chew gum. If this is an interview over food, chew quietly with your mouth closed. Drink water if it is offered, and do so quietly and slowly.
- No smoking. If you smoke, do not smoke before you walk into the office. Wait until you are away from the office to light up.
- Arrival time: Arrive 5 to 10 minutes before the interview start time. Treat video interviews the same way. It's better to wait than be late due to technical difficulties. If you are running late, call to let them know, and why.
- First impressions. The way you present yourself to the receptionist counts. Treat the receptionist with the same degree of courtesy as the CEO.
- Handshake. Make sure you know the etiquette of handshakes at the workplace, or ask the individual when you meet them what their preference is. If a handshake is expected, it should be wand one or two
- Self-awareness. Your body will give you feedback on how you are doing; you just need to listen, pause, and breathe. Pay attention to hand movements, foot tapping, fidgeting, etc. When you notice yourself demonstrating any distracting behaviours, just stop them and carry on.

## Body Language Tips

7% of meaning is communicated through spoken word, 38% through the tone of voice, 55% through body language.\* This is an oft-quoted statistic from a study in 1967 (Mehrabian & Wiener); although not accurate for all situations, it does illustrate the importance of presentation and mannerisms.

### Eye Contact

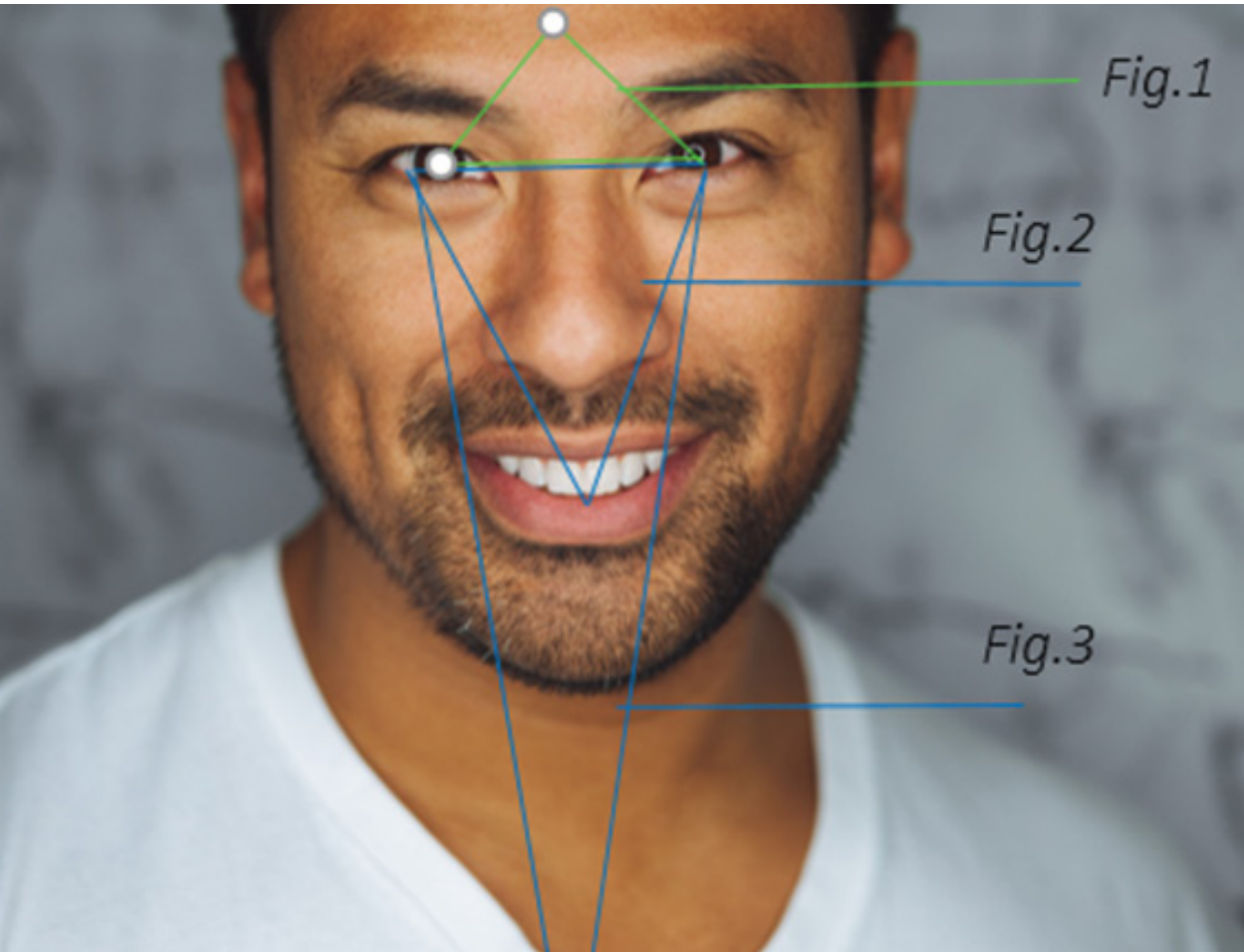
Eye contact in Canadian culture is deemed to be very important, especially in business. Eye contact is a way to relay confidence and interest, and signals honesty and knowledgeability. In addition, if you aren't looking at your interviewer's face, it looks like you are talking at whatever you are looking at. You certainly don't want to be perceived as talking to a glass of water.

#### Here are some key tricks to help you out:

- If you feel shy about making eye contact, pick a spot within the upper triangle of the face. It could be the nose or one eye. As long as you pick a spot in the upper triangle, you will look like you are providing eye contact.
- Move your eyes throughout the triangle during the interview, perhaps 10 seconds, one eye, then the nose, etc.; this will create a more natural effect.
- Smiling relaxes the muscles around the eye and helps draw the shoulders back and open the chest.
- Don't glare. Eye contact for three seconds is the average that has been determined to be comfortable, so remember to blink.
- Eye contact increases your active listening skills; training yourself to look at someone's eyes will help you to stop thinking up an answer before the question is done.
- Direct eye contact when asking a question is very assertive.
- The power gaze is better for interrogation or severity. It may be best to not use it in an interview, unless it is a stress interview.

\*If you are having a video interview: The best way to make eye contact is to look into the camera lens. If you find that tricky, either aim to talk at the top of someone's head or shrink your screen and put the image up below the camera so you can feel like you are looking at the person.





### Where you should be looking at a person's face

**Figure 1: Power gaze contact.**

**Figure 2: Business eye contact.**

**Figure 3: Intimate eye contact.** *\*(Never use in a business setting)*

## Facial Expressions

Being aware of your eye contact and facial features will help you hold the attention of the interviewer and control the narrative of the situation. Avoid distractions such as excessive hand gestures to help ensure the interviewer's gaze is focused on your face and words, not any other part of your body.

Facial expressions are more than just eye contact and smiles. They are a key part of your body language. The direction your eyes look when you are thinking is information. Your eyebrows say a lot about your emotions. They will naturally rise and fall with your emotional expression, as do the creases between your brows, and eyebrows will drop when angry or serious.

Your chin's position provides information as well. Too high up, and the interpretation is that you think too highly of yourself and are looking down on those in the room. Chin too low will increase the interpretation of you being aggressive or flirtatious.

Head movements are attention-getting. Although not every culture uses the same cues, the person across from you is likely going to read your body language through a Western cultural lens, specifically North American. Depending on the context, nodding your head up and down while someone else is speaking is either a sign of agreement or that you're engaged in listening and are inviting the speaker to continue speaking. Shaking your head from side to side in some contexts is saying no, expressing disagreement, and in other situations can display disappointment in the message being received.

## Smile

Women don't like to be told, "Smile, you'll look nicer." It tends to be viewed as patronizing; however, in this situation, it is a valid statement.

Whether you are on the phone, in front of a camera, or in person, a smile goes a long way in creating a bond between yourself and the interviewer.

***Fun Fact:** Did you know when you smile it can be heard through the telephone? It's true. According to a study conducted by the University of Portsmouth: "Smiling affects how we speak, to the point that listeners can identify the type of smile based on sound alone, according to a new study."*

Even a fake smile can reduce stress and lower your heart rate, which means if you start smiling before your interview, it can actually be a tool to calm your nerves. Lastly, smiling increases your likeability. It comes across as warm and increases their belief in your ability to be a team player.

## Posture

Pay attention to your posture on the phone, in front of the camera, and in person. Posture will impact the way you project yourself. It impacts your vocalicity\* and affects your confidence in your own thoughts. When standing or sitting, pretend there is a string that travels through your lower back and up through your head, and imagine that string being pulled upwards. This is how you will achieve sitting and standing tall in a way that will come across as more natural. The next step is to pay attention to your shoulders. Make sure they are dropped. This will allow you to look and feel less stressed. Pushing your shoulders back also improves your posture as it opens up your chest, reduces your slouching, and increases your look and feel of confidence.

## Wandering Hands

In many cultures, people speak with their hands. When you are on stage as a guest speaker, this can be an excellent tool for keeping your audience engaged. However, in an interview, excessive hand movements can take the attention away from your face and distract the interviewers' attention. If talking with your hands is natural, there are a couple of tricks you can use. You can use your body as the measuring stick. Make sure your hand movements stay within your torso: never wider than your chest, never higher than your neck, and never below the table. If you really want to prevent moving your hands, you can place one hand on the table and another hand on your lap and use the texture of the table and your pants to ground your hand.

You definitely don't want to let your hands to reveal your nerves. So even if you are someone who does not speak with their hands, you want to be mindful of them communicating your negative emotions. Nervous people will often tap a pen or spin it around, or flick things. Fidgeting can be distracting or irritating to the interviewer, so practice keeping your hands grounded on the table or your lap.

Our hands can unconsciously betray us. If your hands move in front of your mouth and stays there, it implies you are hiding something. Impression what the other person is saying. Crossing your arms can make you seem like you aren't interested in talking or are closed off, so make sure you wear warm clothing.

## \*Vocality

It basically means the different qualities of speech in terms of:

- clarity;
- comprehension;
- concision;
- confidence;
- articulateness;
- grammar;
- specific vocabulary; and/or
- depth of sound.

A lot of judgement of vocality is actually unconscious. For example, a recruiter may not realize their gender bias based the pitch of the candidate's voice. Most organizations strive for gender equity, but the truth is, gender bias may still exist unconsciously in how people judge someone's voice. It starts with first impressions and vocality.

In Canadian business, a deeper voice tends to be associated with power. A woman's voice that is stern and flat tends to be associated with power as well; however, a smile is equally important. Listeners prefer all genders to have an even sound in their voice as opposed to dramatic changes in inflection, as in a "sing-song" speaking style.

This also applies to ageism. If you seem young, it is critically important that you are familiar with the standard industry jargon and definitions, and older-looking candidates should be up to date in the language trends and views of modern corporate strategy. You are focusing not only on articulating the strengths of character required to do well in a role, but also on the culture of language that reflects the company values.

A woman named Beth Zemsky MAEd, LICSW, said, "Companies hire diversity and onboard for similar." There may be some truth to that statement, as some companies are hesitant to hire someone who seems different, and hire someone who looks and sounds the same as they do.

That sameness may not always come down to race, gender, age, or sexual orientation. It may simply come down to dress, posture, vocality, and specific language.

## Assessments

You can take a number of assessments to complement your interview. The most common assessments in the hiring processes include:

- aptitude tests;
- job knowledge tests (usually designed specifically for the company);
- integrity/ethical tests;
- personality tests;
- emotional intelligence tests; and/or
- skills assessments.

Candidates commonly ask, "How can you beat an assessment?" As a certified coach for psychometrics, I suggest just answering honestly. Lying in assessments can often be caught by the assessor, and you risk being exposed once you start your employment and can't perform to the expected standard.

## Types of Interviews

### Behavioural

A behavioural interview is meant to test your self-awareness and show your problem-solving skills by focusing on what you have done in detailed scenarios.

### Coffee Interview

These interviews happen more often when you are meeting with someone who is very busy or someone who wants to meet in a less formal setting.

### Lunch or Dinner

An interview over a meal is meant to see how you fit with the rest of the team or behave in a social setting. Eat something light and clean so that you are not distracted.

### Strength-Based

Uncovers what the candidate "loves to do" instead of what they "can do." Companies conducting these interviews want to be sure the candidate is passionate about the role.



### Informational

Informational interviews are conducted for you to learn more about a potential employer or industry. Go with an agenda and approach the conversation with gratitude.

### Stress Interview

If you research this type of interview, the questions are fairly standard. It's not about what is asked, but how it is asked. The interviewer usually uses a very authoritative tone and asks rapid-fire questions, which can almost come across as bullying. With this type of interview, they are trying to intimidate you and see how well you deal with this pressure and how well you can think on your feet. It is certainly not meant to make you feel comfortable.

This interview is used more often in sales; however, some organizations may use this technique if they have difficult leadership or top performers, or difficult clients. If you leave this type of interview feeling demoralized, this may not be a job for you. If you leave knowing you did well but didn't like the tone of the interview, this may not be the job for you. It takes a very specific type of individual to work in an environment that is rapid-fire and direct. Consider this when pursuing an opportunity with this type of organization.

### Phone Screen

After a recruiter identifies which resumes are of interest, they will call the candidate. This is your first contact with someone from the company, so it is important to be thoughtful when you pick up your phone. If you don't know the number and you are not available, let it go to voicemail and call them back at a more appropriate time.

### Phone Interviews

A phone interview is exactly that: an interview on the phone instead of in person.

### In-Person Interviews

- **One-on-One Interviews:** This is a meeting with one person only. There likely will be a sequence of one-on-one interviews unless you are interviewing with a small company, in which case there may be only one. You will usually start with an interview with a recruiter or an HR professional. If you pass that interviewer, then you will move up the organizational chart to be interviewed by someone in the department. The average number of interviews ranges from three to five. In some cases, all interviewers may ask the same questions. In other cases, everyone will ask their own questions, or some interviews may seem structured and others completely unstructured.
- **Traditional:** Most executives have participated in these. They focus on highlighting how your skills, experience, and accomplishments prove you are the best candidate for the role.
- **Panel Interviews:** This is an interview where multiple interviewers meet with you simultaneously. The benefit is that the hiring process can be shorter, and you will not have to have several meetings in one interview. Treat it no differently than you would a dinner party; when someone is talking, you look at them. When you are talking, speak to the entire table. You may focus a little more on the individual who asked the question.
- **Rotation Interviews:** Rotation interviews are back-to-back meetings with a number of people for set periods of time. For example, you may meet with six people, one at a time, in half-hour intervals. You are usually given an itinerary. This approach allows you to meet an entire team and some leadership in one day. Be patient; you could have five people ask you the same question over and over again. Know that will have to repeat yourself. These interviews require a lot of stamina, so bring a bottle of water in case one is not offered. I also recommend bringing a snack (e.g., an energy bar) and asking permission to eat if your blood sugar drops during a long interview. Advise them that you are monitoring your sugar.
- **Group:** The hiring team interviews a number of candidates at the same time. This is not very common for most executive roles.



## Video/ Virtual Interviews

Virtual interviews save the candidate and company money on travel costs, but still allow interviewers to observe the candidate's character. Prepare for these as you would for an in-person interview.

### Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Facetime, WhatsApp, Google

The most important thing you can do in a virtual interview is to make sure that the system is working. Install the app well in advance and test your microphone and video at least one day before your interview, then again a half hour in advance. Ask for help from the systems support number before the interview, and not from the recruiter or hiring manager. A recruiter is not an IT specialist. If your computer system is not compatible with the virtual system, it is best to find out beforehand so you or the recruiter can try another system together. A computer or tablet is a better choice than a phone. If you use a phone, position it at the same height as your face so your posture is good, and the interviewer isn't looking up your nostrils.

As a former recruiter, I can specifically tell you that 80 per cent of virtual interviews start late because of software issues that I could not solve, and people sometimes lost out on interviews altogether. If I had 30 minutes scheduled to speak and had another meeting immediately after, taking 25 minutes to get in the meeting gives you only five minutes to impress me. Believe me—I was never impressed by anyone who only had five minutes with me.

### Other things to note:

- Consider your background. When you have an interview on camera, you are inviting someone into your space. How clean or dirty you are is really no one's business but your own, so make sure you have a clean, non-descript background. Leave no room for irrelevant information dictating your future.
- Dress for success. A suit leaves an impression. It shows you are taking this meeting seriously and demonstrating respect.
- Try to find a quiet space. Advise the interviewer in advance if there is a chance of being interrupted by a child or pet. Explain what you are doing to maintain quietness, but be prepared for an unexpected interruption.
- Use a nicer glass if you want some water at hand.
- If you plan on taking notes, let the interviewer know so it makes sense when you aren't looking at the camera.
- Look into the camera, not the screen. A trick I use is to minimize the screen and place it right under the camera, so I am looking at the person and camera at the same time.
- Listen not just for interview questions, but comments as well. I know a gentleman who had an interview with a chin for 45 minutes and repeatedly had to be asked the candidate to move the camera. He tried graciously to listen to the answers and not judge the chin. In the end, another candidate won out. It could have been the chin, if they listened.

### Paying attention to other people's cues

Don't just throw information at the interviewer. Listening and paying attention is part of the interview. You must be able to listen to the exact question being asked and answer that question and not the question you think they are going to ask. In order to do this effectively, you can use several tricks:

- Do not speak until the interviewer has finished speaking. You will know when the interviewer has finished speaking if you are paying attention to the exact words that are being said, and notice the silences.
- Maintain eye contact. If you catch yourself looking away, quickly go back to making eye contact.
- Mirror the interviewer. If they are relaxed, be relaxed. If they are very serious, be serious.
- Watch the interviewer's body language. Do they start to rub their neck or head, stop writing and flop backwards into their chair? Do they stop making eye contact with you? These are signs that you may have lost your audience.
- To prevent losing their interest, make sure you are keeping your answers between two to three minutes long. Use the STAR technique: have a Specific example that clearly identifies the Task, the Action you took, and the Result.
- A raised eyebrow could indicate that your answer wasn't very clear, and two eyebrows up usually means shock or disgust.
- Nodding is a cue that the interviewer is interested in what you are saying.
- Be armed with all the information to answer all potential questions.
- The most important information you can have at hand is your truth—the truth of what you have done, good and bad.

Speaking the truth requires us to be honest with ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses. You can't Google the right answers. There is no cheating your way out of the truth. The right answers are the ones that reflect who you are, what you are about, what your values are, and what you have done or not done. If you use a stock answer, a seasoned recruiter will know. If you overstate your technical skills and are hired, your boss will find out, especially if you need to "hit the ground running."

### Using Your Job Journal

All of the answers to behavioural and technical questions are in you. Only you know the answers to the two most common questions, "Tell me about yourself" and "What is your greatest weakness?" Working on your job journal will help you put it all together. Your job journal will help you highlight what you are good at and what you are not as good at or interested in. It will help you clearly detail your values. This means you will be ready with effective questions to ask at the end of an interview to determine if this is the right job for you.

When you put together your job journal, you are defining yourself as a person and not just a job description. You are defining what the difference is between you doing a job and someone else doing the job. You may be the shining star, or you may be someone who is steady and reliable—a middle-of-the-road performer. Both individuals are equally important to an organization: sometimes a company needs an innovator, other times an organization needs someone who can put their head down, get the work done, and enjoy it. Some companies need a leader to be the glue that holds everything together, and other companies need a maverick. One way or another, you have a place. It's a matter of finding the right place for you.

Remember when answering questions, truthfully highlight what you can do for them and how their organization would be better off with you in the role. Key points that will create interest are:

- Saving money. Increasing revenue. Saving time. Improving processes. Awards, employee recognition, and quotes from performance reviews.

#### For example:

"Tell me about yourself."

Answer: Value Proposition = Buying Motivator  
+ Supporting Qualifications + Added Value

# Interview Questions



Interview questions are often a combination of behavioural and technical questions.

**Behavioural questions** are essentially scenario questions. They are looking at past behaviour to predict future behaviour. Ultimately, these types of interview questions provide insight into your self-awareness. How self-reliant are you? How do you approach problem-solving? There is more to it than just the right answer.

ALWAYS answer the questions with STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Using this technique will ensure you answer the question succinctly and prevent you from rambling.

## Some common behavioural questions are:

### 1. Describe a time when you had a conflict with a colleague. What was the problem? How did you resolve it?

Pro Tip: if you do not plan this question, you likely will default to the worst conflict you ever experienced. A conflict does not need to be a fight over a pop can in the fridge. A conflict can be two ideas at the table and having to come to a consensus to move on. Think of a number of different scenarios where you have encountered conflict, disagreement, or adversity. Preparing a number of well-thought-out scenarios will allow you to respond to multiple behavioural questions without relying on the same example repeatedly.

### 2. Tell me about a time when you did not meet a client's expectations. What happened, and how did you attempt to rectify the situation?

This is all about ownership and taking responsibility. They will expect an answer, and they will want to hear about the outcome. You should talk about the learning process of the experience. Screwing up can be one of the best teachers, and some mistakes have heavier consequences than others. Take the honest approach—you will be better off with it. On another note, if you are at the beginning of your career and have not failed to meet a client's expectations, be honest and say that you haven't had that experience. However, we don't go through life without conflict, so perhaps you can think of something from university that would be appropriate to highlight your experience with conflict.

### 3. What is your greatest weakness?

The only way to answer this is with the truth. You can consider where you are focusing on in your professional development or performance feedback. Talk about what you have learned and how you are tackling the problem. This question evaluates what supports you may need and that you have some self-awareness. As an alternative approach, you could identify tasks that you don't like, explain how you are still competent in those areas, but would prefer that those tasks not be a major component of the role. If you experience pushback, you could suggest you would not be interested in the position if these tasks are the major competency required for the job.

## Salary Expectations and Negotiation

At some point, employers will ask directly or indirectly about salary. This is typically an elimination question. Some recruiters will ask this upfront to save time if your salary expectations are too high. Other HR or recruiters will ask at the end of a phone screening interview. Others will not bring up salary until an offer letter is tabled, with an indirect comment like, "Well, if I can't afford you, let me know." In any event, you should be prepared to give a good answer to the question to be considered for the next part of the interview process.

Talking about money can make people nervous, especially in the first decades of your career.

You may want to consider a few factors: Know the absolute minimum you need to survive.

- Know what the market rate is (do some research to determine this).
- Consider your salary history and benefits.
- Evaluate the job description. If you are being asked to do less, it may not make sense to have a higher salary.
- Research the type of company and the economic state of the industry. A non-profit will not be able to compete with the salary offered at a large oil-and-gas company. If an industry is suffering due to the economy, they may not be able to match previous inflated salaries. When salaries are clawed back, it is called a salary correction.

Define your worth and be willing to walk away if their offer is too low. The employer just can't afford you.

I always recommend asking for more. When you are at the beginning of your career, the range should be \$2,000 to \$3,000 more. Senior management and executives can negotiate many thousands more.

## Closing the interview

Say thank you.

Confirm your interest in the job, unless you are not interested.

Remind them why you are qualified and why you think you would be a good fit for the job.

Use the assumptive sales close. An assumptive close is also known as a presumptive close. This technique assumes that you are moving onto the next steps of the hiring process, or you could assume you have the job. You want to use this as an opportunity to confidently ask about the next steps and timelines. It is a good idea to research the topic and find a close that is best suited to you.



## Post-Interview Debrief

Some questions to journal about at the end of an interview: Were there any trends in their questioning?

3. When you notice trends during the interview, you may want to contemplate why they spent so much time on one specific topic, like conflict. If you only notice it upon reflection, you may want to treat that as a flag. Perhaps they have strong relationships and are conflict-free, and don't want to hire someone who rocks the boat. Perhaps they have a high turnover in the role because of conflict. Regardless, take note.
4. What do you feel went well?
5. What do you feel didn't go well, and how you could improve?
6. Which questions did you find particularly hard?
7. How was your vocality?
8. How was your body language?
9. How was your close?

### Realistic Expectations

- People don't like delivering bad news. You may not hear back from the recruiter.
- Some people may want to pull the trigger; however, other stakeholders may be involved, which can slow down the hiring process to months.
- Always ask for feedback. However, realize that not everyone has the tact to do so, or company policies may prevent them from doing so.

They might have legitimate reasons to turn you down. Even though you may have thought the job was for you, if the environment doesn't fit, then you have saved yourself some sleepless nights.

## Interview Close - Thank you

### You can send a card or an email.

- Send a thank-you note one to 24 hours later. However, late is better than never.
- Send a note to each interviewer. This requires you getting information from each interviewer, or at least writing down their names.
- You may need to go through a recruiter to have the note passed on.
- Refer to the position, date, and time.
- If you are interested in the role, tell them why and briefly describe how you will be a good fit.
- You can address any objections that you may not have been able to address previously.
- End with a presumptive close.

### No thank you

- If you do not want this is a position, let the employer know sooner rather than later.
- Thank the interviewers for their time.
- Acknowledge their busy schedules and express your appreciation for being brought in.
- Close with, "Upon further reflection, this role is not for me."
- You are not obliged to give an explanation unless you want to.
- Be sure that the reason you decline is because it's something you don't want, rather than because you think you didn't do well and want to cut your losses. Don't make the wrong assumption.

# Protected Rights

What to do if someone asks you inappropriate questions?

Evaluate your choices and consequences:

- Answer the question.
- Refuse to answer.
- Ask what the relevance of the question is.
- Use humour and brush it off.
- Ignore it.
- End the interview politely and leave.

There are also “backdoor questions,” which are indirect questions that provide opportunity for discriminatory decision-making. For example, someone may ask where you went to high school when you clearly have a degree, your designation, and many years of Canadian work experience. That question may be used to determine place of origin, which is a direct violation of the Human Rights Act both in Alberta and in Canada.

Sometimes someone may ask you questions that you feel are inappropriate. Those questions may be asked innocently by someone who is truly curious, or they could reflect bias or unconscious bias.

Bias usually reflects an underlying concern. If you choose to ask why it’s relevant, you should approach the question with kindness. For example, a question about children may be linked to a concern about the ability to work overtime. This concern may be a result of a bad experience. If you get to the root cause, you may decide to address it. You equally have the right to decide you aren’t interested in moving forward and politely decline to proceed.

Depending on the employer, you will either be protected under Alberta Human Rights or Canadian Human Rights.

Alberta Human Rights Interview Question Violations:

[www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/bulletins\\_sheets\\_booklets/sheets/hr\\_and\\_employment/Pages/pre\\_employment\\_inquiries\\_guide.aspx](http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/bulletins_sheets_booklets/sheets/hr_and_employment/Pages/pre_employment_inquiries_guide.aspx)

Canadian Human Rights Interview Question Violations:

[www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/guide-screening-and-selection-employment](http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/guide-screening-and-selection-employment)