



Getting a Job: Building Your Interview Skills

Filling out a job application and creating a resume are only two parts to getting a job. Another important part is how you interview. People with disabilities communicate in many different ways, but it all means the same at the end. Some may have limited verbal communication, but may use a speech board, an interpreter, or another form of communication. Making a good impression during a job interview doesn't only include how you answer questions. Here are some other ways to shine during the job interview process.

- **Come Prepared**

Coming prepared to a job interview includes bringing a copy of your resume and the names and contact information for two or three references. References are people who you feel would give positive information about you and have known you for two or more years. Your list should include people who are not related to you, like a past co-worker, a friend's parents, a school advisor or a community leader. You should also try to learn as much as you can about the place you are applying before the interview. Looking online at their website or reading brochures, etc. can help you know how your skills could be helpful to them.

- **Be On Time**

It's better to be early than late. If the interview is at a place that you are unsure of, give yourself plenty of extra time to get there. If you are arranging a ride on paratransit or through a friend, make sure to plan your trip in advance. Do your "homework." Find out how many miles it is away from your home, and think about whether or not you'll be traveling during high traffic hours. The last thing you want to do at an interview is explain why you were late. Getting to the interview on time leaves the impression that you are punctual and dependable.

- **Dress Appropriately and Be Well Groomed**

The way you look at an interview is the way you will be remembered. Dress the part. Wearing a button-down, collared shirt or a dressy sweater with nice pants or a skirt and dress shoes is preferable. If you are going to interview for a 'high level' or professional job, wearing a suit may be more appropriate. Avoid clothes that may be more memorable than what you say. You do not want the person interviewing you to be so distracted by your outfit or hairstyle that they cannot hear what you are talking about. Stay away from clothing with flashy colors and slogans. Neatly brushing your hair,

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maintaining fresh breath, and having clean hands are also important. If you are a manual wheelchair user, you may want to have some hand wipes nearby to clean your hands before you go into the interview. And NO gum chewing!

- **Ask Questions as Needed**

If you have done your research before the interview, you may have questions about the tasks you will be expected to perform, expectations of the job or even the benefits. There should be time during the interview, usually near the end, where you can ask these questions.

It's common to feel nervous and anxious during an interview. Know your rights in an interview. There are questions that are illegal for employers to ask, including questions about your disability, your marital status, your age (unless there is an age requirement for the job, then they can ask you if you are over a certain age), or if you have children.

An employer **can** ask if you will be able to do a job with reasonable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations mean that you can do the job using some adaptations or piece of equipment (assistive technology). For example, using a speech recognition program to type documents on a computer or using a stool to sit behind a counter instead of standing. You should let the employer know that you can do the job with reasonable accommodations if they ask but then talk in detail about it after you are hired.

After the interview, it is good manners to send a thank you note to each person that interviewed you. The note does not need to be lengthy but should acknowledge that someone took the time to talk with you and should remind him or her that you are interested and available to answer any more questions. This can also go a long way to helping your resume float to the top of the pile!

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