



PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH LESS THAN 24 HOURS

Preparing for an important interview can be a challenge, however, the difficulty increases when you weren't expecting an interview and have limited time. Many hiring managers attempt to schedule well ahead of time and a general rule of thumb is that you should be ready to interview as soon as you submit your resume. In the event you have limited time to prepare, we suggest using these proven steps to maximize your chances for success:

1. **Study your resume.** Make sure you know what's on your own resume and can speak to every item listed. If asked to discuss something, tell a story about it and don't just repeat the words on the resume.

2. **Study the job advertisement,** posting, or job description and identify the skills, experiences, or competencies required for the position. This is an important step which sets the stage for all other actions. Do not proceed further until you've identified at least 5-10 items. If the position is a managerial role, you should identify managerial-type skills or experiences (working with people, conflict resolution, or resource utilization) that would most closely align with the position. If the role is technical or administrative, identify those skills or experiences which would be required (analytic experience, programming languages, familiarity with specific tools and software applications, or customer support). You can also identify common skills and experiences of importance to this position (communication, time management, or attention to detail).

3. Using your list from step #2, **think of potential questions** that might be asked to get at these skills,

experiences, or competencies. For example – if the position requires customer service experience, they might ask “tell us about how you deal with customers.” They might be more interested in a subset of this question, such as dealing with irritated customers. The key is to develop general or broad questions which encompass all aspects of the customer service concept. For managerial positions, the concept they want to understand might be your managerial style and a good question would be “tell us about how you manage people.” The same approach could be taken for a program manager position with a question being “tell us about how you manage programs.” Realistically, you should come up with at least 10 generalized questions that focus on the skills, experiences, or competencies identified in the prior step.

4. Now that you have a list of potential interview questions, you need to **conduct a self-assessment.** Your goal in this step is to identify your skills and experiences which align with the interview questions and areas/concepts of interest that were identified in prior steps. You should begin by reviewing your resume which includes materials you'll want to use when answering questions. You also need to ask yourself the following types of questions. We suggest that you make a list of your answers:

What kinds of work do I like to do? | What types of work am I good at? | What has made me successful? What achievements am I most proud of? | Where do I see myself in 2, 5 or 10 years? | Why do I want this position? | When have I failed, why did I fail, and





what did I learn? | Do I prefer working in a group or alone? | Do I prefer a set or changing schedule? | What is my work style? | What is my preferred communication style? | What is my learning style?

5. **Match strengths, skills, and experiences** from your self-assessment with the questions developed in prior steps. The goal is to align your strengths, skills, and experiences with those that will most likely be asked about during the interview. A good technique is to write out the potential interview questions from step #3 followed by your strengths, skills, and experiences that best align with each question.

6. **Identify your key messages.** At this point, you should have a fair amount of material that can be discussed during the interview. It's now time to identify the most important items that you need to include within your interview discussions. Key messages might include accomplishments, strengths, skills, or experiences that exceed what's required, or anything that could make a positive impact on the hiring decision. Make sure you find a way to highlight these in your conversations with the hiring manager.

7. **Identify what distinguishes you** from other candidates. Is there anything that sets you apart, in a positive way, from others who might be applying for this position? If so, you need to highlight these in your responses and discussions. Consider mentioning what makes you "uniquely qualified" for the position in your opening and closing interview statements.

8. **Develop tailored responses.** Based upon the outcomes from the previous steps, you're now ready to develop tailored responses to potential questions and topics that might be discussed during the

interview or hiring process. We suggest using a structured response format (such as the **STAR** model) to ensure responses are clear, make sense, and demonstrate your potential value to the organization. Begin your answers with the **S**ituation you encountered or a **T**ask you needed to complete. Next, you should discuss the **A**ction(s) you took to address the situation or to complete the task. If done as part of a team, make sure you talk about your specific part of the action step, not just about the team's actions. Finally, you must highlight the positive **R**esults that were achieved in response to your actions. Remember to use a structured approach when developing your responses – be a **STAR**.

9. **Practice your communications.** This is critical and often overlooked in the preparation process since interviews aren't just about what you say, they're about how you say it. Once you've developed your responses along with key messages for the interview, you need to practice delivering these out-loud to yourself and with someone else. Practice your answers to potential interview questions until all your responses make sense, flow well, and your body language aligns with your answer.

10. **Study, identify connections, and relax.** If there's still time before the interview, we suggest that you continue your study of the organization, industry, and position. Try to identify who you'll meet with, their role within the organization, and background. Look for any connections you might have with these individuals such as schools attended, hometowns, community groups, churches, military experiences, fraternities/sorority, sports or hobbies. Finally, take a breath, relax, and get ready for a great interview.