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## Interview prep 101

### Three things to know before facing a potential employer

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Jist Publishing

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**Your job interview is approaching and you've put your portfolio together, written your resume, edited your cover letter and made a dozen phone calls ... are you forgetting anything?**

"The interview is the most important 60 minutes in the job search," states Michael Farr in his recently released book "Next-Day Job Interview" (Jist Publishing).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in November 2005 that 7.6 million persons were unemployed in the United States. Competition for jobs is tough, which means job seekers must be prepared to make an outstanding impression during their interviews.

Many employers choose to hire people who present themselves well in an interview over people with equal -- or even better -- credentials. Research indicates, however, that most people are not well-prepared for interviews.

"Despite all the advances in hiring technology, most people still get hired -- or, more often, screened-out -- based on a personal interview," Farr writes.

Many job seekers spend hours perfecting their resumes and days studying lists of potential interview questions, trying to guess what the employer will ask, and attempting to memorize pre-fabricated answers. This approach to interview preparation is not the only solution and often leads to a higher level of anxiety over the impending meeting.



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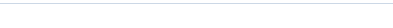
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Rather than focusing solely on possible interview questions, there are three essential areas that you should focus on to have a successful job interview: yourself, the industry and the employer.

### Know yourself

Knowing what you excel in is a critical part of an interview because it can ultimately help you obtain the job.

"Most people are not good at recognizing and listing the skills they have," Farr warns. "On average, everyone has 300 to 500 skills. The problem is that they can't translate this in an interview."

In his book, Farr cites an employer survey that found "more than 90 percent of the people they interview cannot adequately define the skills they have that support their ability to do the job."

You can gain an edge over the competition by knowing the different types of skills you possess, such as adaptive (self-management), transferable (general) and job-related (specific). You should also be able to communicate them well and back them up with proof.

Understanding your skills has additional long-term benefits for you. Knowing what you are good at can also help you determine if the career is the right fit for you.

"Unless you use the skills that you enjoy using and are good at," Farr explains, "you are unlikely to be fully satisfied in your job."

### Know the industry

Research is the key to understanding the industry that you are pursuing and the information you gather will be invaluable as you interview for the job. For example, knowing the average salary for people in a particular job will help you negotiate for fair pay. Knowing what the potential growth is in the field will help you determine what the demand is for people with your expertise.

"Do a news search, read its recent press releases and annual report, and talk to others," advises Kate Lorenz of CareerBuilder.com. "Chances are you will be asked the important question, 'Why do you want to work for our company?' or 'What do you know about our business?' Failing to show that you have done your research will tell your interviewer you didn't care enough to take the time to prepare."

There are several resources available for researching careers. One example, the Occupational Outlook Handbook, is updated every two years by the U.S. Department of Labor and provides descriptions for about 280 of the most popular jobs in the country, organized within clusters of related jobs. It includes information on salaries, growth projections, related jobs, required skills, education or training needed, and much more. Other examples include the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) database, from the U.S. Department of Labor.

You can also increase opportunities in your job search by identifying a wider range of job targets. Looking up all job descriptions within a cluster of related jobs will uncover many new job titles and possibilities to expand your search. Additionally, this research will unveil key skills that are expected of you so that you can emphasize them in your interviews and resume.

### Know the employer

"The more you know about the job, the industry and the employer, the more likely you are to present yourself well in the interview," Farr writes.

The interviewer will be more impressed with you if you can demonstrate a good knowledge of the company. Knowing the organization's background will also give you the opportunity to ask strong questions during the interview.

Researching a company may seem like a difficult task, but there are many ways to easily obtain useful information. Begin by talking to current or former employees of the

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company. If you don't know any employees, the next step is to approach the company itself and ask for information such as product catalogs, brochures, reports or other literature that explains the purpose, products or services of the organization. You may also find much of this information on the company's Web site, usually in the "About us" or "Media" sections.

Doing research will also help you decide if the company is a good fit for you. You will gain insight on the work environment, philosophy, community involvement, growth potential and more.

"You should evaluate employers just as carefully as they evaluate you," Farr explains.

Many job seekers today are faced with extremely busy schedules -- juggling school, one or multiple jobs, families or volunteer activities. It can be a big challenge to find time for any interview preparation at all. This is why it is even more crucial to spend preparation time wisely.

"My experience with thousands of job seekers," Farr writes, "is that just a few hours of learning and practice is often enough to make a big difference."

ThirdAge Inc. recommends that while preparing for interviews you should "ask a friend or associate in human resources or another field of management to conduct a practice interview with you and give you feedback on what he or she observes in the mock interview." A friend can often observe mannerisms or weak spots that you may be unaware of and help you to correct them.

Don't get trapped into memorizing hundreds of interview questions. Prepare for the most important part of the job search by taking a few hours to learn about yourself and research the job to decide if it's the right fit for you.

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