

12 Steps to a Knock Out Interview



If you are selected for an interview, preparation is key. Note that you may go to several interviews for the same job. For example, your first interview may be with a staffing agency and your second interview with its client.

Step 1: Confirm the appointment

Do this one day before your interview. Know the location of the interview. Try to find out how long you'll be there. And make sure you have your contact's phone number(s) in case you need to call.

Step 2: Clear your calendar

If possible, keep your schedule free of any other commitments that day. The interview might run over or you could be asked to stay longer during the appointment. Explaining that you have to be somewhere else could create an awkward situation that should be avoided.

Step 3: Say the interviewer name(s) correctly

If you know the names of interviewers in advance, confirm the pronunciation and spelling prior to the appointment. If necessary, ask the receptionist to help you with pronunciations. It's a part of his or her job.

Step 4: Be on time

Arrive no more than 10 minutes early but whatever you do, don't be late! Arriving late will create an impression that you are unreliable. If unforeseen circumstances arise and you must be late, do everything you can to call ahead of time.

Step 5: Dress to impress

If possible, learn in advance what attire is appropriate for the interview. If you're still not sure, dress conservatively in a dark suit.

Step 6: Let them know you've arrived

Walk to the receptionist, smile, shake hands, introduce yourself, and state that you have an appointment with your contact's name.

Step 7: Shut off the cell phone

Unless you are experiencing a bona fide crisis, turn off your cell phone upon arrival.

Step 8: Use your mouth only for talking

Unless the interview is scheduled with a meal, nothing should be in your mouth but words. Drinking, eating, smoking, and chewing gum must be avoided.

Step 9: Prepare a short statement about you

Be ready to answer the question, "Tell me about yourself and your background." This is your "stump speech" and should include some information on the types of companies and industries you have worked for, your strengths, transferable skills, and some personal traits. Practice saying this statement until it feels natural.

Step 10: Be prepared to talk about your successes and experiences

The prospective employer will want to learn about your past experience—successes and failures (as learning experiences), work ethic, and professional track record. Be able to amplify every item on your résumé.

Step 11: Be nice

Everyone you meet during your interview—from the receptionist to the interviewer(s)—should be treated with the utmost respect and courtesy. The receptionist might not be conducting the interview, but his or her opinion of you might be solicited.

Step 12: Promptly follow up

Decide if an email follow-up is appropriate. If any documents were requested, such as references, employment application, or samples of your work—all are reasons for an email, assuming you have them in electronic form. In any event, it's always a best practice to send a thank-you letter or note—on paper, mailed in an envelope—within a day of the interview. In some cases, an email thank-you note may be appropriate (e.g., if the turnaround time for a decision will be very quick).

