Do’s and Don’ts for Job Interviews

The overriding theme for interviewing is preparation. Preparation builds confidence and helps to calm your nerves during an interview. Prepare to be asked open-ended questions because interviewers use these to dive deeper into the meaning and motivation behind your responses.

Prepare to give really good examples of why you are right for the job. Know yourself and be able to tell the interviewer what impact you’ve had at previous companies. People want to hire people that can prove they get results. Know what you bring to the company and to the position.

“Do’s”

1. Take a pre-trip at least a day before the interview so you know exactly where it is and how long it takes to get there. Just watching a few people enter the building can help you discern the dress code.

2. Bring 5 copies of your resume in case there are multiple interviewers, and keep a copy for yourself if you think you may need to remind yourself of talking points of your career.

3. Bring a notepad with questions for the interviewer and as a way to take any notes.

4. If the interview is online with a Web cam, make sure none of the posters or pictures in camera-shot are inappropriate. Make sure there is no loud outside noise that will make it hard to hear your answers. Make sure to dress well for the interview as if you were in person.

5. Know your answer to the question, “Why do you want to be in IT?” Or, “Why did you enroll in PrepareU?” Or, “How did your training/degree prepare you for work?”

6. Know your answer to the question, “Why do you want to work here?” A well thought-out response will show that you are not simply interested in a job, but that you’ve researched the company and know about them.

7. Prepare for situational questions such as, “Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a conflict with a customer or co-worker and the steps you took.” Or, “Give me an example of when you provided exceptional customer service.”

8. Prepare to answer questions specific to the position that you are applying to. For example, “Why do you want to work on our Help Desk?”
9. Expect to answer, “Tell me how what you learned in your training applies to this Service Desk position.” It’s very helpful to review the job description in advance so that you can refer to specific topics and information covered in the IT-Ready class that satisfy the needs of their position.

10. Remain positive during your interview, even when asked questions about a negative time in your employment. If you need to answer a question about being let go, be specific with the reason but then speak on the positive. “I didn’t meet the quota, but during my time at ABC Company I was recognized for excellent customer services based on survey responses received from customers I worked with.”

11. “Tell me how about yourself, or tell me how you spend your free time.” Keep responses concise and stay away from political or religious opinions. Remember that you are not obligated to talk about your family situation.

12. “How well do you handle multi-tasking and resolving issues quickly?” This can give the interviewer an idea of how well you’ll work under pressure, especially on the phone.

13. If asked a technical question that you don’t know the answer to, do not respond, “I don’t know.” Rather, think about how you might go about coming up with a solution on the job, whether that be consulting the knowledge base available to you or leaning on one of your co-workers for that specific information. Help Desk and Service Desk positions will present new challenges every day and an interviewer wants to know that you have a passion and a methodology for solving problems.

14. “Outside of the training received in the IT-Ready program, what practical knowledge or relevant experience do you bring to this position?” If you have experience removing viruses from your computer or other friends and family members, let the interviewer know this.

15. Make good eye contact throughout the interview and give a firm handshake at the beginning and end. Both of these demonstrate that you are engaged and interested in meeting the interviewer.

“Don’ts”

1. Don’t lie on your resume. People have been hired and then lost jobs as a result of this.

2. Don’t show up late for an interview. Give yourself extra time to arrive early. Being rushed and in a hurry while driving to an interview will only get your nerves rattled.
3. Don’t leave your cell phone on (even in vibrating mode) because that shows a lack of respect for the interviewer. In fact, don’t even look at your phone while waiting for your interview. Review your resume instead.

4. Don’t give a weak handshake. Women, too, should give a firm handshake and look the interviewer in the eye.

5. Don’t be afraid to smile and be yourself as long as being yourself is professional.

6. Don’t speak negatively about a previous employer or colleague. Remain positive. Any negative points that need to be spoken about should be short and to the point and followed up by positive outcomes regarding that same negative point. For example, “I did end up quitting that position because I didn’t feel it was a good fit for me. However, during the time I worked there I learned a lot about working as a team and how to handle tough customers. And I really respected my manager for taking the time to work with me when I had questions.”

7. Don’t give a long answer or ramble on. Use the problem-action-result approach to keep you on point. Describe the problem, the action you took to resolve it, and the outcome that resulted.

8. Don’t dwell on employment gaps. If you took courses in the interim, respond that you focused on improving your skills and knowledge to prepare for a career in IT.

9. Don’t stalk the interviewer for feedback after your interview. The more you chase after people, the less inclined they are to call you back or want to call back. Follow up is fine as long as it is spaced out appropriately.

10. Don’t forget to send a “Thank You” note after the interview. A brief note after an interview is an opportunity to summarize a few key benefits you bring to the position, or to simply show that you’re truly interested. If six candidates interview for the position and you’re the only one that does not send a follow up thank you message, chances are the interviewer will think you’re not interested, even if you are.

11. Don’t give canned answers to questions. Instead, have a conversation that is meaningful. If you know why someone should hire you and what you’ve achieved, you can turn the interview into a conversation.
12. Don’t get rattled. Interviewers will often asked questions designed to throw you off. They are testing you on how you respond to stress and how you will troubleshoot problems. When you get a question that initially throws you off, pause and respond with an even demeanor and to the best of your ability.

13. Don’t show inflexibility in terms of what hours you’ll work, days of the week and starting compensation. Remember, employers can hire anyone they want and you may be unemployed with very little leverage. You want them to hire you. Don’t give them reasons not to.

Also, understand what you’re planning for your future IT career path. Companies want to see initiative and drive. However, be cognizant of the fact that they also want you to be happy in the position that you’re applying for, so don’t get too far ahead of yourself with expectations.