

career
development manitoba



A GUIDE TO
**OUTSTANDING
INTERVIEWS**

YOUR **FUTURE** YOUR **WAY**

Manitoba 

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Introduction

About This Guide

By this point in the job search process, you've thought about who you are, set goals, researched employers, applied for jobs and now landed an interview. This guide will help you to prepare for that interview, so you can effectively demonstrate your skills, experience and talents.

Remember, the interview is only one part of your job search activities. For more information about career planning, tips for success in the workplace and other related topics, please visit: www.manitoba.ca/careerdevelopment.

If you are having difficulty with any part of the guide, another helpful resource is your local Employment Manitoba Centre. To find one near you call: 1-866-332-5077 or go to www.gov.mb.ca/employment/emp_centre_locations.html

Several symbols are used in this guide to help highlight key points, suggestions, cautions, tips and examples.

 <p>EXAMPLE</p>	<p>indicates an example</p>
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 <p>REMEMBER</p>	<p>outlines items to remember</p>
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 <p>ACTIVITY</p>	<p>introduces an activity to complete</p>
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 <p>AVOID</p>	<p>indicates things to avoid</p>
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What's the Purpose of an Interview?

Interviews are an important part of the job search process. They're an opportunity for employers and job seekers to learn about one another before making any job offers or employment commitments.

In an interview, an interviewer can:

- learn about what you have done and what you can do
- find out how relevant your past work experience is to the job
- see your interpersonal and communication skills in action
- judge your suitability for the job
- test your knowledge and skills
- see how motivated and committed you are to the job
- see how you respond to stressful situations

Recruiting and training new employees is expensive. Employers use interviews as a way to make sure their investment is a good one.

As the interviewee, you can:

- highlight your skills, qualifications and accomplishments
 - link them to the job you are interviewing for
- minimize potential negatives (ex: employment gaps, inconsistent work history)
- show good interpersonal and communication skills
- highlight what you know about the job and organization
- share your career goals and relate them to the job and organization
- ask questions that will help you learn more about the job and organization
- ensure the job is right for you and meets your work/life preferences



REMEMBER

When preparing for your interview, remember to look at:

- your resume
- your cover letter
- job advertisement and/or job description
- your portfolio (if you don't have a portfolio, **A Guide to Building a Career Portfolio** can help you get started)
- notes from informational interviews



REMEMBER

From the time you walk into the building, act as you would during the interview. Smile and be polite and respectful to everyone you come in contact with. You never know, the receptionist who you ignored when you walked in could be one of the interviewers!

Throughout this guide, you'll find tips and information to help you improve your chances of having a successful interview.

What Types of Interviews Are There?

There are six different types of interviews that employers commonly use. Regardless of the type of interview, most employers want to see that you have a good attitude, will work well with their company, know about the job and organization and are willing and able to learn. The key to succeeding in any type of interview is to prepare for your interview by practicing questions in advance.



REMEMBER

Practice with sample questions before the interview so that you're prepared and less likely to manage silent moments with fillers like "uh, um, er." Use the **Common Interview Questions** worksheet (**Appendix A**) to get started and consider writing out your answer to better prepare yourself.

Screening Interview

A screening interview is usually brief and focuses on making sure the applicant meets the basic criteria for the job. This can be an effective way of meeting a large number of applicants (ex: at a job fair) and narrowing down the number that will be invited for a longer interview. You may only have a few minutes to create an impression so plan to make the most of this opportunity.

One-on-One Interview

One-on-one interviews are common. They involve one interviewer and one applicant. These interviews may be less stressful than a panel or group interview as there is only one person to focus on. Each interviewer is different. An interviewer could be a recruiter or human resources manager who may know very little about the job. An interviewer might be a hiring manager who knows the job well. In either case, try to make a personal connection with the interviewer. For example, you may have been referred by a friend of the interviewer; mention his or her name. You may notice a trophy in the office from a sport you play well. Look for natural connections that will help the interviewer remember you.

Panel or Committee Interview

Panel or committee interviews involve more than one interviewer. The interviewers will take turns asking you questions. Each interviewer helps make the hiring decision. Focus on the interviewer who is asking you a question but make eye contact with all the rest.

Group Interview

Group interviews are becoming more popular. They let interviewers meet with many applicants at once. Group interviews might involve an information session where the employer talks about the job and organization. They might also involve direct questions and group activities. Preparing for this type of interview can be tough. Focus on being a team player; show your good communication and people skills. Group interviews can also be a great opportunity to show leadership skills; try to find the right time to demonstrate them.

Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews can be used to screen applicants, minimize interview costs, or bridge a distance gap. With no face-to-face contact, telephone interviews can be challenging. The following helpful tips will make them a bit easier:

- Schedule a time when you will not be interrupted. Allow plenty of time for the call.
- Turn off your call waiting indicator.
- Dress like you're going to a face-to-face interview. It will boost your confidence.
- Organize your space – make sure you have a copy of your resume, job description and any other information or materials that might be helpful.
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm for the job by ensuring your responses sound energetic, upbeat and friendly.

Informal Lunch/Coffee Interview

Lunch or coffee interviews are usually more casual than other types of interviews but they can be more stressful because you have to manage eating and drinking while talking. Be polite, listen carefully and avoid foods that are messy or difficult to eat. These less formal interviews offer a great opportunity to let your personality shine and show how you fit in.



REMEMBER

When you accept a job interview, find out a few things that will help you prepare for it:

- What type of job interview will it be?
- Who is conducting the interview (ex: recruiter, hiring manager)?
- How long will the interview last?
- Where is the interview?
- Will there be any written tasks?
- Obtain a job description.

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How Can I Prepare for an Interview?

Researching the Position/Organization

You will have likely researched the job and organization when you wrote your resume and cover letter to apply for the job. Now that you have an interview booked, do a bit more research to make sure you understand the organization and the job. Things to research include:

- goals
- mission
- vision
- customer base
- core business
- activities
- tasks
- working conditions

This research will help you effectively answer interview questions. You will also be able to link your skills, abilities and unique talents to the job and the organization.



REMEMBER

There are lots of places to look for more information, including:

- organization's website
- annual reports
- trade journals, magazines
- internet searches
- organization's human resources department
- job descriptions
- current or former employees

For more information about the occupation or competencies that you might need, check out:

- Working in Canada Tool
 - www.workingincanada.gc.ca
- National Occupational Classification
 - www5.hrsdc.gc.ca/noc/english/noc/2006/welcome.aspx



ACTIVITY

Use the space provided to record your research findings and reflect on how you see yourself within the organization. Some questions to think about include:

- How do my values compare to those of the organization?
- What would a typical day at work look like?
- Which skills will I get to use most at work?
- Do I have any unique skills or abilities that would help the company?
- Which skills will I need to work on?

One of the best resources for researching a job or organization is people. Informational interviews can provide lots of good information that could help you prepare for your interview. You could interview people who work in the type of job you're interested in or who work for the company you want to work for.



EXAMPLE

Use the Informational Interview questions in **A Guide to Conducting an Effective Job Search** to guide you as you conduct your research.

30-Second Elevator Statements

Your interview may begin with a request like "tell me about yourself." An "elevator statement" can help you make a great first impression. Elevator statements are short (about 30 seconds) and clear. Think of your statement as a sales tool. If you only had 30 seconds to convince the employer to hire you, what does he or she really need to know?



REMEMBER

Some of the things that you could include in your statement are:

- relevant information about you that relates to the position (education, paid/unpaid experience, skills and abilities)
- why the position interests you
- why you're a good fit for the position and organization



EXAMPLE

Jennifer Meyer:

Jennifer is a recent graduate who just landed her first job interview. She wrote the following 30-second elevator statement that she will practice and hopes to use in her interview.

I recently completed a Computer Systems Technology diploma. I really love the technical challenges in this type of work. I even like the problems. It's great to see the people I help get excited about new equipment and become less frustrated when I find ways to make their systems run smoothly. I'd love to work for your company because you're known for offering great network support. Working here would let me use the skills I developed in school and also continue to learn.

Sarah Jones:

Sarah also wrote an elevator statement. She is interested in finding employment as a sales clerk after being home with her children for the past 10 years.

I love fashion and have wonderful customer service skills. I've always been told I have a knack for helping people find a "look" that suits them. Amy's Boutique offers an amazing selection of women's clothes. I'd love the opportunity to work here, helping your customers look and feel their best.



ACTIVITY

Write your own 30-second elevator statement here. You may need to rewrite it a few times to find the best combination of words and phrases to highlight your assets. Once you've got a 30-second speech that you love, memorize it, practice it and use it!

If you require additional information see **A Guide to Conducting an Effective Job Search.**

Practice Techniques

The best way to improve your interview skills is through practice! Find a friend, co-worker, family member, or career practitioner to help you practice your skills. Try to use questions related to the job you're applying for. Look at the job ad, the organization's website or brochures, or a job description. Make a list of questions that you might get asked during the interview, and use the **Common Interview Questions** worksheet (**Appendix A**).

For more information about commonly asked interview questions and sample responses visit Quintessential Careers at http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/.



REMEMBER

To practice effectively:

- use the same format as the real interview
 - ex: phone, face-to-face, panel
- videotape your practice
 - review the video and critique yourself
- sometimes play the role of interviewer
 - understand the interviewer's perspective
- complete the activities in this guide

Effective Story Telling

Whether you are writing your resume or preparing for an interview, it's important to find ways to make your skills stand out. You can do this through good communication and storytelling. Think of examples where you did well at work, at school, or while volunteering. Break those examples down into three parts:

1. the issue
2. what you did about it
3. the outcome

This approach will help you tell effective stories in your interview.



EXAMPLE

Susan York:

Susan took several years off work to raise her children. She has been working part-time as a bank teller since her youngest started school. Now Susan is looking for full-time work. She wants to create an effective story that she can use in a job interview.

By answering three questions, Susan created a powerful story. Here's her example:

The issue: As a part-time bank teller, I got to know some of my clients very well. One day, one of my clients came into the bank really upset! He was leaving that afternoon to go to Florida for a month. When he was at the drugstore buying a few last-minute supplies, he realized that his Visa card was missing from his wallet! He thinks he dropped it in the parking lot when he used it earlier that morning. However, when he went back to look, it wasn't there.

What I did about it: I immediately helped the client report his missing card. We arranged for a new one to be sent to his hotel in Florida. I helped him set up his debit card to allow cash withdrawals until his new card arrived.

The outcome: The client was able to get away on his vacation as planned. His card arrived a couple of days later. He was so excited that he sent flowers to me at the bank and wrote a wonderful letter to my manager. Here's a copy...



ACTIVITY

Use the space provided to develop your own great story to share in an interview. Ensure the stories relate directly to the position you are being interviewed for.

What was the issue?

What did you do about it?

What was the outcome?

Handling Illegal Interview Questions

In Canada it's illegal to discriminate based on personal characteristics that do not affect one's ability to do a job. Most employers don't ask illegal questions but it's possible that you may still get asked one of these questions. The best way to handle illegal questions is to be prepared.



REMEMBER

It's illegal to discriminate based on:

- age
- race
- gender
- ethnicity
- religious or political affiliation
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- disability

If you're asked an illegal question, you have a few options. You could:

- answer the question
- politely refuse to answer the question
- look for the underlying question and answer it instead



EXAMPLE

Frank Peters:

The following example is from Frank's interview for a position as a Quality Assurance Coordinator/HR Trainer. Frank is a 46 year-old, divorced father of two; he is looking for work. Frank was injured in a workplace accident and is unable to keep doing his previous job. During the interview Frank was asked an illegal question about his relationship status. Frank chose to answer the interviewer's question because it seemed clear that the interviewer's intent was to find out if Frank could commit the time needed for the job.

Interviewer: Based on your review of the job advertisement, you know that the job will require travel away from home and occasional extended hours. Are you married or do you have a family?

Frank's response: I know this job requires travel and working long hours during peak periods. Thankfully my ex-wife and I have a good arrangement that is flexible in terms of when we have the kids. I can travel and work long hours when needed.

In this case, Frank realized that the real issue was his availability and flexibility. In his answer, Frank shared some personal information with his interviewer (ex: divorced, shared custody) to show his availability and flexibility to meet the job needs.

Sarah Jones:

Sarah spent the last ten years as a homemaker raising her children. She has volunteered at her children's school for the past six years and now wants to get a paying job. Sarah applied for a job at a women's clothing store. In her interview, Sarah was asked an illegal question about her age. Check out how Sarah handled the question.

Interviewer: Most of our customers are fairly young, usually 25-35. It's really important to us that our sales staff relate to the customers so they can meet their needs. Do you mind if I ask how old you are?

Sarah's response: I'm really interested in fashion and am knowledgeable of the needs of customers that shop at your store. I have a talent for finding the best look for people regardless of their age and I'm confident that I can help your customers look their best.

Sarah knew that she was asked an illegal question about her age. She also knew that the interviewer's main concern was whether she could relate to the customers. She found a good way to respond without actually answering the illegal question.

Handling Difficult Interview Questions

In interviews, you may face some questions you're not sure how to answer. These are different for everybody but may relate to employment gaps, inconsistent job history, layoffs and so on. The best defence against a difficult question is to plan ahead. Identify questions you personally would find hard to answer and prepare a comfortable response.

Here are some difficult questions to think about:

- I noticed on your resume that you were out of work several times over the past few years. Can you explain why?
- According to your resume, you've changed jobs six times in the past two years. Can you explain the changes?
- What did you like least about your last job or boss?
- You mentioned that you were injured at your last job. Was the accident your fault?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- How long do you see yourself working here?



EXAMPLE

Darel McDonald:

The following example was taken from Darel's interview for a general labourer position. Darel was laid off from his last job and has worked for many different employers over the last 18 years. A lot of his experience is general labour work. He also filled in the gaps with seasonal work as a hunting and fishing guide.

Interviewer: I noticed on your resume that you've had quite a few different jobs. Can you explain why?

Darel's response: I'm a really hard worker and have been successful in all of my jobs. Unfortunately, the type of work that I do tends to be unstable. Because of the variety of jobs I've done, I've learned lots of different things and gained many skills. I'd love to find a job that's stable and long-lasting.

Darel has taken a difficult question and given a positive answer. He highlighted how his variety of jobs have helped him to learn new information and skills.



EXAMPLE

Gabriela Tomogan:

Gabriela applied for a job as a Senior Research Assistant. She's overqualified for the job but she has no Canadian work experience and she wants to start working. The interviewer has noticed that Gabriela has more education and experience than the job ad asks for. The interviewer is a bit nervous that Gabriela might not be a long-term employee.

Interviewer: I see on your resume that you've had lots of experience at a higher level than this position. How long do you think you'll be happy in this job?

Gabriela's response: I've done some research on your university and was really excited to learn about the projects you are working on. In some ways they are similar to the types of things that I did before but I think they are different enough that they'll be challenging and rewarding. I am happy to start as a Senior Research Assistant and hope that over time, I'll be able to prove my skills and move into more challenging roles at this institution.

"Constantly talking isn't necessarily communicating."

~Charlie Kaufman¹

¹ www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/c/charliekau181243.html



ACTIVITY

Use the space provided to note a difficult question and how you would respond.

Difficult question:

Response:

Questions to Ask During an Interview

At some point during the interview, most interviewers will ask if you have any questions. Prepare questions to show the interviewer that you've done some research and are interested in this work opportunity. Use this chance to get more information to see if the job/organization is a good fit for you. This part of the interview also allows you to briefly summarize why you should be seriously considered for the job.



EXAMPLE

Here are some sample questions to help you get started:

- Can you tell me about some of the upcoming projects that I might be working on?
- What qualities are you looking for in an ideal candidate?
- How does this organization support employee training/professional development?
- What would a typical day/week look like for this job?
- Why is this position vacant?

For more sample questions, visit Quintessential Careers at http://www.quintcareers.com/asking_interview_questions.html

Asking questions about company benefits during the interview can give the impression that you are more interested in what the company can provide you than you are in the position. Reserve questions regarding salary, vacation leave and benefits until you have been offered the position.



AVOID

Questions that you should not ask in the interview:

- How much will you pay me?
- When can I expect my first raise?
- How many breaks do you provide during a shift?
- How many sick days will I get?
- If my kids are sick or have a day off school, can I bring them to work with me?



ACTIVITY

Use this space to write questions that you would like to ask during an interview.

Written Assignments, Presentations, and Other Assessments

As part of the interview process, some employers will ask you to provide samples of your written work or complete a written assignment. Some employers give you the details of the assignment before the interview to allow time to prepare, while others may give you an assignment during the interview. This is more common for jobs that require a fair amount of writing such as letters, reports or other documents. If you know or think that you'll have to complete a written assignment, consider the typical job tasks. To help prepare for the interview, complete a practice assignment similar to these tasks.

Some jobs require you to make presentations to co-workers or to external clients. As part of the interview, you may be asked to prepare and provide a brief presentation. If asked to prepare a presentation in advance, make sure to ask questions about the presentation format (ex: PowerPoint, hard copy). If you are using software, make sure that you find out what will work with their computer.

Assessment Screening Tools

Some employers use assessments as screening tools to help select the best person for the job. These assessments might measure your aptitude, ability or personality. Depending on the job, you might also have to agree to a criminal record check or a credit check.



REMEMBER

When you accept the interview, it's a good idea to ask if you will need to complete a written assignment, give a presentation, or complete assessments during the interview.

What to Bring to the Interview

There are a few things to bring to the interview:

- Resume
- Cover letter
- Copy of the job application (if you have one)
- Targeted portfolio with relevant samples of your work
- References
- Note paper and a pen

2

What Types of Questions Can I Expect?

There are literally thousands of questions that interviewers could ask in an interview. The most common interview questions cluster into four categories:

- general
- behavioural
- situational
- stress

Most interviewers use more than one category of questions. Typical questions are included in this guide. When asked an interview question, keep the following in mind before you respond:

- Think about what the interviewer really wants to know.
- Make sure that you answer the question.
- Try to link your response to the job you're interviewing for.



EXAMPLE

This section provides sample questions and answers for each of the four categories of interview questions.

General

General interview questions allow interviewers to learn more about you. They may be used to assess “fit” with the job and the organization.



EXAMPLE

Darel McDonald:

Darel is applying for a General Labourer job. The job involves cleaning up work areas, fuelling vehicles, operating site vehicles and equipment, janitorial work, painting, and office maintenance. Darel was recently laid off from his job and really wants to get back to work. He quit school after grade 10 and had a variety of general labour jobs. Check out Darel’s answers to the following general interview questions. Two versions of the same answer are provided to show you the difference between an ‘OK’ answer and a ‘GREAT’ answer.

Why do you think your skills and experience make you a good candidate for this position?

- A. I have lots of experience as a general labourer and think that I could do a good job working for you.

In this answer, Darel doesn’t give any detail about his past experience and how it would help the employer.

- B. I’ve had lots of experience working as a general labourer doing many of the same duties that were listed in your job ad. I am willing to work flexible hours and will do what it takes to get the job done and done right. At my last job I was given the Employee of the Month award to recognize the good service I was providing throughout the company. From what I understand, your company has lots of employees who speak English and Cree, and I am fluent in both.

In this answer Darel used his knowledge of the job from the job advertisement to relate how his skills and experience will make him a valuable employee. Great work Darel – you’ve shown the interviewer that you did your homework!



EXAMPLE

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- A. I really enjoy doing lots of different tasks and general labourer work tends to be well suited for this. I'm a hard worker and always try to do things as perfectly as I can. Because of this, I've have a hard time giving tasks to more junior workers. This is something I've been working on and I now realize that it's better to teach the younger labourers how to do something right instead of not giving them the opportunity to try. I can help them if they need it, but I've learned that it's better to work as a team – it's more productive and makes work more enjoyable.

This was a great answer. Darel has chosen a weakness that will not limit his ability to do a good job and he's shown how he is working to improve it. If you have to list a weakness, it's important to find a way to turn it into a positive.

- B. I'm a hard worker. As for weaknesses, I have a few. I'm not very good at being on time for work, but I work hard once I get there. I didn't really like school, so I never finished and now I'm not very good with math or writing.

This is not a good answer. Darel has chosen to highlight a weakness that no employer wants to hear – often late for work!



ACTIVITY

Record your responses to the following general interview questions. Try to relate your experience to the job; if possible, link to specific tasks from the job description or ad.

Why do you think your skills, education, and experience make you a good candidate for this position?

Tell me about your experience in this type of workplace.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Why should we hire you?

Behavioural

Behavioural interview questions are based on the idea that past behaviour predicts future behaviour. By learning how you handled past situations, employers get a sense of how you might handle similar situations if working for them. Here are some tips for answering behavioural questions:

- There is no right or wrong answer.
- Try to connect your answer to the job that you're interviewing for.
- Review the job description, job advertisement and notes from informational interviews; find ways to include this information in your responses.
- Review skills and qualities that the interviewer is looking for; identify specific examples of times you showed those traits.

Some people find the STAR method useful in responding to behavioural questions. STAR stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

For the best interview success, spend less time on setting the scene (ex: Situation and Task) and more time on the Action you took and the Results you achieved.



EXAMPLE

Sarah Jones:

Sarah is hoping to get a job as a sales clerk at Amy's Boutique. She hasn't had a paying job for over 10 years but has volunteered at her children's school for six years. She can use her volunteer and life experiences to answer interview questions. See Sarah's answers below.

Give me an example of a work situation in which you were proud of your performance. What were some of the factors that contributed to your performance?

A. I am really proud of the work that I did coaching the primary co-ed soccer team. Our team won the intramural championships for three years in a row. Some factors included great players, parental support, and good team spirit in the school. I love working with people to motivate them to produce results.

In this answer, Sarah provides background and clearly lists factors that contributed to the success of the team. She identified what she brought to the situation (motivation and love of working with people) and talked about the contributions of others. Great answer Sarah!

B. I'm proud of the job I did coaching the primary co-ed soccer team. The students were great to work with.

This answer isn't as strong. Sarah gives an example but doesn't explain how she contributed to the performance.



EXAMPLE

Tell me about a time you had a conflict at work with a co-worker or a customer. How did you handle it?

- A. I can't stand conflict, so I usually just go along with what other people want so that I can avoid it.

Employers want to know that you have the skills needed to do the job. Sarah's answer shows that she will avoid conflict. This is a red flag for an employer. For example, Sarah may not protect her employer from a customer trying to return a "Final Sale" item or even from suspected shoplifting.

- B. In my volunteer work, I've co-ordinated classroom fundraising activities for the past few years. One of the other parent volunteers really wanted to coordinate the fundraising activities too. However, I heard this parent gave incorrect information to other parents about how the money was going to be raised and spent. I had to sit down with this person because other parents were confused. In our meeting, we talked about how important fundraising is and how much it benefits our kids and the school. After a long talk, it was clear that she just wanted to get involved and really believed she was helping. We brainstormed specific ways she could help; since then, things have been great and we try to share the co-ordination role whenever possible.

In this answer Sarah gives a detailed example of a conflict situation and how she used her people skills to find a good solution.



ACTIVITY

Record your responses to sample behavioural interview questions here.

Tell me about a work situation in which you were proud of your performance. What were some of the factors that contributed to your performance (ex: skills, knowledge, team members)?

Tell me about a time you had a conflict at work with a co-worker or a customer. How did you handle it?

Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision. What steps did you take and what was the outcome?

Tell me about a time when you had to deal with multiple deadlines. How did you handle it?

“The greatest mistake you can make is to be continually fearing you will make one.”

~Elbert Hubbard²

Situational

Situational interview questions can be great opportunities for you to highlight your problem-solving skills. Although these are usually hypothetical questions (ex: “what would you do in a situation like this?”), try to draw on your experiences to provide examples if you’ve handled similar situations in the past.



EXAMPLE

Sarah Jones:

You met Sarah earlier when she was answering some behavioural interview questions. Sarah’s paid work experience was from more than 10 years ago, so she’s relying on her current volunteer experiences to help her answer questions.

Describe how you would prioritize tasks or needs on the job.

- A. I would check with my manager, if possible. Otherwise, I would ask my co-workers to find out how priorities are usually set.

This is not a bad answer, but it doesn’t really show any initiative. Sarah needs to show that she isn’t going to always rely on other people for answers.

- B. When I’m learning new things or taking on new tasks, I like to take notes. It helps me, especially if I need to remember things later. So, I’d look back at my notes to see if I was already told about work priorities when I was doing my training or orientation. If my notes didn’t have anything about priorities in them, next I’d look at the specific issue. If I’m working on something that isn’t needed until next week, I could set it aside to handle an urgent request from a customer. If I had two urgent priorities and only time to do one, I’d ask my manager or co-workers to help decide which to focus on.

In this answer Sarah shows the interviewer that she is able to solve a problem (ex: what to do first). Well done Sarah!

² www.quotationspage.com/quote/26991.html



EXAMPLE

You've been asked to take on a new task, one that you've never done before. You want to make sure that you do it well because it could lead to a raise in the future. What are the first steps that you would take?

- A. I'd look around to see what other people are doing and if that didn't help, I'd jump in and sort it out as I go along.

In this answer Sarah has just made the interviewer a bit nervous! Her answer does not show any thinking before starting a task. This could lead to costly mistakes.

- B. I would take a few minutes to think about the task. I'd then ask questions if I needed more information. I'd also ask if there are any best practices or proven approaches for doing the task. Others on the team probably have lots of similar experiences that could help determine how to get started.

Sarah's answer shows that she has strong problem solving skills and the ability to work with others.



ACTIVITY

Record your responses to sample situational interview questions here:

Describe how you would prioritize tasks or needs on the job.

You have an angry customer who has interrupted your conversation with another customer. What will you do?

Tell me about a time you had a conflict at work with a co-worker or a customer. How did you handle it?

You've been asked to lead a project that involves supervising several co-workers who are also your friends. How would you handle this situation and preserve your relationships?

You've been asked to take on a new task, one that you've never done before. You want to make sure that you do it well because it could lead to a raise in the future. What are the first steps that you would take?

Stress

Stress interviews are used when an interviewer wants to see how you handle stressful situations.

Interviewers may create stress by:

- using an aggressive tone of voice
- asking you questions designed to unsettle you
- leaving you waiting unnecessarily in the waiting area before the interview
- appearing distracted, bored, or uninterested
- saying hello and then not saying anything else, to see if you will take the initiative to start the interview

Try not to let the interviewer upset you or distract you from your purpose. For questions that seem completely unrelated to the job (ex: Do you prefer fruits or vegetables?) what you say is generally not as important as how you handle the question. Use this type of question to show your creativity, thought process, and ability to stay calm and cool in unexpected situations. If possible, link your answer to the job you are applying for.



EXAMPLE

Jennifer Meyer:

Jennifer is applying for a position as a Junior Assistant Network Administrator. This position needs someone with:

- interpersonal and technical skills
- an ability to handle multiple projects at the same time
- previous experience working in this environment

Jennifer only has two months direct experience in this type of job. However, she has lots of transferrable skills from working as a restaurant server. Check out Jennifer’s answers to the following stress interview questions.

How do you handle stressful situations?

A. I don’t like stress so I tend to avoid stressful situations whenever possible. I usually try to let someone else handle the situation.

In this answer Jennifer has just told her interviewer that she isn’t the right person to work in a stressful, fast-paced environment like the one that she has applied for!

B. Maintaining a network can be stressful at times when trying to meet the needs of internal clients or customers. I’ve become skilled at stepping back from the situation and examining all of the issues and viewpoints. Through this, I’ve either been able to reach win-win situations or reduce the overall stress of the situation. Another way I minimize stress is to have a good sense of upcoming work. I manage my workload so that when unexpected problems arise, I’m better able to deal with them.

Great answer Jennifer! Jennifer acknowledges that this work environment could be stressful and shares her strategies for dealing with stressful situations. Jennifer could have made this answer even better by giving a specific example of a time when she used these strategies to deal with a stressful situation.



EXAMPLE

Which do you like better, lions or tigers?

A. Lions.

Jennifer's answer does not tell the interviewer why she chose lions.

B. Lions and tigers are both intelligent and quick; however, lions are well known for their courage and live in groups. I think that in a job like this one, it's important to be more lion-like – to know your stuff, be quick to respond, but also to have the courage needed to make decisions and to be able to function as a member of a team.

Jennifer has skillfully managed to answer the question and found a way to relate it back to the job. Nicely done, Jennifer!

Like most stress questions, this one is difficult and is used to see how an interviewee can handle an unexpected question.



ACTIVITY

Record your responses to sample stress interview questions here:

How do you handle stressful situations?

What would you do if you caught one of your co-workers stealing?

Tell me about a time you had a conflict at work with a co-worker or a customer. How did you handle it?

How are you feeling about your performance in this interview so far?

Which do you like better, chocolate or vanilla ice cream?



REMEMBER

Always answer questions honestly during an interview. Ensure you're able to provide specific examples of the skills, experience, or abilities you present. Highlight your strengths; where you have a weakness that could affect your ability to do the job, describe how you're working to address the weakness.

For more information about preparing for an interview, visit:

- How do I Prepare for an Interview
 - www.workingincanada.gc.ca/content_pieces-eng.do?cid=208
- Job Interview Questions Database for Job Seekers
http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/

What to Expect

Every interview is different, so there are no rules about what to expect. Here are a few general tips. Interviewers:

- will expect that you come alone to the interview
 - don't bring your kids, friends, other family members
- will shake your hand
- will expect you to look interested in being at the interview
- will expect you to make eye contact when you are answering questions
- might write down your answers as you say them
- might not look at you if they are busy writing your answers



REMEMBER

If you are new to Canada and want more information about working here, visit:

www2.immigratemanitoba.com/browse/work_in_manitoba/

3

How Do I Choose References?

Before making a final decision to hire, employers often want to check references. A good reference is someone who can speak positively about you and your skills. The better your references know you and your work, the more detail they can provide. Some employers may specifically ask for character references. These types of references can speak about your personality and provide general information about what type of person you are (ex: honest, hardworking, compassionate).

Tips for Choosing Effective References

Choosing references is an important step in the job search process. Good references can set you apart from other job applicants. References who provide strong, positive feedback and details about your performance may increase your chances of getting the job.



REMEMBER

- Always ask permission for someone to be your reference. Never give their name and contact information without asking first.
- Tell your references when you know that an employer is going to contact them.
- Find references that are relevant to the job you're applying for.
- Make sure that the reference is able to say positive things about you.
- Give your references an updated copy of your resume.
- Share information about the job and organization with your references; help them understand what they are giving you a reference for.
- Provide enough information about your references so that employers know who they are calling (ex:name, job title, organization, email address, phone number).



AVOID

- Don't choose political or religious references not relevant to the job.
- Don't use friends or family as references.
- Never choose references that were not happy with your work.

Remember to thank your references; keep them updated about the progress of your job search.



EXAMPLE

Handling References from Another Country

Gabriela Tomagan:

Gabriela moved to Canada a year ago from the Philippines. She has a PhD in Chemistry and solid work experience. But, all of her relevant work experience was in the Philippines and she has no Canadian references. She's wondering what she should do if asked for references during her job interview.

If asked for references, Gabriela could:

- obtain letters of reference from former employers, written in English
- provide detailed phone and email contact information for English-speaking references
- note the best time to call and the time difference
- arrange translation services
- seek out local references
 - academic (ex: EAL instructor)
 - volunteer organization



EXAMPLE

Sarah Jones:

Sarah wants to be as prepared as possible for her interview. She only has a few references and she's already got permission from each of them to use them as a reference. Here's an example of how Sarah set up her reference page. She used the same style as her resume and cover letter. She's also going to print a copy to bring to her interview in case she is asked for references. Sarah will use the same type of paper as her resume and cover letter.

References for Sarah Jones

(204) 123-4567 sarah.jones@email.com

Parvinder Bains, Assistant Principal
Sunnydale Elementary School
Winnipeg, MB
(204) 123-4567

Andrea Scholtz, Manager
Manitoba Books
Brandon, MB
(204) 123-4567

Nelson Perez, Manager
ABC Pet Store
Winnipeg, MB
(204) 123-4567



ACTIVITY

Use the space provided to list potential references and notes for each (ex: key experiences or skills that the reference could share about you).

Name

Job Title

Organization

Contact Info

Notes

Name

Job Title

Organization

Contact Info

Notes

Name _____

Job Title _____

Organization _____

Contact Info _____

Notes

***“In the final interview
they must remember one basic concept.
Employers hire people that they like.
A genuine, honest, positive,
Person-to-person discussion from the heart,
will usually close the deal”***

~Michael C. Lazarchick³

³ From The 21st Century Job Search by Michael C. Lazarchick

4

What Happens After the Interview?

After the interview is over, make sure you thank your interviewers for the opportunity to speak with them. If possible, request they provide you with a business card so you can follow the interview with a thank you letter.

Shortly after the interview, take some time to reflect on the interview questions and make note of your responses. Were there any questions that you didn't fully answer or information that you forgot to share during the interview? If so, you can cover any important points that you missed in a thank you letter.

Hopefully you'll be offered a job. If so, you'll need to negotiate and accept a job offer. At that point, you will also need to inform your network and references about your success.

Saying Thank You

Within one to two days, follow-up with a thank you to the individual(s) who interviewed you. This is courteous and shows your interest in the position. If the interviewer has interviewed many candidates over a short period of time, saying thank you could help you to stand out from the others. It can also be a great opportunity to add something that you forgot to mention during your interview.

Use a thank you letter to:

- Say thanks for the interviewer's time
 - At the interview be sure to write down the proper spelling of name(s) or collect business cards
 - If being interviewed by more than one interviewer, either send the interviewers one collective letter addressed to all or a separate letter to each
- Mention anything you forgot to say or didn't fully explain during the interview
- Clarify any parts of the interview that may not have gone too smoothly⁴
 - Ex: "During our interview you had asked about my availability. I mentioned that I worked with a set schedule Monday through Friday in my previous job and it was something that I enjoyed. What I forgot to mention is that although I had worked a set schedule, I am also comfortable and open to working with a flexible schedule."

Be sure to:

- Send your letter the same day of the interview; wait no longer than two days after the interview to send it
- Proofread the letter before sending
- Keep the letter to one page⁵

⁴ http://resume.monster.ca/6817_EN-CA_p1.asp

⁵ www.jobsearchonline.bc.ca/Interviews/thankyouletters.htm



REMEMBER

Choose the most appropriate follow-up method to suit the situation:

- Email
- Mail
- Phone

This may also be a good opportunity to provide interviewers with relevant samples of your work.



EXAMPLE

Frank Peters:

Frank was successful in getting an interview for the position he applied for. However, he realized after the interview that he had forgotten to mention his past fundraising experiences. Knowing that this experience was relevant, Frank shared it in his thank you letter.

Frank Peters

3249 Spruce Drive
Thompson, Manitoba R8N 6P6
(204) 123-4567

January 15, 20XX

Mr. Henry Lee
Human Resources Manager
Thompson RPC
123 Fake Street
Thompson, Manitoba R8N 1S6

Dear Mr. Lee,

Thank you for the interview on Thursday January 14, 20XX. As we ran out of time in the interview I wasn't able to mention my involvement with Cops for Cancer. My brother-in-law works for the local Police Department and for the last five years I've been involved in organizing various fundraisers. I noticed that your company is involved with fundraising for this excellent cause. If given the opportunity to work for you I would be thrilled to volunteer on the organizing committee.

It was a pleasure meeting you and I appreciate your time. I look forward to a positive outcome from the interview and hope our paths cross again soon.

Yours truly,

Frank Peters

Frank Peters



EXAMPLE

Here's a thank you letter template that you can use to customize your own letter. Personalize your letter, using any format or style that you like. Be sure to keep it professional.

Personal Letterhead (e.g. consistent with resume and cover letter)

or

Your Address
City, Province Postal Code

Date

Contact Name
Job Title, Organization Name
Organization Address
City, Province Postal Code

Dear (Contact Name):

Thank you (and other interviewers, if appropriate) for interviewing me for the position of (job title) on (day, date, and year). It was a pleasure to meet you; I learned a lot about the job and your organization.

The interview also increased my interest in the position. I left confident that I could effectively handle the responsibilities and be an asset to your department. (More information about your skills can be inserted here.)

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon. You can contact me at (telephone number) or at (email address) or by writing to me at the above address.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Your Printed Name

Negotiating Offers

When you receive a job offer, ask about all relevant details (ex: wage, start date, benefits, decision date, hours, location). You are not required to make an immediate decision. Thank the employer for the offer. Let him or her know you will respond by the date required. If the employer does not provide specific deadline, be prepared to respond within two-to-five days. If you are not completely satisfied with the offer prepare to negotiate.⁶



REMEMBER

Use the “4 P’s” to successfully negotiate:

1. create a positive environment
 - take a win-win approach
2. prepare thoroughly by brainstorming compensation possibilities (salary, benefits)
 - list your reasoning
3. identify and prioritize possibilities for consideration
 - e.g. you may be willing to take a lesser salary with an extra week’s holidays per year or access to professional development funding
4. be patient
 - allow enough time for a thoughtful response to what you asked for

Effective negotiation usually requires research. You may need to ask the employer if anything about the offer is non-negotiable (ex: limited to union agreements or head office policy)

Some job aspects that may be negotiable include:

- Salary
 - o Explore the Working in Canada Tool website (www.workingincanada.gc.ca) for salary information for specific occupations
 - o Check out **A Guide to Completing Applications** for more information on “Dealing With Salary”
- Start date
 - o If a start date is not set, you may want an opportunity to take time off for travelling, visiting family, completing a course, etc.
- Benefits
 - o If an employer doesn’t mention benefits, don’t hesitate to ask. Benefits may include medical and dental contributions, childcare assistance, etc.
 - o If you need to relocate for the job, consider negotiating travel expenses for your house hunting, moving costs, or remote living allowances.
- Hours
 - o If a flexible schedule is appealing, ask about options such as starting late, finishing late; starting early, finishing early; working 10 hour, four day work weeks; job sharing.
- Location
 - o If the salary is lower than anticipated, try to negotiate working from home a few times a week to save on commuting expenses.

⁶ www.career.fsu.edu/employment/negotiating-offers-guide.html

Assessing Multiple Offers

Your job search may even result in more than one employment offer. If an employer has only given you a couple of days to decide, and you need more time, ask if a later date is possible.



ACTIVITY

Use the following table to evaluate the benefits of each job offer you receive.⁷ Three rows have been left blank; use them to include things that are important for you to consider. Look at each of the criteria listed below and place a checkmark next to it if offered by the company. Next, add up the checks for each company. Record totals in the bottom row.

Criteria	Company Name _____	Company Name _____
Opportunity for promotion		
The work is interesting		
Challenging and rewarding work environment		
Positive team atmosphere		
Recognition for a job well done		
Job security		
Professional development and training opportunities		
Low employee turnover		
Friendly co-workers and management		
Reasonable commute		
Good salary		
Opportunity for raises		
Good vacation time and benefits		
1.		
2.		
3.		
Total		

⁷ Kaplan, S. J. (1995). Don't wait 'till you graduate: The Canadian job search guide for the real world. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers.



ACTIVITY

If you are still having trouble deciding, use the space provided to write down some of the company perks (ex: is there a signing bonus, employee discount, company car, flexible hours?). Rate each perk on a scale of one to three with one being somewhat valued, two being very valued, and three being highly valued. Total the ratings for each company and compare (with the highest rating being the better option).

Company 1	
Perks	Rating
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
	Rating Total

Company 2	
Perks	Rating
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
	Rating Total

Job Acceptance Letter

Consider sending a job acceptance letter one to two days after you accept an offer. Use this letter to show your professionalism and document what was discussed and agreed upon when you were hired. Keep a copy of your job acceptance letter for yourself; in the future if you need to confirm elements of your new job (ex: your rate of pay once your first pay cheque is received) you can reference your letter.

Use a job acceptance letter to confirm in writing things about your new job that you would have agreed to, such as:

- your new title
- salary
- benefits
- start date
- hours of work



EXAMPLE

See Jennifer Meyer's job acceptance letter that she sent after accepting a job offer.

Jennifer Meyer

125 Park Place, Brandon, MB T1K 5X7 (204)123-4579 | jennifer22 @ email.com

January 15, 20XX

Ms. Keisha west
Human Resources Manager
Charge University
270 18th Street
Brandon, Manitoba R7A 6A0

Dear Ms. West,

I am very excited to be accepting your offer of employment for the Junior Assistant Network Administrator position starting Monday February 1, 20XX at 9:00 a.m. As discussed over the phone on January 14, 20XX, my salary will be \$48,000 and medical and dental benefits will begin after my 3 month probation period.

Ms. West, it was a pleasure to interview with you and I am looking forward to working with you and the team at Charge University.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Meyer

Jennifer Meyer

You may decide to decline an offer of employment. This generally happens if the salary and/or benefits don't meet your needs or if you've already accepted another job while waiting to hear about this one. Always say thank you for the offer and opportunity. It's important to keep relationships positive; you may want to apply for a future position!

Informing Your Network and References

If you get offered a job, be sure to let your references know and thank them for their support. Let people know that your job search was successful and you are no longer looking for work. Stay in touch – you never know when you might need their support again!

Handling Rejection

If your interview didn't result in a job offer there could be many reasons why you were not successful. Here are some tips for making the most of the situation:

Many organizations will give feedback. Be sure to ask for it.

Be specific about the feedback you want:

- Why you didn't get the job
 - tips for future interviews
 - recommendations for skill development
- Ask if there may be other job openings that suit your skills and experience
 - if yes, request details
 - if no, ask how to find out about future openings
- Maintain a positive relationship with the employer or interviewer
 - send a thank you letter for the interview and the feedback
- Stay positive – don't be discouraged
 - optimism is closely linked to career success!

For tips and strategies related to maintaining a positive outlook during the job search process, see **A Guide to Conducting an Effective Job Search**.

Rejection Follow-Up Letter

A follow-up letter is a great way to be remembered by the individual responsible for hiring. Sometimes the person hired doesn't work out. Perhaps a similar position is open but not advertised. A positive follow-up letter helps you to stand out from other applicants. Interviewers tend to remember both first and last impressions. Make a strong positive impression by following up.



EXAMPLE

Darel McDonald:

Here's the letter Darel sent after hearing that he did not get offered the job.

Darel McDonald

12243 Vert Street, Flin Flon Manitoba R8A 0A1

(204) 123-4567

dmcDonaldMB@email.com

January 29, 20XX

Mr. Arthur Beach
Human Resources Manager
Johnson Suppliers
8295 Main Street
Flin Flon, MB R8J 7G4

Dear Mr. Beach,

We met January 15, 20XX and I was one of three applicants interviewed for the Seasonal Construction Labourer position. Although I didn't get the job, my interest in working for Johnson Suppliers remains strong. I hope that you will keep me in mind for further opportunities to work for your company.

As you may remember from our interview, I have almost 10 years experience as a general labourer and various certificates that would be an asset in the construction industry. I also have excellent communication skills and can communicate fluently in both English and Cree.

Since our interview I was hired by ZZ Construction company for a temporary position; my contract is expected to end mid-March of this year. I have updated and enclosed my revised resume so you have the most up-to-date version. I would love the opportunity to speak with you again about any future openings with Johnson Suppliers. Feel free to call me at (201) 123-4567.

Respectfully yours,

Darel McDonald

"You miss 100% of the shots you never take."

~Wayne Gretzky⁸

⁸ http://thinkexist.com/quotation/you_miss-of_the_shots_you_never_take/227454.html

5

Interview Tips



REMEMBER

- prepare for your interview
- have a good night's sleep the day before your interview
- bring along your targeted portfolio
- be neat and tidy
- dress appropriately
- arrive 10 minutes early
- be scent-free (some interviewers may have allergies to perfumes and colognes)
- reserve smoking cigarettes until after the interview
- eat before your interview
- keep cell phone off during your interview
- be sincere
- smile
- maintain good posture
- look interested
- make eye contact
- speak clearly
- be aware of your body language and avoid fidgeting
- think before you answer
- answer questions honestly
- give examples
- listen well
- say only positive things about your current or former bosses
- ask for questions to be repeated
- say thank you

⁷ http://resume.monster.ca/7184_en-CA_p1.asp

⁸ http://resume.monster.ca/6459_EN-CA_p1.asp

Summary

This guide has provided tips, examples, and activities to help you succeed throughout the interview process. Here are key points to remember.

- take time to prepare for your interview
- find out what type of interview to expect (ex: panel, one-on-one, telephone)
- research the position and organization
- try to conduct an informational interview to learn more about the organization/job
- think about how you might fit into the organization
- develop and practice a 30-second elevator statement
- be prepared to handle difficult and/or illegal questions
- practice answering common interview questions: general, behavioural, situational, and stress
- develop a list of questions to ask at your interview
- choose your references wisely
- remember to follow up to say thank you after an interview
- if you do get an offer, prepare to negotiate
- if you don't get an offer, ask for feedback and follow up with a thank you

This is one of several guides in a series to support your career planning and job search. For more information, visit www.manitoba.ca/careerdevelopment.

Appendix A: Common Interview Questions

Here is a list of common interview questions. Use the space provided to practice answering them.

Describe your ideal job and/or boss.

Why are you looking for work?

Why do you want to work for us?

What are some of your short-term and long-term goals?

What are your salary requirements?

What would a former boss/colleague say about you?

What are the best and worst aspects of your last job?

Are you willing to relocate?

When would you be able to start working for us? Or How much notice do you need to give to your current employer?

Other Resources:

How do I Prepare for an Interview

www.workingincanada.gc.ca/content_pieces-eng.do?cid=208

Job Interview Questions Database for Job Seekers

http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/

Appendix B: Guide Links

External Weblinks

- How do I Prepare for an Interview www.workingincanada.gc.ca/content_pieces-eng.do?cid=208
- For more information about career planning, tips for success in the workplace and other related topics, please visit www.manitoba.ca/careerdevelopment
- Job Interview Questions Database for Job Seekers http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/
- Working in Canada Tool **website** www.workingincanada.gc.ca
- National Occupational Classification www5.hrsdc.gc.ca/noc/english/noc/2006/welcome.aspx
- Work in Manitoba www2.immigratemanitoba.com/browse/work_in_manitoba/

Links In This Guide

- **Appendix A**

Links to Other Guides

- A Guide to Completing Applications
- A Guide to Planning Your Career
- A Guide to Writing Resumes
- A Guide to Writing Cover Letters
- A Guide to Conducting an Effective Job Search
- A Guide to Building a Career Portfolio
- A Guide to Success in the Workplace
- A Guide to Recognizing Your Prior Learning