

APPLICATION & INTERVIEW TIPS

Completing a Job Application

1. Answer all questions prayerfully, completely and thoughtfully. Even if some of the answers may be found on your resume, for the employer's convenience it is best to complete the questions in the space provided on the application.
2. Be neat! Be sure it is readable; typed is best, if possible. If you have a problem with spelling take along a pocket dictionary.
3. Check with your state's Fair Employment Practices Commission for a list of questions considered inappropriate for employers to ask on job applications. You do not have to answer questions related to your race, nationality, marital or financial status - or even a disability if it is unrelated to how well you are able to perform the job.
4. Do not over answer or assume more than a question asks. For example, "Have you ever been charged or convicted of a crime?" is generally not talking about minor traffic violations.
5. When giving your employment record do not skip jobs that you disliked or in which you had problems. Be prepared to give dates for all jobs you have held. If you changed jobs frequently or were unemployed for a period of time, you can expect potential employers to be leery. Stability is important. Be prepared, therefore, to give good explanations.
6. Have a list of five or six references with their contact information and job titles or relationships to you. Do not say, "Will provide upon request" or "See resume." Follow these guidelines when listing references:
 - ★ Select references who know you well and are capable of articulating your qualities to potential employers. *Do not use family members!*
 - ★ It is wise to select individuals with high professional standing and who are employed in the career field you plan to enter.
 - ★ Obtain the consent of the individuals before using them as references.
 - ★ Ask your references how and where they want to be contacted.
 - ★ Besides listing the name, address, phone number and e-mail address of your references, state how they are related to you (e.g., professor, supervisor, pastor).
 - ★ Give your references a copy of your resume in order to assist them in responding to inquiries.
7. Listing civic involvements, extra curricular activities, hobbies, continuing education courses, professional improvement seminars, etc. can be helpful if applicable to the job for which you are applying. These experiences can show a range of abilities and interests as well as incentive, leadership and commitment to professional growth. It would be wise to prepare a list with this information before filling out applications.
8. Attach a copy of your resume.

Sample Application and Interview Questions

While there are “generic” questions that will likely be asked by secular and Christian organizations alike, you can expect churches and Christian organizations to delve more deeply into your personal, family and spiritual life. Avoid being negative, critical or dogmatic in your answers. Try to think through the questions from the employer’s point of view, i.e., “What is the underlying purpose for the questions?” “What are some of the concerns the employer might have?” “How does my answer address his/her particular need?” “For what terminology is the employer looking?”

You may be asked to respond to the following questions on the application, in the interview or both, so it would be wise to practice giving concise written and oral answers.

1. *For what position are you applying?*

Be specific; an “any opening” response shows no thought and implies you have not researched the organization or do not know what you want to do.

2. *When will you be available for employment?*

Employers appreciate individuals who honor contracts and give present employers sufficient notice of resignation.

3. *Will you relocate? Are there limits?*

It is generally easier to find a job if you have few geographical constraints, but be honest. Do not say you are willing to go anywhere and then turn a position down because it is too far away.

4. *How long will you commit to this job?*

Most employers generally desire long term commitments. Schools and churches usually are looking for a minimum of five years.

5. *Expected salary and benefits?*

Your answer should reflect some idea of your monthly budget, the cost of living in the area, and the “going rate” which is paid for that position to people with your level of training and experience. It is generally best to give a range rather than an exact figure. After stating a range, you may wish to mention that the figures are “negotiable,” thus giving you and the organization latitude for dialogue and to adjust for benefits, etc.

6. *What were your reasons for leaving your previous employment(s)?*

- “To take a better job” is not an adequate response.
- Avoid being critical of previous employers. You may need to explain tactfully areas of incompatibility and emphasize growth and refinement in self-knowledge and professional goals.
- Most employers can understand and even appreciate employment changes that resulted in advancement in responsibilities and compensation, and that provided opportunity for the individual to use more effectively his/her training, acquired skills,

- interests, etc. – just so long as these changes were not too frequent.
- It is also appropriate to mention unique circumstances that precipitated a move, e.g., “temporary position while attending school,” “husband was transferred,” “laid off due to merger,” “pastoral staff resigned when the senior pastor took another church.”
7. ***What was your best job? Your worst job? Why?***
Guarding against being critical or negative, identify the tasks, relationships, work environments, etc. for which you are most suited.
 8. ***Describe yourself or tell me about yourself.***
This is probably the most commonly used interview question. Know how to get down to job relevant specifics as quickly as possible.
 9. ***What are your strengths, gifts, talents and skills? What are your weaknesses?***
Be able to articulate your strengths, skills, etc. that are relevant to the job. You should also mention any goals set or progress made toward overcoming weaknesses.
 10. ***How does your education fit the job for which you are applying? What was your favorite subject? Your least favorite?***
Be prepared to show how your training, interests and aptitudes match the position you are seeking.
 11. ***What are your life goals? How do you plan to achieve these goals? What motivates you?***
Answer these questions as they apply and are relevant to the position you are seeking.
 12. ***Summarize your philosophy of life . . . education . . . classroom discipline . . . ministry . . . youth work, etc.***
Plan to give philosophy statements concerning whatever occupational field you plan to enter plus some of the major areas of responsibility in that field.
 13. ***Explain your short and long range goals for this job. What do you expect to accomplish in one year, five years, etc.? What are some of the activities, procedures, etc. you plan to implement for accomplishing these goals?***
Try to give realistic answers, given what you know about the position, the organization and the future. You don’t want to over promise and underachieve!
 14. ***Give some examples of responsibilities and accomplishments you had in your last job.***
Even though much of this information is highlighted in your cover letter and resume, this is the time to elaborate and give examples. Be specific but be careful not to exaggerate. Be sure your previous employer and coworkers can verify your statements.
 15. ***Describe a problem or difficult situation you faced in a previous employment (or in your daily life), and tell how you dealt with it.***
In addition to examples you give the interviewer, he/she may follow up with other

problems or “case studies” relevant to the job and ask how you would resolve them. It is important, therefore, to think through the problems and responsibilities you will face in the job for which you are applying, and have some plans (backed by personal illustrations, if possible) for addressing them.

16. *Have you ever supervised others? How many and for how long? What did you do to develop those you supervised? Explain.*

You may want to include your leadership style, if known, and any training you received (company training programs, leadership conferences or seminars, etc.)

17. *Did you ever have a subordinate resist your leadership? How did you handle it?*

If the outcome was negative, relate what you learned or what you would do differently.

18. *Why should we hire you?*

Answer from their perspective, not yours. In other words tell why you are valuable to them and how you can meet their needs, rather than stating why you need the job and what you expect to get from it.

Churches and Christian organizations may ask some of the following questions:

1. *Give a brief statement of your testimony.*

Be able to briefly describe your conversion experience and examples of spiritual growth.

2. *What is your spouse’s training and occupation? How does your spouse feel about your taking this position? Is your family a credit to the ministry?*

Often churches and Christian organizations desire that the spouse and family be supportive and involved in the ministry.

3. *How do you like to spend your leisure time (time off the job)?*

Be prepared to discuss hobbies and interests when appropriate. You may be expected to name books you have read recently and tell what you learned from them. Churches and Christian organizations may request that you describe your typical weekly schedule along with your habits of Scripture memory, witnessing, church involvement, “quiet time,” daily prayer, Bible study, and family devotions.

4. *What are your views concerning the following doctrinal and ethical issues: inerrancy, second coming, eternal security, charismatic movement, miraculous gifts, baptism, women in leadership positions, divorce and remarriage, use of alcoholic beverages, use of tobacco, etc.?*

Many churches and Christian organizations will ask you to articulate accurately various evangelical theological positions, e.g., dispensational, reformed, Arminian, and explain your stand in relationship to them. If you are applying for a church or staff position in a denomination, you will probably be expected to identify the denomination’s distinctives, polity and key historical events with your views concerning them.

What to Do Before an Interview

1. A valuable principle of job hunting is this: if you can get an interview, you are more likely to get the job. Meeting face to face with a potential employer is generally more effective than correspondence or a phone conversation. Make an appointment, do not come unannounced. It helps if you have a mutual acquaintance or contact person who can introduce you, refer you or set up the interview.
2. Learn as much as you can about the company, church or organization to which you are applying. What do they do, where, how well? What are their growth patterns? What clientele do they serve? What are their philosophies? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Why do you want to work with them? Try to get their last annual report if available. As a rule you should not go on an interview without answers to these questions.
3. Practice interviewing. Role play with a friend or relative in which you act out the entire interview. Let him/her ask you the application and interview questions listed in the previous section and then critique your answers.
4. Make sure you get a good night's sleep before the day of your interview.
5. Dress appropriately and neatly. Select and try on the clothes you plan to wear for the interview beforehand, making sure they fit properly and are not stained. Generally, males should wear a suit and tie, females should wear a jacket, blouse and skirt or a dress. Make certain that your shoes are polished and your hair and fingernails are clean.
6. Do not bring your spouse with you into the interview unless asked. In all cases, get a sitter and leave the children home.
7. **BY ALL MEANS BE ON TIME (10 - 15 minutes early)!** Get good directions! If possible, make a practice run about the same time as your interview appointment. By doing that you will have a better idea about traffic patterns and can time your arrival for your interview more carefully.

What to Do During an Interview

1. Be courteous and friendly to receptionists, secretaries and office workers who greet you.
2. Be yourself, relax, don't be nervous, don't fidget. Maintain good posture.
3. Hold back on the use of humor.
4. Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer.
5. Answer questions thoroughly, but do not talk too much. The more you talk the more likely you are to "hang" yourself. Use good grammar and manners.
6. Listen carefully to the interviewer. Do not be so preoccupied with what you want to say or ask next that you miss what is being said to you.
7. Be prepared to ask insightful, well thought out questions about the position and/or the organization (see *Questions You Might Ask in an Interview*).
8. The first interview is generally not the appropriate time to ask about money or benefits.
9. Do not criticize others in past employments.
10. Express interest in the job (if indeed you are), giving specific reasons why you want it.
11. Be realistic about the level and responsibility of your first few jobs. Do not demand too much.
12. Do not be over eager about wanting the job; it looks desperate. On the other hand, do not play hard to get.
13. Keep in mind employers look for poised, enthusiastic employees who have good communication skills.

Questions You Might Ask in an Interview

Ask your questions at the end or when asked. It is important to ask insightful, well thought out questions. Remember, the interview is to be a “two way street” where you learn about the potential employer as they learn about you. Interviewers generally consider it a negative if you do not ask questions. It frequently is interpreted as a lack of interest, initiative, preparation or insight. Furthermore, asking questions can be a good offensive move that relieves some of the tension for you and the interviewer. A second interview, however, may be a more appropriate time for some questions; be sensitive to the time and the level to which the interview has progressed.

1. ***Is there a job description for this position? To whom will I report? Who reports to me? What are the tasks that will be assigned to me? By what standards and accomplishments will my success be measured?***

In order for churches and Christian organizations to justify a staff position they will sometimes write a job description that is humanly impossible for one person to fulfill. It is essential to find out how flexible they are in their expectations and what tasks are perceived as having the greatest priority. Furthermore, it is very important to know to whom you will be reporting. It generally is better to report to one person rather than an entire committee, especially if everyone on the committee tries to be a supervisor.

2. ***How would you describe the ideal person for this job?***
3. ***What are the long term opportunities? Is there room for growth?***
4. ***Who has held this job in the past, and how did the present opening come about?***
5. ***What is the geographic area like: cost of living, living conditions, churches, schools, job opportunities for spouse?***
6. ***How has growth occurred in last five years?***
7. ***Are there any special policies of which I should be aware?***