

# How to Prepare for a Job Interview

by Steve Cohen, *Auto Careers' JOBS*

The biggest mistake in interviewing is not being fully prepared. It is important that job-seekers use every means possible to prepare for the interview. Understand that interviewing is a skill. As with all skills, preparation and practice enhance the quality of that skill. Preparation can make the difference between getting an offer and being rejected.

There is no single “best” way to prepare for an interview. However, there are specific and important strategies to increase one’s chances for success. Every interview is a learning experience, so the learning that takes place during the preparation and actual interview process is useful for future interviews.

Initial preparation requires current assessment of skills, interests, values and accomplishments, as well; a re-assessment and updating of one’s resume and research on the targeted company or organization and position. Preparation also includes rehearsing of typical and targeted interview questions. And finally, preparation includes details of dress, appearance, mapping the location of the interview, anticipating what to expect, and protocols for follow-up.

## General Preparation

**Self-assessment:** We recommend self-assessment annually. When one is unemployed or fearing lay-off, the time is right for reassessing current skills, talents, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, interests, and work values. In addition, it is clearly time to re-examine accomplishments and achievements, particularly those that may be relevant to a prospective employer. We recommend keeping an on-going file of accomplishments in which to maintain such items as articles, congratulatory letters, emails, kudos from the boss or clients/customers, CSI levels, evaluations, and descriptions of successful activities and monthly achievements as they occur.

**Updating your resume:** The accomplishments file serves as a source document for reassessing and updating your resume. If we assume that a resume must be accomplishments-based rather than descriptive of one’s responsibilities, then the file serves to jog one’s memory about recent notable activities. Simplify the resume by removing all unessential and/or irrelevant material and work at getting it onto **one page**. Use sensible headings to help focus the reader on what you have done and what you can do for the prospective employer. **Be absolutely certain it is error-free.** [*This can be accomplished by using spell-check and by having others review the document for you.*]

## Having a specific interview lined up.

**Research, research, research:** Use every possible means to learn all you can about the company and position. Use the **Internet** to locate and read information about the company/organization. Read and/or check online resources for major business publications, such as *Automotive News*. Go online to the **company's website** as well as competitors' sites. For Public Companies, use investor Web sites to learn what is currently happening with this company and its competitors. It is also beneficial to research the manufacturer's products that the dealership sells.

**Re-assessing your resume:** Even if you have sent your best-yet resume, which was obviously successful in making the cut, review it thoroughly and know everything that's on it. Be prepared to discuss additional experiences that might be important to this employer. Use an Interview Prep Sheet to focus on experiences that you believe are most relevant and match them to the employer's needs. Example:

## Interview Prep Sheet

Use these three topics and add your own.

- Position Requirements
- Your Qualifications and Experience
- Your "Stories"

**Practicing typical and targeted interview questions:** Use the practice interview questions to review typical interview questions. Be able to answer the "Basic 3:"

- *Why are you interested in this company?*
- *Why are you interested in this position?*
- *Why are you interested in this field?*

Be prepared to discuss anything on your resume. Be prepared to answer questions/issues you really *don't* want to answer. For example:

- *Your greatest weakness...*
- *Your record of job-hopping...*

Also, research common interview questions that you can find using an Internet search.

Practice with a friend or coach and in front of a mirror. Video or audio record your answers for future review. Evaluate how you look and sound. Note inflections of your voice, mannerisms and gestures, facial expressions, poise, energy and enthusiasm in your answers as well as in your body language. ***How can you improve, enhance, develop, or revise your answers and/or delivery?***

Because interviewing is a skill, you can only improve your perceived professionalism and competence with practice. You can always prevail upon family or friends to help you prepare. **ASK!!!** Ask too for genuine feedback that will be helpful in working out the kinks. Practice is important in overcoming fears and nervousness. However, a degree of tension is beneficial toward maintaining a level of alertness that causes you to sit up straight and forward in your seat, leaning toward the interviewer. *The idea is to strike a balance between poise/calm and energy/enthusiasm.*

Prepare questions to ask. These questions should reflect your research on the company and position and would **never include questions whose answers are readily available in company literature or website. DO NOT ASK ABOUT SALARY OR BENEFITS!** [The employer will present this information when and if appropriate based upon their intent.]

## **Final Preparations**

Select the appropriate attire long before the interview day. Know the culture of the organization for which you are interviewing and dress accordingly, or even a notch above, even if the company practices corporate casual. *A business suit is always acceptable.* It is very important that your clothing is clean and well pressed. Do a test; run to determine comfort level. Too short or too tight may cause you, or others, to be distracted or uncomfortable. Minimize accessories and lean to the conservative side. Remember: less is more. *You want to be remembered for the right reasons.*

Know the location of your interview. Do a drive-by, in advance, if possible. Plan to arrive at the designated office 10-15 minutes in advance. Allow ample time for traffic, the possibility of getting lost, and parking difficulties. Bring extra copies of your resume in a folder or portfolio. *Bring a small notebook for notes, but keep note-taking to a minimum.*

## **Ask for the Job**

If you believe that the position is one that you are qualified for and are interested in...**ASK FOR THE JOB!** You might say, in your own words; “this is exactly the position I’m seeking. I believe that I meet all of the desired skills and job requirements and everything that I understand about the company and position is well matched to my career objectives.”

Collect business cards from every individual with whom you interview. Ask about timeframes for filling the position, how and when you will be notified, and if they would like additional information or materials from you. **AGAIN, DO NOT ASK ABOUT SALARY OR BENEFITS!**

## Follow-Up

Send a thank-you note within 24-48 hours of your interview. Send one to *every* person who interviewed you. Email is OK, but follow protocols for formal business correspondence, which is always more formal than typical email. Use the Thank You note to reiterate your interest and to emphasize your specific qualifications for the position. What do you want them to remember about you that is likely to “sell” them on you as a viable candidate? Everything about the job search should be focused on what YOU can do for the company, what YOU bring to the position, and why the employer should hire YOU! *This interview may be your one shot — so make it a good one!*

## Second Interview

If you are invited back for a second interview, this is generally for the purpose of meeting with additional decision makers and hopefully, to formalize the job offer.

## Conclusion

Okay, with these tools and a better preparation, you are now ready to interview and get the career position you are seeking. Good luck as you pursue your automotive career.

## About the Author

Steve Cohen is the Placement Director with Auto Careers’ JOBS.

Auto Careers’ JOBS is the industry leader specializing in the placement of retail automotive dealership career professionals. For over 20 years, we have placed thousands of auto dealership employees with our client dealerships in all USA markets.

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