

Interview cheat sheet and prep tips

This handy checklist will help you organize your thoughts and stay focused before, during and after the interview.

Carole Martin, Monster contributor

Interview prep is an essential part of the job-search process.

Relax—a cheat sheet is not really cheating. It's a checklist to make sure you stay focused before, during, and after the interview. Creating a cheat sheet will help you feel more prepared and confident. You shouldn't memorize what's on the sheet or check it off during the interview. You should use your cheat sheet to remind you of key facts. Here are some suggestions for what you should include on it.

In the days before the interview

- Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. On the left side, make a bulleted list of what the employer is looking for based on the job posting. On the right side, make a bulleted list of the qualities you possess that fit those requirements.
- Research the company, industry and the competition.
- Prepare your 60-second personal statement.
- Write at least five success stories to answer behavioral interview questions ("Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of a time...").
- List five questions to ask the interviewer about the job, the company and the industry.
- Research salaries to determine your worth.
- Determine your salary needs based on your living expenses.
- Get permission from your references to use their names.

Prepare your interview answers

Be ready to answer common interview questions such as these:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you leave your last position, or why are you leaving your current position?
- What do you know about this company?
- What are your goals?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- Why do you want to work here?
- What has been your most significant achievement?
- How would your last boss and colleagues describe you?
- Why should we hire you?
- What are your salary expectations?

Before you go to the interview

Do you look professional? Check yourself in the mirror; part of your confidence will come from looking good.

Carry these items to the interview:

- Several copies of your resume on quality paper.
- A copy of your references.
- A pad of paper on which to take notes, though notes are optional.
- Directions to the interview site.

Upon arrival

- Arrive early—enter the building 10 minutes before your appointment.
- Review your prepared stories and answers.
- Go to the restroom and check your appearance one last time.
- Announce yourself to the receptionist in a professional manner.
- Stand and greet your interviewer with a hearty—not bone-crushing—handshake.
- Smile and maintain eye contact.

During the interview

- Try to focus on the points you have prepared without sounding rehearsed or stiff.
- Relax and enjoy the conversation.
- Learn what you can about the company.
- Ask questions and listen; read between the lines.
- At the conclusion, thank the interviewer, and determine the next steps.
- Ask for the interviewer's business card so you can send a follow-up letter.

After the interview

- As soon as possible, write down what you are thinking and feeling.
- Later in the day, review what you wrote and assess how you did.
- Write an interview thank-you letter, reminding the interviewer of your qualities.

Keep your cool throughout the search

Even with all this advice, there's no actual "cheating" the job interview—or any part of the job search, really. But there are definitely ways you can set up a strategy and prepare yourself for the many steps involved in getting a new job. Curious about what those are? Join Monster today. As a member, you'll get interview insights, career advice, and job search tips sent directly to your inbox. You'll how to answer tricky interview questions, ways to negotiate the best job offer, and so much more. There are no shortcuts, but at least you don't have to navigate your career path all alone.