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Kelly Services[®] candidate interview guide

At Kelly Services, we're dedicated to providing the resources and tools necessary for success. Because we know how important a job interview can be, we developed this guide to help you prepare.

While your qualifications get you an interview, the interview gets you the job. The more prepared you are, the better you'll perform in the interview and the sooner you'll prosper in a new job.





Before you walk in the door

First impressions are key. Think carefully about what to wear, and make sure you are comfortable and dressed appropriately for the position. Avoid extremes in hairstyles, cologne, makeup, or jewellery.

Know your resumé, inside and out

With all the time you have put into writing a stellar resumé, you will want to make sure you take the time to know it inside and out. Be prepared to answer the following questions about your resumé:

- What did you do at each position you have held?
- What did you do during any lapses in employment?
- Why did you choose your school and major?
- Why did you take the jobs listed on your resumé?
- Why did you leave the jobs listed on your resumé?
- Why are you looking for a new employment opportunity now?

An interviewer will want to see how your skills and experiences will translate into their environment, so be prepared to tell them how.

- **Be prepared with specific examples.** Think about and be prepared to discuss specific examples where your contributions made a real impact. Saying that you are a good public speaker is one thing; discussing how you made a big presentation and fielded questions in front of a packed auditorium is another.
- **Be prepared to go beyond the resumé.** Even if your resumé details specific accomplishments, be ready to identify more. Use the interview to either expand upon or offer up new details. Be prepared to provide specific numbers and examples.
- **Know what you want.** Your resumé should give an indication of what you have achieved, but be prepared to talk about your career and personal goals, both long- and short-term.

..... **Tip:** Do not have your resumé in front of you during the interview—you should be the expert on your resumé. Do, however, bring a few extra copies of your resumé and keep them in a nice portfolio, which can also be used to take notes during the interview.



Know your strengths and weaknesses

Go to the interview with a thorough understanding of your strengths and weaknesses. Be prepared to speak confidently and positively about both.

Play to your strengths. After understanding the company and position you are applying for, identify the areas where you think you will add the most value, and what areas you will need to improve on.

Do not ignore your shortcomings. Always turn them into a positive. If your skill set has a weakness, turn it into an advantage by describing it as an opportunity to improve. You can also talk about how you have overcome a weakness in the past. The key is to remain positive but realistic, and never present your weaknesses as unworkable.

Here are a few examples of how weaknesses can be turned positive:

Example 1. "I understand that you are looking for someone skilled in X. While I don't have experience doing exactly that, I have done Y and Z and am an incredibly fast learner. I have no doubt in my ability to do the job."

Example 2. "While it is true that my degree is in Business Administration, I have had nothing but accounting experience since graduating from college. And I believe that my on-the-job experience has prepared me much more than any college course could have."

Tip: *Employers invest time, resources, and money into the interview process. For this reason, you should only accept interviews for positions in which you are seriously interested. If you must cancel an interview due to unforeseen circumstances, do so promptly. It is unprofessional and disrespectful to be a "no-show" for an interview.*

Do your homework

The more you know about the company you are applying to, the more serious a candidate you present yourself as, and the better the chance you have of standing out from the crowd.

- Research the company, position, and the industry, and have questions on hand relating to each. You will demonstrate a good knowledge of and interest in the company and you will show the interviewer that you respect his or her time.
- Find out who you are interviewing with, and use social network sites to conduct research and learn more about their education and professional background. And don't forget to check out the company on social network sites as well. These simple practices will help you gain useful information to demonstrate your interest in the position and company.
- Match yourself to the opportunity. It is important that you think ahead of time how your skills, experience, and interests could complement the company and the position in question.
- Communicate your interest in this industry, company, and position to the interviewer. The more specific you can be about why the particular position appeals to you, the better.

Practice. Practice. Practice.

As a candidate for the position, you will generally interview with up to four people during a formal interview cycle. Interview questions will generally fall into one of four categories. Be prepared to cite examples of your:

- Ability – Can you do the job?
- Willingness – Will you do the job?
- Communication/Interpersonal Skills – Will you be easy to work with?
- Problem Solving Skills – Can you easily resolve issues that arise?

To get a feel for what you'll say and how you'll say it, it's not a bad idea to rehearse your answers and practice out loud. This will also help ensure you exude the right level of confidence.

Tip: *If you have time between each interview, use it wisely. Note the name of each person you met, his or her title, some of the interview questions asked, things you have learned, or questions that may have arisen. You can then use this information for the next interview to ask clarifying questions. Your notes will also help jog your memory on how each interview went—this is helpful when providing feedback to your interviewer.*

It's important to be prepared for anything, but you'll gain an advantage by knowing the kinds of questions you'll be facing. The following are examples of questions you can expect to hear in your interview.

Work-related questions

The interviewer will ask work-related questions about your past employment, current position and responsibilities, and career goals. This is your opportunity to be remembered as a qualified candidate with notable achievements. Always focus on professional accomplishments and qualifications.

Examples:

Tell me about yourself.

This refers to your qualifications, not your personal life. Start with education and discuss your experience and qualifications.

Why should I hire you for this position?

Be positive and sell! Be enthusiastic, and discuss the skills you bring to the position and how the organization could benefit from having you join their team.

What are your career goals?

Your answer should reflect both short- and long-term goals. This will show your ongoing commitment to building your career.

What did you like least/most about your previous job?

An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by what you choose to say to these important questions. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek. What you liked most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, a high level of creativity, or attainable deadlines. What you liked least should include any situations that you are **unlikely** to encounter in your new position.

Why are you looking for another job?

Again, be positive. "I have to say that I have really enjoyed my years at XYZ Corporation. There are a lot of good people over there. But I am looking for a more progressive organization with greater opportunities for growth and challenge. I am looking to join a team where I can make real contributions and advance my career."

What interests you most about this position?

Teasing the interviewer with a truthful one- or two-word answer such as, "the challenge" or "the opportunity," should prompt the interviewer to ask you to explain.

Other questions you may be asked:

- How do you work under pressure?
- What professional skills are you working to improve?
- Describe how others perceive you.
- Describe one of your greatest accomplishments in a previous position.
- Describe how you organize yourself to meet deadlines and goals.



Behavioural interview questions

Many employers are moving toward behavioural interview questions. These questions focus on how you have reacted under certain circumstances in the past as an indicator of future performance. Prepare yourself by analyzing your skills and those required by the position, and identify situations where you have successfully demonstrated those skills.

Examples:

- Tell me about one of your most challenging situations at work.
- Give me an example of when you had to multi-task.
- Describe a time when you had to work as a team to accomplish a project.
- Describe a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker or boss. How did you resolve it?
- Tell me about one of your recent primary responsibilities. What was the number one accomplishment you attained while holding that responsibility? What was the measurable payback or benefit to the company, or how were you recognized for that accomplishment?

Your answers should tell a story; you should be able to walk the interviewer through your situation or conflict, describe what actions you took, and most importantly, communicate the **positive** outcome.

A few words about references

When choosing references, be sure to select former bosses or supervisors who will best describe your accomplishments, value, and potential. You should always get their permission to be used as a reference, and keep them up-to-date on your job search so they can prepare for a phone call from your potential employer. If you worked on a specific project that you'd like to highlight, then by all means secure a reference who can attest to your good work. It's a good idea to always remain on good terms with your employers and colleagues throughout your career as they can ultimately become valuable members of your professional network.

Questions you can ask

The best interviews are where both the interviewer and candidate ask questions, listen, and respond. Asking relevant, informed questions will demonstrate a strong, proactive interest. Whether interviewing for a contract, temporary, or direct-hire position, you want to present yourself as someone who is ready to work, not just for any company, but for this company in particular.

Questions for all types of positions (contract, temporary, and direct-hire)

About the company:

- How would you describe the culture of the company?
- Where do you see the company among the competition?
- What are this company's most important differentiators?

About the department:

- Where does this department fit into the organizational structure?
- What challenges are currently facing this department?
- What is the tenure of people in this department?

About the position:

- Could you describe for me a typical day in this role?
- What characteristics would the ideal candidate for this position possess?
- What goals have been set for this position?
- To whom would I report?
- How do you feel my experience and personality would fit in this position?

Questions specifically for direct-hire positions

- How would my performance be measured?
- What do you expect me to learn in the first six months?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- Where does the position fit in the hierarchy of the company?
- How would you describe the culture of the department, and what types of personalities work well in it?
- Does your company have programs to help me advance my career? If so, can you please explain them?
- What new products or innovations are being introduced by the company?

During the interview it is advised that you avoid asking questions about compensation and benefits, as this topic can make you appear narrowly focused and short-term oriented.



Discussing salary

The interviewer may ask you how much money you expect to earn. If you give a number in answer to this question, three things might happen:

1. Your number may be too high and you may impede your chances of getting an offer.
2. Your figure may be too low and either you get a low offer or no offer because your number was interpreted as a lack of confidence.
3. You are in the right range, but you have still taken away any ability to negotiate.

The best answer is: **“I like everything I’ve seen here, and I’m sure I would accept a fair offer if you make one.”**

Some other safe responses are:

- “What is the range you have scheduled for this position?”
- “Do you have a specific figure in mind for this position?”

If questioned directly about your current salary, always answer truthfully and include any bonuses you may have received. If a raise is due in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect to receive.

..... **Tip:** Before the interview, feel free to write questions down and take the list with you. The interviewer will not mind and will be impressed with how prepared you are.



Interview close

Be sure to close the interview in a strong, confident manner. Tell the interviewer why you want this job and the benefits you would bring to the company.

- If you are interested in the position, say so. This is a good time to summarize your job skills with what the interviewer is looking for.
- Ask the interviewer if there are any other questions or concerns with your candidacy. This indicates that you want to provide as much information as possible.
- Don't leave the interview without asking about next steps.
- Say thank you. Show your appreciation for the interview opportunity and say that you look forward to speaking with the interviewer again.

Interview dos and don'ts

- **Be on time. Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early for the interview.**
- **Turn off your cell phone** before you arrive for the interview.
- **Treat everyone you meet as if they are the interviewers.** This can never hurt your chances and will help you maintain a positive attitude even if you determine you are not interested in the position.
- **Carry a portfolio** that contains clean, unfolded, unstapled copies of your resumé, the interview questions you prepared ahead of time, and a list of references.
- **Remember you are selling your capabilities.** Be prepared to discuss your professional accomplishments.
- **Remember that you are always interviewing,** no matter how casual the setting or conversation may be.
- **Send each interviewer a timely thank you letter.**

Be proactive with follow up

Don't hesitate to let the interviewer know you will follow up with him or her in a set amount of time. Just be sure to follow through with your intentions, and be sure the interviewer knows how to best contact you if he or she wants to get in touch with you sooner.

Non-verbal communication skills

Keep in mind that non-verbal communication skills can be even more important than what you say or how you say it. It is estimated that 55 percent of the hiring decision is based on non-verbal messages.

- **Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake.** This is your first chance to demonstrate self-confidence.
- **Maintain eye contact** at all times. If you do not, you could appear insecure or insincere.
- **Use positive vocal qualities and body language.** Make your voice strong and confident, but not overbearing. Display a broad and confident smile, keep composed facial expressions to show that you are listening intently, use minimal hand gestures, sit straight, and square off your shoulders while talking.
- **Pay attention** to the interviewer's expressions and body language, adjusting your responses so you don't appear overbearing or overconfident. Ideally, you should try to maintain a balance between confidence and respect.

Verbal communication skills

Sometimes it's not what you say but how you say it that leaves a lasting impression. Keep these verbal communication skills in mind throughout the interview process.

- **Correctly pronounce** the name of the interviewer. Clarify the pronunciation if you are not sure.
- **Listen carefully** and respond accordingly. If you do not understand a question, don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
- **Respond with concise, well-considered answers.** Do not ramble or go off on tangents.
- **Avoid inappropriate language.** Slang or cursing can end the interview quickly.
- **Be genuine** when you thank the interviewer for his or her time and express interest in the company and the opportunity. Repeat his or her name when you exit.
- **Be sure to ask the interviewer for a business card** if one is not given to you. This will ensure you have the correct spelling of his or her name as well as accurate contact information for your thank you letter.

Closing thoughts

The interview is an opportunity for you and the interviewer to determine if the job is right for you. It's also your chance to sell yourself and your abilities. Preparing for the interview is critical for your success, because a good interview will improve your chances of employment, but a great interview can secure the position.

Good luck!

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