

# HOW TO AVOID Seven Common Interview Mistakes



Nervous about an upcoming job interview? It's understandable. The prospect of being grilled about your qualifications isn't exactly a relaxing thought. But you can alleviate much of the stress by doing some prep work. Following are seven common interview pitfalls and advice for sidestepping them:

**1 Forgetting to expect the unexpected.** Alarm clock failures, traffic jams and coffee stains strike at the most unfortunate times. Guard against Murphy's Law by planning ahead.

The night before your interview, get plenty of sleep, set a backup alarm and print directions to the employer's office. Build in extra time to get there and bring along another set of interview-appropriate clothes. That way, you won't sweat bullets if you hit road construction or your latte lands in your lap.

**2 Running afoul of the receptionist.** The interviewer isn't the only person you need to win over. Sixty-one percent of managers ask their assistant's opinion of prospective hires, according to a survey by our company.

Be friendly and polite to everyone you encounter, from the security guard to the person at the front desk. And display your best manners while waiting. For example, don't yammer on your cell phone — an all-too-common etiquette faux pas.

**3 Fumbling the first impression.** Initial impressions matter. Showcase your interpersonal abilities by taking conversational cues from the employer. Some interviewers enjoy small talk; others prefer to cut to the chase.

As soon as the hiring manager appears ready to talk business, offer up a copy of your resume. Volunteer to walk him or her through the document, steering the discussion toward your skills, experience and accomplishments most relevant to the opportunity.

**4 Not keeping it real.** Honesty is indeed the best policy. Embellishing the truth or coming across as inauthentic only hurts your cause. Is “working too hard” really your biggest weakness? Pat and transparent answers frustrate experienced interviewers who want insights into the real you.

While you don't need to highlight shortcomings or give the gory details about a succession of layoffs, you should present an accurate (albeit positive) picture of who you are and what you bring to the table.

**5 Filling the void.** You answer a question, and then there's a pause. A long pause. Uncomfortable? Yep. But that doesn't mean you should keep talking. Often, there will be a little time between queries as the interviewer processes your response, takes notes or ponders what to ask next.

Unfortunately, many candidates ramble on and on to fill the empty air. In addition to potentially meandering off topic or saying something regrettable, you might give the hiring manager reason to question your ability to keep your composure.

**6 Succumbing to interview fatigue.** You may start to feel like a broken record if you are asked to meet with several staff members, especially if it seems they all have slight variations of the same questions. While multiple interviews make for a grueling day, these meetings are typically “temperature checks” to see if you'll get along with prospective coworkers.

Remain enthusiastic and engaged, and strive to establish good rapport with each person. Also look at this as an opportunity to learn more about the company. The more people you meet, the more perspectives you'll get about the organization and what it's like working there.

**7 Thanking yourself out of the job.** It's courteous to send a handwritten thank-you card, but make sure it's free of errors. A hastily composed, typo-ridden note will do more harm than good.

Also, most people only write a generic and perfunctory “thanks for your time” message. This is a missed opportunity. After expressing your appreciation, reiterate your strong interest in the position and restate a few key reasons why you're the perfect fit for the role. Sprinkling in a little flattery never hurts, either.

Even the most poised and confident professionals can find job interviews intimidating. While the strategies above likely won't calm all the butterflies fluttering in your stomach, they will help you better manage this exciting but nerve-racking process.

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