

How to Ace Any Interview and Land the Job of Your Dreams

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The in-person, one-on-one job interview is getting a new look. Anna Parini

Forget the traditional sit-down with a rep from HR. Nowadays companies are employing decidedly offbeat hiring techniques. To land the spot you want, be prepared for whatever tests come your way.

Planning your next big career move? Get going. Job openings climbed to 4.7 million in June, the highest level since 2001, reports the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And in a recent survey by Challenger Gray & Christmas, 77% of hiring managers reported trouble filling slots because of a talent shortage.

To succeed in this sunnier market, though, you need a firm grasp on today's hiring process, one that may be far different from what you faced the last time you hit the circuit. For starters, businesses are going slow, spending an average of 23 days to fill a slot in 2013, vs. 12 days in 2010, according to [employer review website Glassdoor](#). And many are replacing antiquated hiring methods with more offbeat ways to vet job seekers.

“Companies are finding traditional job interviews aren't identifying the high-quality candidates they need,” says Parker McKenna of the Society for Human Resource Management. Numerous academic studies have unearthed flaws in the process. A 2013 one co-written by psychologist Jason Dana at the Yale School of Management found that many hiring managers are mistakenly overconfident in their ability to assess how well a candidate will perform through a one-on-one interview. To get an edge on your competition, you should prepare for these four types of tests.

The Video Chat

What to expect: Last year nearly one out of five job seekers sat through a video interview, more than double the number the year before, according to a survey by workforce consultants Right Management. Firms want to see your communication skills, says McKenna. Plus, recruiters can cast a wider net for candidates without the cost of flying applicants into the office, notes Paul Bailo, author of *The Essential Digital Interview Handbook*.

Since American Wedding Group, a Huntingdon Valley, Pa.-based provider of photographers, videographers, and disc jockeys, began video interviewing in May, the company has conducted more than 300 screenings. The firm used to interview candidates from across the country by phone. This new approach, says head of human resources Scott Mitchell, works better for a business that places a high value on professional appearance. “We want to be confident the candidate is someone we feel comfortable putting in front of our clients,” he says.

How to be ready: Most video interviews are via Skype, so make sure you have a professional-sounding username and profile photo. Then nail down the mechanics. “Don't let technology get in the way of getting hired,” says Bailo. That means investing in quality gear instead of relying on your computer's built-in microphone and fisheye camera. “If you want to get a job, you have to buy a suit,” he says. “If you want to nail a digital interview, you have to buy the right equipment.”

His picks: the Logitech HD Pro Webcam C920 (\$100) and Blue Microphones Snowball sound kit (\$90). To cut the risk of technical hiccups and a bad Internet connection, do a practice run with a friend an hour in advance.

As with an in-person interview, looks matter. So dress appropriately, head to toe (be ready to stand to adjust the camera). Sit opposite a window for the best lighting, and pick a backdrop that's clutter-free; off-white is ideal.

During the interview, keep looking at the camera. "If your eyes are shifting around, it distracts from the content of your interview," says Bailo, who recommends taping a script to the wall behind the camera so that you can hit on key points without having to look down or shuffle through notes.

The Group Session

What to expect: While some employers rely on group interviews to weed through a large pile of applicants, companies more commonly use them to survey a refined pool of potential hires for certain qualities.

You're likely to be one of three to five candidates, says Dan Finnigan, CEO of the [social recruiting platform Jobvite](#). Typically you'll be tasked with a group exercise. At Taste of D.C., a culinary event-planning business, groups must work together to develop a marketing campaign, say, or make a presentation. Even beforehand, the company observes how candidates waiting outside the interview room interact in a casual setting, says CEO Stuart Martens.

Adrian Granzella Larssen, editor-in-chief of [career advice website The Muse](#), points out that interviewers are looking for a very specific set of interpersonal skills, such as leadership, communication, and collaboration.

That's what the Boston-based international tour operator Grand Circle is after when it gives groups a task to complete, such as building a vehicle to transport an egg. "We analyze how candidates react," says senior vice president of human resources Nancy Lightbody. "We're looking for natural leaders to emerge."

How to be ready: No matter how tempting it may be to grab the spotlight, don't. "Dominate the conversation, and you'll be perceived as aggressive," says Priscilla Claman, president of Boston coaching firm Career Strategies. Sit back, though, and you risk being overlooked.

Give others space to offer ideas and then build on what they say. ("Josie brings up a great point ..."). "Having the ability to politely piggyback demonstrates you can collaborate and work well with others while taking a leadership role," says Finnigan. (Letting someone else speak first gives you more time to craft your idea too.)

Being in the same room as your competition, though nerve-racking, may give you a feel for the atmosphere at your future workplace. You're getting a glimpse into the types of people the company likes. If the competition is cutthroat, employees may be as well.

The Panel Approach

What to expect: A third of employers put prospects in front of a group, Glassdoor reports. You'll probably meet with three to five people, such as an HR rep, your prospective supervisor, a senior peer, and heads of departments you'd interact with daily. For employers a panel interview has several advantages. "It eliminates different people hearing different things in one-on-one interviews," says Peter Cappelli, director at Wharton's Center for Human Resources.

The insurer Kaiser Permanente asks finalists for midlevel management positions to present to a group. “It creates efficiency for both the candidate and the company,” says Jason Phillips, vice president of national recruitment and HR operations. “Many senior job seekers have a tight calendar.”

Another upside for you is the insight you can gain into the company culture. Pay attention to how panelists interact with one another; in a healthy environment co-workers are collaborative but also welcome and respect other points of view, says Finnigan.

How to be ready: To make it past a board, you’ll need everyone’s buy-in, says Washington, D.C., career counselor Karen Chopra. Contact your point person ahead of time to learn whom you’re meeting and roughly how long the interview will last (some run two to three hours). To give yourself a preview of the folks you’re facing, look up everyone’s profile on LinkedIn.

Introduce yourself to all the panelists and jot down the seating order; you can glance at the chart throughout the session so you can address each person by name. (Save it for writing your thank-you notes.)

Eye contact conveys confidence, says Chopra, so look directly at the person who poses the question, pass your eyes around the room as you answer, and circle back to the questioner as you’re wrapping up. Bring any mum panelists into the conversation, especially if there’s a chance silence means a closed mind. Posing a question about their divisions or clients also shows you’ve done your homework.

The High-Stakes Game

What to expect: Borrow your kid’s Xbox controller—you might need it for a job interview one day. Employers in a number of fields, including energy, consumer goods, and financial services, are starting to take a look at gaming technology to assess job candidates. Through custom-made videogames, companies can measure skills and personality traits that may be tough to pick up in person. “This is in the testing phase,” says veteran recruiter Mark Howorth. “But I do feel like it is about to take off.”

Take Knack’s Wasabi Waiter, a 10-minute game that has job seekers act as a sushi server at a virtual restaurant. Not only are your customer service skills tested, says Guy Halfteck, founder and CEO at the game developer, but “the game evaluates everything from your problem solving to critical thinking, logical reasoning, empathy, conscientiousness, and emotional intelligence.”

How to be ready: Gaming is in its infancy as a hiring tool, and how well the approach identifies ideal workers remains an open question. Nonetheless, get used to the technology. You can play Wasabi Waiter on [Knack’s free mobile app](#), “What’s Your Knack?,” but don’t overthink your strategy: Your instincts are what interest employers, says Halfteck. When you’re finished, though, get back to working on your in-person interview skills. Odds are the last leg of the hiring process will be a face-to-face one.