

How to prepare yourself when being interviewed by a group

If an interview with one person is stressful, is a four-person interview four times as stressful? Some people would say it's more like 40 times as stressful. Even people who enjoy the interview process tend to wilt in group interviews. After all, you're walking into a room full of people who all know each other well and are going to talk about you later. But confidence can come from being prepared.

Ask some initial questions to get better prepared

When the interview is scheduled, request the following information:

- Time, location and approximate length of the interview.
- Number of other people being interviewed for the same job, particularly on the same day.
- Names and titles of the people on the panel.
- The decision-making process: Will the choice be made by committee, or will one person make the choice, with input from the others?

Once you have the information, think about it. The more analysis you apply in advance, the more control you will feel in the discussion.

At the interview, remember people hire people they like. These people want to determine whether they like you and whether you will fit into their operation. The best way to be likable is to be genuinely interested in each of them and to appear confident. Upon entering the room, shake hands with each panel member. Explain that you brought a fresh copy of your resume for everyone. As they are handing around your resume, surreptitiously open the pad you have brought and make a quick seating chart to help you remember who is who.

When the first question is asked, take the opportunity to thank the panel before you answer. "I'd like to thank you for inviting me to talk with you. I appreciate that so many key people were available, and I'm glad to get this chance to meet you."

Include everyone in the group

As each question is asked, begin your answer by looking at the person who asked it. Then move your head slightly and make contact with others on the panel. It isn't necessary to make eye contact with each person for every question, but don't leave anyone out for more than a couple of questions at a time. Finish your answer while looking at the person who asked the question, and remember to make your answers slightly shorter than you would in a one-to-one interview.

When it's time to ask a question of your own, try to direct it to one person. For example, if the director of operations is there, you might say: "I can see that this department could have some challenges. Ms. Smith, can you tell me how it impacts distribution to have two locations?"

As the interview comes to a close, shake hands again with everyone, if it's not too awkward. Otherwise, address the apparent leader with a handshake, and tell the group

that you have enjoyed the interview and look forward to an opportunity to work with them.

After the interview send at least one thank you letter, to the head of the committee.