The Rules of Interview Etiquette

Interview scheduled? Whether you’re looking for your [first job](http://www.daily-muse.com/career/10-ways-to-avoid-the-first-day-jitters/" \o "10 Ways to Avoid the First Day Jitters" \t "_blank) or you’re a seasoned professional, it never hurts to brush up on these basics. Follow these rules for making all the right moves before, during, and after the interview, and you're sure to shine.

1. **Rehearse**

There are several questions that you’re pretty much guaranteed to be asked during an interview: “Why do you want to work for this company?” “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” and “Where do you see yourself in five years?”—to name a few. So be prepared with insightful answers for these classics, plus be familiar with other interview questions typically asked in your field, too. Practice looking in the mirror and answering the questions out loud. This prep work will help you clarify your thoughts and make you much more comfortable during the interview.

2. **Do Your Research**

At minimum, review the company’s website and Google its key players. Find out who you’ll be interviewing with and learn something about them, such as when they were last quoted in a publication or if they’ve recently received an award. Casually reference the information during the interview and quote specifics, such as “I see the company has expanded into several new markets over the past year.” You’ll project the image of someone who is interested, does their homework, and pays attention to details.

3. **Brush up on Body Language**

Be aware of what you're communicating through your posture and stance—and make sure it’s good. For example, sitting with your arms and legs crossed sends a message that you are closed-off or feel defensive. If you keep your hands in your lap the entire interview, you could signal that you lack self-confidence. And twirling your hair can make you look nervous or juvenile. Next, always stand up when someone else comes into the room. Professionally, you lose respect and credibility by staying seated—it sends a weak and powerless message. Think your movements through ahead of time so you are not distracted (or distracting) during the interview.

4. **Dress the Part**

An interview may be the only shot you have to impress the decision-maker in person, so make sure you’re dressed impeccably. It’s always better to overdress than underdress, but do some sleuthing and find out what the corporate dress culture is before you walk through the door. A dark suit (jacket and pants or skirt) and a crisp white shirt, manicured nails, simple make-up, and clean, professional shoes will be perfect in most cases. And definitely avoid dangling earrings, too much perfume, and multiple, clanking bracelets.

5. **Shake it Like You Mean It**

No "fingers-only" handshakes, ladies! The proper, professional way to shake is using the entire hand, extending your arm (first if possible) for a firm, but not overbearing grip, while rolling the index finger around the bottom of the other person's hand. The "fold" between your index finger and thumb should touch the other person’s. If this doesn’t come naturally, practice with a friend before your interview.

6. **Smile**

Yes, a job interview is a high-pressure situation, but freezing up and looking nervous will lose you points in the few critical moments you have to shine. Smiling naturally (without pursing your lips tightly together) will make you appear confident, friendly, and approachable. Even if you're not feeling it, fake it. A smile conveys that you’re someone who can get along with fellow employees, wow the boss, and impress the clients.

7. **Take the Water**

If your interviewer offers you a glass of water, take it, even if you're not thirsty. This little prop can help buy you time to formulate an answer to a difficult question or just give you a moment to center yourself.

8. **Ask Questions**

Keep in mind that the job interview is a two-way street. It's an opportunity for you to sell yourself to the company, but also to learn more about the workplace to see if the position and environment are a good fit for you. Go in with [a few questions](http://www.daily-muse.com/job-search/any-questions-what-to-ask-in-an-interview/" \o "Any Questions? What to Ask in an Interview" \t "_blank), such as details about the type of work that the position entails, the corporate culture, and the typical career path of someone who holds the position. And don’t be scared to speak up: not asking questions can signal that you’re uninformed or uninterested.

9. **Send a Proper Thank You**

Yes, even today, a handwritten note is mandatory. Sending a thank you letter via email is fine when the decision must be made quickly, but always follow up with written correspondence. (A voice mail message doesn’t take the place of a written note, either.) Express your thanks for the interviewer's time and for the chance to learn more about the company. No need to go overboard and—please—do not send a gift or flowers after the interview (yes, it's been done).

When it comes to interviewing, practice makes perfect, and knowing the rules ahead of time is a great start. So be prepared, be confident, and be yourself, and you’ll shine. Good luck!