Tips for designers: nailing the interview
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I can still remember my senior year of college… building a portfolio, researching places I dreamed of working and sending countless pleas for an interview. I not only remember how nervous I was, but how clueless and unprepared I was for "a real job." Now looking back, I wish I had someone to give me more direction on how to get interviews, prepare for them, what to do after interviews and the most important part, how to be good at the interview process. By no means do I have all of the answers, but I do have some useful tips that I would have greatly benefited from… and I hope that you can too.

Interview Basics for Designers

- Companies don't hire portfolios, they hire people. When you interview, you are selling yourself and your ability to produce great work. Your portfolio is the product of you.
- Look up the location in advance and be early. If anything is unclear, ask the receptionist for specific driving or parking details prior to the meeting. Never show up late to an interview or cancel without appropriate notice.
- Check to see how much time the interviewer has available and pace yourself accordingly.
- Hand out your résumé first, during the introductions.
- Connect with the interviewer. Ask them about their role, how long they've been there, their approach to design, etc.
- Remember, excitement is contagious.
- You have to "sell yourself" and your ability to do more than just produce great work. Interviewers have to believe in you and be willing to invest in your career.
- Each interviewer is different—some may like to drive your portfolio themselves, others may want to go through it quickly and then revisit, and some will patiently let you walk through it. Be prepared for all scenarios. Read the visual and verbal clues from the interviewer to determine their preference.
- Tell a story about the story behind the work; not just describe the finished piece

- When pressed for a full explanation, a good presentation formula includes a recap of the brief or assignment, an explanation of how you met the objective and highlights of anything unique about the process.
- You don't have to talk about each and every piece. It's OK if some get skipped.
- If they don't ask enough questions about your background, or what you want out of your next job, make sure to mention it in your answers. Some people aren't good at giving interviews, so it's important to make sure you work this in.
- Get their contact information to send a detailed thank you or follow up note.
- Ask questions. What are your expectations for this role? How will this role best provide value to your company? Ask them for advice or feedback about your work. If they are not currently hiring, ask for advice on who you should interview with.
- Never say something negative about your work, a classmate, professor, another company or client.
- Never apologize for something being included in your portfolio (if it's there to showcase a past challenge, that's what you focus on; if it's not good design, it doesn't belong in there at all).
- Never show exercise projects as portfolio items – these are essentially experiments, and aren't considered finished work. You may, however, include this in a sketch or process book.

Interview Preparation

- Research the company in advance. It's so easy to do this with the abundance of information available online. Skipping this step is very noticeable to the interviewer. Plus, if during the research you decide this isn't the company for you, then move on.
- Call the company to determine the name of the person whom will receive your résumé. Even if there is a general email address or portfolio drop-off policy, the receptionist will likely share the name of the person who makes the hiring decisions. Hint: be very friendly to the receptionist.
- Send an email with your résumé, a few portfolio samples and link to your online portfolio. If you are responding to an open job, include that detail in your subject line. If it is an unsolicited email, mention that you will call in a few days to request a meeting.
- Gear your portfolio and presentation towards the audience (while keeping true to the type of work you want to do). If you've done your research, you'll know what kind of work the company does.
- If you get a meeting, come with questions to ask. Write them down beforehand.
- Have a perspective. You should be able to recognize what you consider good design and why. Know why you are passionate about design and know what your goals are.

As far as what is most important during an interview, everyone will tell you something different, In my opinion, this is most important:

There are a lot of designers out there applying for the same job. You need to know your strengths and sell them. Find out what makes you unique and better at your job than the next guy. Not only is it important that the interviewer knows this, I think it's important for every designer to know this.

With a ton of useful tips, I hope you can find some inspiration that will benefit you during the interview process. Good luck!