

BEFORE YOU WALK INTO THE ROOM

A JLRS Guide to High-Stakes Workplace Interviews and Hearings

JLRS RESOURCE GUIDE

INTERVIEW & HEARING PREPARATION

Consequential workplace meetings can move quickly, and the outcome often turns as much on **how** you communicate as on what happened. This guide is communication preparation — not legal advice — for the moments when you may be speaking for yourself, in front of HR, an EEO investigator, a panel, or a deciding official.

Listen

Let the question finish completely before you start forming your answer.

Pause

A breath before you speak is discipline — not hesitation.

Answer

A few direct sentences. Answer what was asked, not everything you know.

1 • PREPARATION

BEFORE THE MEETING

- **Define your objective.** What is this meeting actually about? What decision might follow it? When it ends, what do you need the decision-maker to understand?
- **Build 3-5 core messages.** Short, factual themes — not speeches — that you can return to when relevant. Prepare themes and facts, then answer naturally in your own words; memorized language tends to sound memorized.
- **Know the record.** Walk in familiar with the chronology, the key documents and dates, what you've said before, and — just as important — what you honestly don't remember.
- **Prepare for the hardest questions.** Write down the questions you least want to be asked, and practice truthful, concise answers. The version you improvise under pressure is rarely your best one.

3 • UNDER PRESSURE

WHEN IT GETS DIFFICULT

- **Control the emotion — don't hide it.** If you're upset, pause, collect yourself, and continue. You don't have to fill an uncomfortable silence just because it's uncomfortable.
- **Disagree without arguing.** State what's inaccurate, calmly, once. Credibility tends to rise with composure and fall with debate.
- **Don't attack motives you can't prove.** Save words like *lying*, *biased*, *retaliating*, or *out to get me* for when the proceeding specifically calls for it — and ground the claim in facts, not frustration.
- **Bridge — don't dodge.** Once you've actually answered, you may briefly connect to a core message: answer, clarify if needed, connect briefly, stop. Skipping the answer to reach for your message isn't bridging — it's evasion.

2 • IN THE ROOM

WHILE YOU ARE ANSWERING

- **Listen to the whole question.** Don't start building your answer before the question is finished.
- **Pause before you answer.** A breath of silence is discipline, not hesitation — and it buys you a moment to answer the question actually asked.
- **Answer narrowly, then stop.** A few direct sentences beats a comprehensive one. Answer what was asked — and once it's complete, silence doesn't need explaining.
- **Never guess.** If you can't remember accurately, say so plainly: "*I don't remember well enough to answer that accurately.*" That sentence protects you far more than a guess ever will.
- **Ask for clarification.** If a question is confusing, compound, or you simply didn't hear it, ask the person to repeat or rephrase it. That's normal — not evasive.
- **Separate fact from characterization.** You can acknowledge an accurate fact, a mistake, or a responsibility without agreeing to every label or interpretation attached to it.

4 • CLOSING OUT

BEFORE YOU LEAVE / AFTER

- **Prepare a short closing.** If you're given the chance, use 30-60 seconds to state your most important factual theme, what you're asking for, and one forward-looking point.
- **Confirm next steps.** If it's appropriate to ask, find out what happens next and by when.
- **Write it down — right away.** As soon as you can, note who was there, what was asked, what you said, which documents came up, any commitments made, and any deadlines announced.

REMEMBER

**Slow down. Tell the truth. Listen carefully. Answer only what was asked.
Say what you know, say what you don't know, and stop when the answer is complete.**

JL Ricks Strategies provides strategic and organizational support. We are not a law firm and do not provide legal representation or legal advice. This guide covers communication preparation only — it is not a substitute for consulting an attorney where representation is available and appropriate.