

## THE PINK TO GREEN TOOLKIT: BUILDING CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

CREATED BY WIDER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN FOR THE GREENWAYS  
INITIATIVE

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### TOOL 3.10 INTERVIEWING FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: PREPARING WOMEN TO BE COMPETITIVE CANDIDATES

Occupational training participants can use this tool to prepare themselves for interviews. It provides in-depth tips on common interview questions specific to the industry, how to answer these questions in the most effective way, as well as advice tailored to women in this nontraditional field. It also summarizes illegal interview questions and general interviewing guidance.

*This tool is also part of the pre-apprenticeship Multi-Craft Core Curriculum of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO.*

#### WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL

Occupational training instructors, with their students; case managers; job developers; soft skills instructors; career coaches

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#### THE PINK TO GREEN TOOLKIT

This tool is part of *The Pink to Green Toolkit: Adding a Gender Lens to Green Jobs Training Programs*, created by Wider Opportunities for Women for the GreenWays initiative. All tools are available online at: [www.jff.org/pinktogreen](http://www.jff.org/pinktogreen)

The GreenWays initiative provides high-quality workforce services to employers and to workers seeking to advance their careers in the green economy. The initiative invests in 20 workforce partnerships across six diverse industry sectors

in eight metropolitan labor markets. It builds on JFF's approach of organizing employers and workforce resources into sectoral workforce partnerships to promote career advancement for lower-skilled workers. GreenWays is supported by grants from the U.S. Department of Labor through Pathways Out of Poverty and the Green Jobs Innovation Fund.

[www.jff.org/initiatives/greenways](http://www.jff.org/initiatives/greenways)

# INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR WOMEN ENTERING THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

It may seem hard to believe that your 5 to 10 minute interview will, in some cases, receive the same weight in the selection process as the test you have taken several months to prepare for. Preparing for the interview, then, requires the same practice and attention. Below are some tips to help you make the most of this opportunity to tell them why YOU are the best candidate.

## First impressions matter!

Exhibit Confidence

- > Give a firm handshake
- > Make eye contact
- > Maintain an upright posture, walking and sitting
- > Do not fidget

Demonstrate your commitment and seriousness: Apprenticeship programs invest thousands of dollars in training apprentices and their number one criterion in a candidate is commitment to completing the program. Demonstrate this by:

- > **Arrive promptly for the interview** (early is better)
- > **Appearance**—good grooming and neat, conservative clothing—whether or not this is work gear will depend on where you are interviewing. If it is a jobsite, wear work clothes; if it is an apprenticeship school, wear clothes that are nice but not overly feminine. Do not wear a skirt, dress or shorts. Limit jewelry and fancy nails or hairstyles—you want them to be able to picture you on a jobsite. Minimize body art and exposed skin. Do wear neat, well-fitting pants, presentable but practical shoes (no heels), and a conservative, unisex type shirt, sweater or jacket. Remove outerwear.
- > **Focus on the interview**—even while waiting, stay off electronic devices and cell phones (make sure these are turned off!).
- > **Bring all relevant documents** and present them in an organized and neat manner.

**Be polite, respectful, and likable:** Even if they forget what you say, they will remember if they liked you. Put them at ease by:

- > Greeting and thanking them, individually if possible

- > Smiling
- > Being sincere

**Be prepared:** Learn as much as you can about the trade you are applying for before the interview and practice your presentation so that, even if you are nervous, you will not be tongue-tied. You may not know the exact questions they will ask, but you should know what you want them to know about you. Whatever they ask, be sure you make the presentation you intended.

**Be positive:** Apprenticeship programs do not expect you to be skilled in the trade, but they do expect that you know enough to know what it is you are applying for. So don't be shy about talking to them about your limited experience and your research. Be positive and talk about what you do know, not what you don't know.

Don't be indecisive: You may have doubts about what you really want, or your qualifications for the job, but the interviewer doesn't need to know that. You should answer any questions about your commitment or goals as if you haven't a doubt in the world. "This is what I want and I have the aptitude/skills/commitment to do it." Even if you have no doubts about your choice, many women have been socialized to communicate less directly and often unconsciously insert phrases like "I think" or "maybe" into otherwise clear sentences. Try to monitor your language and remember, you can always refuse an opportunity, so don't give away the power to choose. Do not say, "I think I would like . . .," say, "This is the career I want."

**Be specific, give examples:** Whenever possible, back up what you say with concrete examples such as, "I'm dependable—I maintained perfect attendance in my pre-apprenticeship class" or, "I only missed one day of work last year." Instead of, "I'm a hard worker," talk about how your productivity exceeded expectations on your last job. If you have a hard time giving yourself credit, think about things supervisors or co-workers have complimented you on and you can phrase it that way if it feels more comfortable. For example, you might say that your supervisor gave you the highest possible evaluation for customer service. Awards, promotions, or other tangible rewards for good work, are also great to mention.

**Be logical and don't ramble:** If you are applying to the electrician's apprenticeship program, the answer to "Where do you hope to be in five years?" is "Working as an electrician." Think about what they want to hear before answering the question and make sure your answers relate directly to the opportunity you are applying for.

**Listen to the question:** Wait until the interviewer has finished stating the question and try to answer it thoroughly. Stay on point as much as possible because you have a very short timeframe to make an impression and you don't want to waste it on irrelevant information. Assume that the interviewer will ask a follow-up question so make sure you can talk about the answers you give. An answer such as, "I love bricklaying," is really not enough, and you will have to be able to answer why you love it. When you are preparing your answers, think about the likely follow-up questions and make sure that you are prepared to answer those as well.

**Highlight relevant training:** Mention your participation in the training program and anything else you did directly and specifically to prepare for a career in the trades. You didn't just get up one morning and decide to become a bricklayer, so don't forget to emphasize that you attended this course. Also, do not assume your interviewers know what the program is about, make sure to tell them about what you studied, how long the course was, and any certificates or awards you received in recognition of your participation.

**Be relatable and authentic:** Do not be intimidated by the visible differences between you and the interviewer as it is quite likely that you share many of the same values and motivations as your interviewers. Think about who they are and appeal to those commonalities. Be yourself—you don't want to sound like a robot reciting an answer that you don't really own. Instead, make sure that your responses are authentic and flow from your own experience and interests.

## COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Typically, you will be interviewed by two or more people representing the union and contractor sides of the apprenticeship program. They will generally follow a script and assign a score to your answers. Though each program is a little different, below are some typical questions to consider when preparing for an interview.

**1. Why do you want to be a bricklayer/plumber/electrician/etc.?** Think about what attracted you to the trade you are

applying for and be able to talk about it without mentioning money or benefits. Demonstrate that you are truly interested and enthusiastic about the apprenticeship and the trade.

**2. What do you know about, or what kind of experience do you have, in this trade?** They may or may not ask you this specifically so try to work some of this into the first question and, if you miss anything, find a way to tell them at the end. As discussed above, the most important point to communicate under this question is: I know what I'm applying for (the good and the bad) and I know enough to commit to this apprenticeship program. Do your research so you can speak confidently about the work of the trade and let them know how you know it (e.g., did you read up on it, interview tradeswomen, have experience, talked to friends/family in the trade). Put their fears to rest about your ability to handle the work. Here are a few examples:

- » "I know it's physical work and I will have to lift \_\_lbs. I know I can do this because: I workout every day; I routinely lift \_\_lbs at my current job."
- » "I know I will work outside in the heat and cold and I know I can do this because: I have done it before; I play summer/winter sports; I know how to dress comfortably, etc."
- » "I know I will need good math skills and I have: a strong background in math; have recently completed a math class with a score of \_\_ on my final; I love math, etc."
- » "I know I will have to travel and I: can read a map; have a good vehicle, etc."
- » "I know I will have to be at work at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, which I know I can do because: I have had jobs like this before; I have always been a morning person up at the crack of dawn, etc."

**3. You are working on a task assigned to you by your supervisor when your co-worker asks if you can help him/her out with another task. What do you do?** This is a common question to get at your problem-solving abilities. There is no actual right or wrong answer, be thoughtful and share an example.

**4. What are your strengths and/or weaknesses?** They are looking for insight into your character. If you are very small, for example, the interviewer might be thinking "Can she really handle this physical job." You can actually use this question as a way to address the concern. You might say, "I was concerned about my physical strength, so I have been

working out for the past \_\_ months, and at this point I can lift over \_\_ pounds fairly easily.” Or maybe you were afraid of heights but have been practicing climbing up and down ladders and now feel comfortable enough to be confident that you can meet the challenge. This is also a place to share that although you have limited experience you probably have skills or interests that are transferable to nontraditional work. Give examples from your own experience.

These are just a few examples; think about the demands of the trade you are applying for and make sure you communicate why you think you will be successful.

If you get to the end of the interview and find that you have not clearly made your case, it is acceptable to end the interview by saying something like, “I want to thank you for this opportunity and let you know that if I’m selected I will . . .”

## ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Although it is illegal to ask about your marital status or child care, it is very possible that you will be asked such questions. It would be a mistake to be upset or irritated about it during the session, but there is no need to provide a lengthy response either. You can just answer the question or politely deflect it by saying something like, “My family is very supportive and has never kept me from giving my job the priority it deserves. In fact, I have an excellent attendance record with my last employer.” You can make a note of such illegal questions after the interview in case you later come to believe that you were discriminated against.

## ASKING QUESTIONS

Asking questions shows you are serious about the opportunity, so if there is an opening, it is good to have one or two prepared. Do not ask questions about things you should know if you had done your research and avoid any questions related to what’s in it for you, such as pay, benefits, etc. You can ask questions such as: “When will decisions be made?” or “What can I do to prepare for work in this field?”

## TRAITS AND SKILLS TO DEMONSTRATE IN AN INTERVIEW

- > Confident
- > Reliability
- > Organized
- > Patience
- > Common sense
- > Approachable
- > Self-motivated
- > Knowledgeable
- > Effective communicator
- > Cooperative
- > Perceptive
- > Sense of humor