

Preparing for a Front-End Designer job Interview

By [Jake Bresnehan](#)

Preparing for an interview as a front-end developer is hard. There is no “standard” interview, and what was relevant last year might no longer be relevant today. To make the process even more complicated, each company has its own way of interviewing prospective employees, its own desired skill set and its own duties for the incoming developer.

The interview process could be quick or drawn out. The process is out of your control, so don't stress out too much about it. As long as you have given yourself the best possible chance of landing the job, that's all you can do.

One thing to keep in mind: don't be afraid to apply. Some job advertisements are worded to scare off some applicants and attract only the best of the best. If the job appeals to you and you meet the essential requirements, why not apply?

Getting an Interview

Once you have found a job that appeals to you, it's time to pour a big cup of coffee and knuckle down.

Read the job advertisement — read it again and again and again. The most important thing to do is really **address the selection criteria**. Submit exactly what they want; if you cannot do that, then do your best to show why you are the right person for the role.

Things To Help You Land An Interview

PERSONAL WEBSITE

For crying out loud, you're a front-end developer: build a website! Take your time to learn while tweaking and modifying. If you don't have the design skills, then pair up with a designer friend to help you out, buy a theme or even hire a designer.

UPDATE YOUR PORTFOLIO

How you incorporate your portfolio into the website comes down to personal preference. Showcasing the work you've been involved in can increase your chances of getting an interview. There is no need to show all of your work, just your best. If you are a newcomer to the field, you might find it hard to fill out a portfolio. This is not a big concern. It might just take a little more preparation. For example, you could do the following:

- Ask around to see if any family or friends need a website,
- Build a website for your local sporting club,
- Create a WordPress plugin,
- Create a splash page for an imaginary application.

The possibilities are endless. It requires just a few more hours at your desk, but the effort will pay off.

COVER LETTER

Not all job advertisements ask for a cover letter these days. Generally, the body of the email will suffice. If you are required to supply a cover letter, though, make sure to address the given questions, and **write in a professional yet friendly manner**. There's no need to be over the top, but don't be too casual either. Before hitting the "Send" button, double-check your spelling and proofread the email to make sure it reads well. Better still, get someone to triple-check it.

RESUME

This is generally a one-page document and one of the first items an employer will look at. First impressions count, so make sure it conveys your skills, values and experience accurately.

If you are required to provide an online version, [LinkedIn](#), [Zerply](#) and [Stack Overflow](#) are all great services. Whichever you use, ensure the resume is up to date and sets out your skills, values and experience.

GO THE EXTRA MILE

If the company you are applying to is outstanding, you will certainly not be the only one applying. To stand out, why not take the time to put together a **personalized website specifically for this application**? Doing this not only shows that you have gone above and beyond what is required, but shows off your repertoire of skills and shows that you really want the position.

Another great draw card is to be active in the community. Participate in online conversations, answer questions on [Stack Overflow](#), fork [GitHub](#) repositories, dig through code, and keep on learning. If you find you need a tool or resource that doesn't exist, try to build it. Open-source the code and add it to GitHub. Having a **solid GitHub account** that showcases your projects and involvement in the community can add that "Wow" factor to your application, especially with more technically oriented companies.

KEEP YOUR ONLINE PROFILE CLEAN

Once you have submitted your application, there is a high probability that the employer will search online for you. Make sure your Twitter feed, Facebook page, LinkedIn profile and so on are clean and represent your professionalism.

Possible Pre-Interview Step

An extra step in the normal recruitment process is not unheard of. This often involves a simple coding challenge or a phone interview. Companies tend to do this in order to shortlist applicants.

Don't be afraid of a coding challenge. Treat it as an opportunity to show off your skills. Go the extra mile — take your time and execute it to your best ability. **Show them that you know your stuff.**

For example, I have been asked on several occasions before an interview to code modules that were currently being used on the company's live website.

If you are asked to interview by phone or Skype, be prepared. Do some research, and have some notes handy. Be confident and passionate about the role. Get comfortable wherever you take the call. The more relaxed you are, the better. Just because you are on the phone, doesn't mean you should forgo general interview etiquette.

The Interview

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

When the interview comes around, put in as much effort as you can. Preparing will give you a huge advantage and will hopefully calm your nerves. It is the key to increasing your chances of landing the job.

RESEARCH

Before the interview, take some time to look into the company, its people, its values, its current and past projects, and its history.

Investigating the company's competitors is also a good idea. It will help you to see what the company and its competitors do well, and identify areas of improvement that you can discuss with the employer. It will also show that you have done your research and that you are able to think outside of your "code editing" role, which could make a big difference.

Moreover, knowing who you will be interviewed by and researching the caliber of the staff will be to your advantage.

PRACTICE ANSWERING SOME QUESTIONS

Get comfortable talking out loud about yourself and what you have to offer. No two interview questions will be the same, but this [compilation of questions](#) on GitHub by leading front-end developers is a great resource.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

First impressions count. Be on time (but not too early). Dress appropriately. Starting off the interview on the right foot will give you a massive advantage and will help to calm your nerves. Being polite, excited and knowledgeable will put you in a good position. Throughout the interview, show how passionate and enthusiastic you are for the position. No employer wants to hire someone who seems disinterested. Try to keep calm, even if you are ridiculously nervous. Try to convey positive energy, rather than let your nerves get the better of you.

For example, I was given the task of coding on a whiteboard in one of my interviews. Not only was this completely unnatural, but it really pushed my knowledge. Try to remain calm and focused if you are put in such a situation. Preparing for the unexpected is difficult — just do your best.

Know your strengths, and talk them up where possible. Turn any of your negative attributes into positives. If you lack a particular skill set or area of knowledge, there is no need to highlight it. Instead, emphasize what you have to offer; for example, that you are a quick and eager learner and can easily acquire any skill set necessary to perform the job.

TAKE ALONG SAMPLES OF YOUR WORK

If you have a portfolio, take your laptop or tablet in with you to show the employer samples of your work. This will allow you to explain your work in greater detail, including showing off your code under the hood. This interaction with your work will create a more memorable impression than just giving a description or a link.

TALK ABOUT SIDE PROJECTS

Talking about any interesting and relevant side projects will enhance your prospects. Much can be said about what someone does in their free time. If you live and breathe front-end Web development, make this known to the interviewer.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

Be succinct, but give well-rounded answers. If you feel you can't answer a question, explain how you would find the answer, or at least turn the situation into a positive and show them what you do have to offer.

Keep the interview flowing, but don't waffle. Waffling is dangerous. You could easily divert into saying something you will regret. There is a fine line between giving too much away and intriguing the interviewer.

ASKING YOUR OWN QUESTIONS

Take along a list of questions to pose to the interviewer (or panel) in the final stages of the interview process. You might be too overwhelmed or exhausted to remember the questions, so a note might come in handy.

Here are some questions you could ask:

- What kind of work will I be doing in general?
- Is this a new position that has opened up because of more work?
- What is the company's policy on work-life balance?
- What kind of tools or software are provided in the workplace?
- What would I be working on first?
- Am I allowed to do other work after hours?
- Is there a budget for conferences or training?

BEFORE PARTING WAYS

Before you leave, find out the next step — i.e. the timeline for when you will be advised of whether you've been chosen. Then, thank the interviewer for the opportunity and for taking the time to meet with you.

Post-Interview

If the interview has gone well, your referees (or at least one of them) will no doubt be contacted. Giving them a head's up is courteous. It would also help if they knew some details about the position before getting quizzed about you.

If you feel you have waited long enough to hear whether you've gotten the position, send a follow-up email. Try not to come across as impatient, though. I have waited up to six weeks for an initial response.

Interviews are hard! Don't be disheartened if you don't get the job. Make the most of any positive feedback, and work on the negative feedback so that you have even more

positives in your next application. And reflect on how the interview went. Jotting down any matters you felt you could improve on will assist you the next time around.

If you are offered the job but are unsure whether to accept it, you could contact current or past employees via services such as LinkedIn. This insight into their experiences and the workplace will help you make an informed decision.

Conclusion

The interview can make or break whether you land your dream job. Regardless of whether you have the right skills, the best portfolio and the most experience, if you cannot sell yourself during the interview, you might not convince the employer that you are the one for the job. Your skills and experience will not go unnoticed, but a poor interview performance would detract from them.

So, to put your best foot forward, make the most of pre-interview preparation, and have confidence in yourself.

Good luck!