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**NORC**  
 at the UNIVERSITY of CHICAGO

# FINDING A JOB: AMERICANS' EXPERIENCES WITH INTERVIEWING

Half of Americans have faced problematic questions or inappropriate situations during a job interview at least once. In an Associated Press (AP) and CNBC poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, most job applicants have had to deal with uncomfortable situations at some point during a job interview. Three in 10 acknowledge exaggerating or lying about their background at any time while they were seeking a job.

When considering a job offer, Americans give most importance to the type of work they'd be doing, the salary, and the benefits package. Where the job is located and whether flexible hours are offered are given less weight. And few regard office amenities as a significant selling point for a job.

Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,054 adults, 1,030 of whom said they had ever interviewed for a job. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points.

Key findings from the poll include:

- Ninety-eight percent of Americans have interviewed for a job at some point, and half of them have interviewed within the past five years.
- Thirty-five percent of job seekers have been asked about their marital status, which is against federal law. Questions about medical history or disability can also leave employers vulnerable to discrimination lawsuits, and 21 percent report having been queried about that.
- Lack of preparation can hurt a job seeker's efforts. Forty percent say they were unable to answer during an interview because they went blank. Another 28 percent forgot their interviewer's name at least once. And 10 percent acknowledge arriving late to an interview.



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## Three Things You Should Know

About The AP-CNBC Poll on Job Seeking

Among Americans who have ever interviewed for a job:

1. Fifty-one percent have been asked an inappropriate or sexually suggestive question during a job interview.
2. Fifty-four percent report having experienced an embarrassing incident during the job interview, ranging from arriving late to profuse perspiration to forgetting the interviewer's name.
3. Twenty-eight percent acknowledge ever lying or exaggerating during the interview or on the job application.

- Twenty-eight percent of job seekers admit to overstating the facts at some point on an application or during the interview.
- When Americans are considering a new job, the duties of the position, its salary, and the retirement and insurance benefits play the most important role.
- Amenities such as food and games are not considered significant inducement to take a new position by many Americans. However, those under 30 are five times as likely as older people to regard them as very important: 16 percent versus 3 percent.
- Less educated and low-income Americans are more likely to be subjected to inappropriate questions during an interview than their better educated or more affluent counterparts. But they are no more inclined to lie during a job search than other job applicants.

## **HALF OF JOB CANDIDATES HAVE FACED INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS IN AN INTERVIEW.**

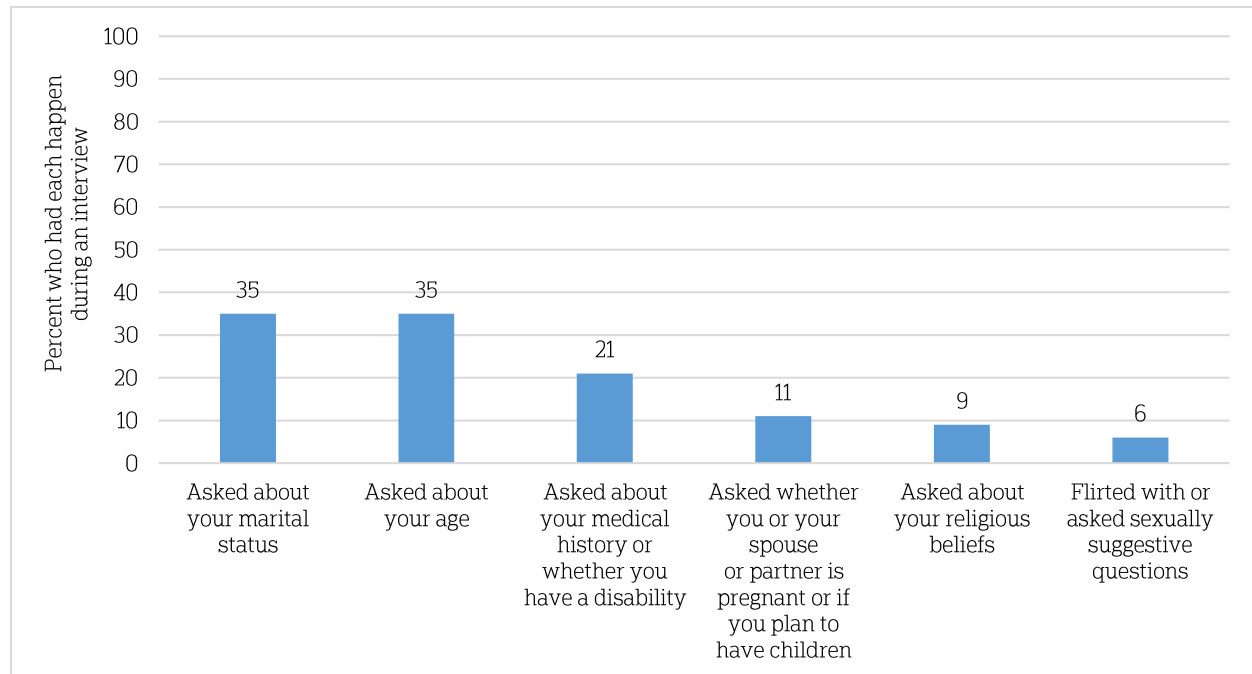
Nearly every American has been on at least one job interview in their lives, and half of them have been in challenging situations at least once, whether they were flirted with or asked potentially inappropriate questions.

Ninety-eight percent of Americans age 18 and older have interviewed for a job at some point in their lives. Twenty-three percent were last on an interview within the past year, 26 percent between a year and five years ago, 16 percent between five to 10 years ago, and 33 percent last interviewed more than 10 years ago. Adults age 18-44 are more likely than adults age 45 and older to have been on a job interview within the past year (37 percent vs. 10 percent).

Among those who have ever been on at least one job interview, 51 percent say they have been asked at least one inappropriate or personal question. Most commonly, interviewees have been asked about their marital status or asked about their medical history or whether they have a disability. About 1 in 10 say they were asked whether they or a spouse is pregnant or planning to have children or were asked about their religious beliefs. Fewer were flirted with or asked sexually suggestive questions.

As a general rule, information requested through the pre-employment process should be limited to those essential for determining if a person is qualified for the job. A person's race, sex, national origin, and religion are irrelevant in such determinations. And employers are explicitly prohibited from making pre-offer inquiries about a disability.

Employers are not prohibited from asking a person's age, and employees under age 40 are not protected by federal age discrimination laws. And when considering young job applicants, the employer needs to know the candidate's age because there are different rules for workers under age 18. Thirty-five percent of those who have interviewed for a job say they were asked about their age. However, it is not possible to ascertain how old they were when that happened.

**Among those who have ever interviewed for a job, a third have been asked about their marital status.**

**Question:** Has any of the following ever happened to you during a job interview, or not?

**Source:** AP-CNBC poll conducted nationwide October 12-16, 2017, with 1,030 adults who have been on at least one job interview.

Low-income Americans and those with low educational attainment are more likely to be subjected to inappropriate questions during an interview than their counterparts. Adults with household incomes of \$50,000 a year are more likely than those with household incomes of \$50,000 or more to say they were asked about their marital status (41 percent vs. 30 percent) or their medical history (30 percent vs. 12 percent). Likewise, those with a high school diploma or less are more likely than those with a bachelor's degree to say they were asked about their marital status (48 percent vs. 20 percent) or their medical history (33 percent vs. 7 percent).

Again, those with low educational attainment and low-income adults are more likely to say they were asked their age in an interview. Half of Americans with a high school diploma or less were asked their age in an interview, compared with just 15 percent of those with a bachelor's degree. Forty-four percent of those with household incomes of less than \$50,000 a year say they were asked about their age, compared with 27 percent of adults with household incomes of more than \$50,000 a year.

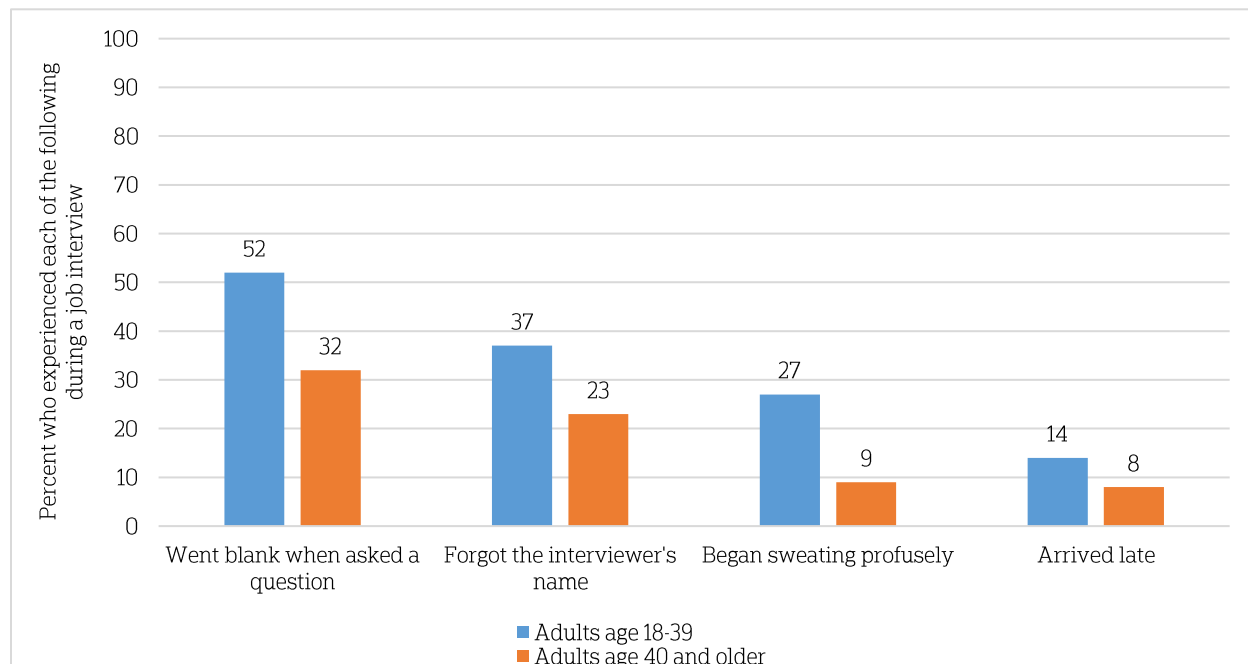
## **MORE THAN HALF OF JOB APPLICANTS REPORT AN EMBARRASSING EXPERIENCE DURING A JOB INTERVIEW.**

Having your mind go blank, arriving late, and excessive perspiration can all hurt a job candidate's chances of getting the job offer. Anxiety or lack of preparation are often the cause of these distressing incidents, and 54 percent of those who have applied for a job report having experienced them at least once.

Ten percent of applicants acknowledge arriving late for a job interview. Forty percent report the experience of having their mind go blank during a job interview. And nearly 3 in 10 say they forgot the interviewer's name while being considered for a position. Job applicants under age 40 are more inclined to disclose memory lapses than older job seekers.

Sixteen percent of job candidates report sweating profusely during their interview. Older job seekers are less inclined to profusely perspire during a job interview than those under age 40. Having toilet tissue attached on one's body or food stuck in one's teeth are humiliating incidents that few job seekers report having experienced.

### Younger job seekers are more likely to commit some of these “don’ts” during a job interview.



**Question:** Have any of the following ever happened to you during a job interview, or not?

**Source:** AP-CNBC poll conducted nationwide October 12-16, 2017, with 1,030 adults who have been on at least one job interview.

## BEING CAUGHT IN A LIE COULD RUIN YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING THE JOB.

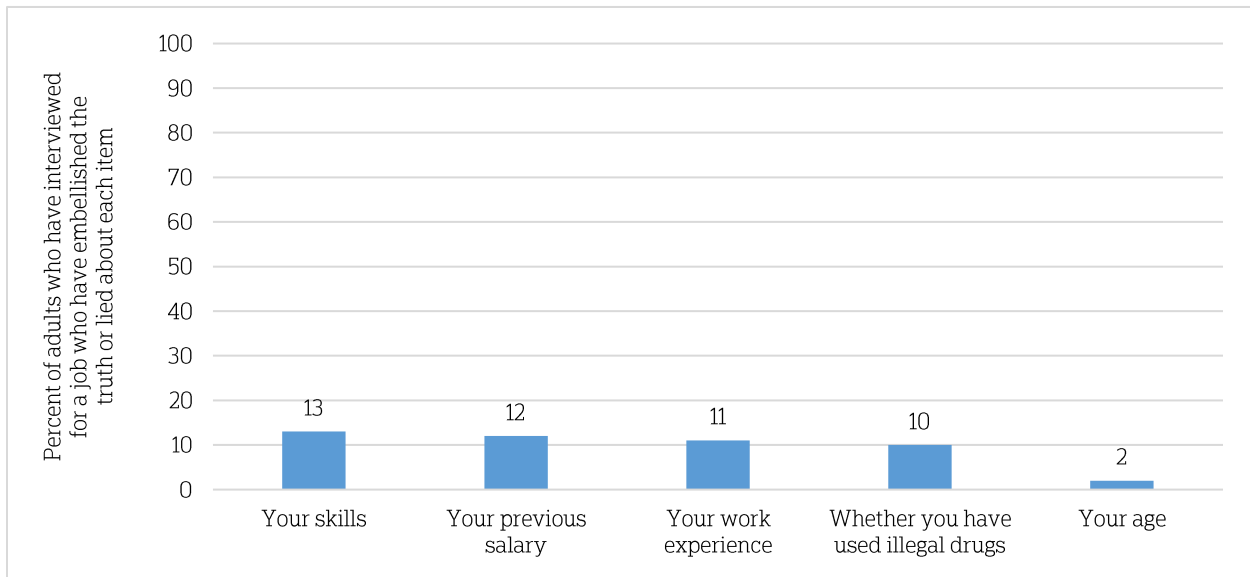
Twenty-eight percent of job candidates admit to having lied or embellished at least one thing during an interview or on an application.

Only 2 percent say they have lied about their age. But 13 percent acknowledge misrepresenting their job skills, and 11 percent did not tell the truth about their past work experience.

Ten percent admit to lying about illegal drug use. Job seekers under age 40 are more likely than older applicants to acknowledge lying about drug use (16 percent vs. 7 percent).

Twelve percent have not been honest as a job applicant about their previous salary, at least once. And when asked directly about how they respond to a question about their current salary, 27 percent say they lie or exaggerate and another 45 percent offer a range rather than an exact number.

Among the job applicants who have not lied about their salary, 45 percent say they tell the truth when asked and 27 percent say they have never been asked about current salary during a job interview. Twenty-four percent give a range rather than an exact number, and 2 percent avoid the question.

**Most job seekers say they have not embellished or lied on a job application or during the interview.**

**Question:** Have you ever embellished or lied about any of the following during a job interview or on a job application, or not?

**Source:** AP-CNBC poll conducted nationwide October 12-16, 2017, with 1,030 adults who have been on at least one job interview.

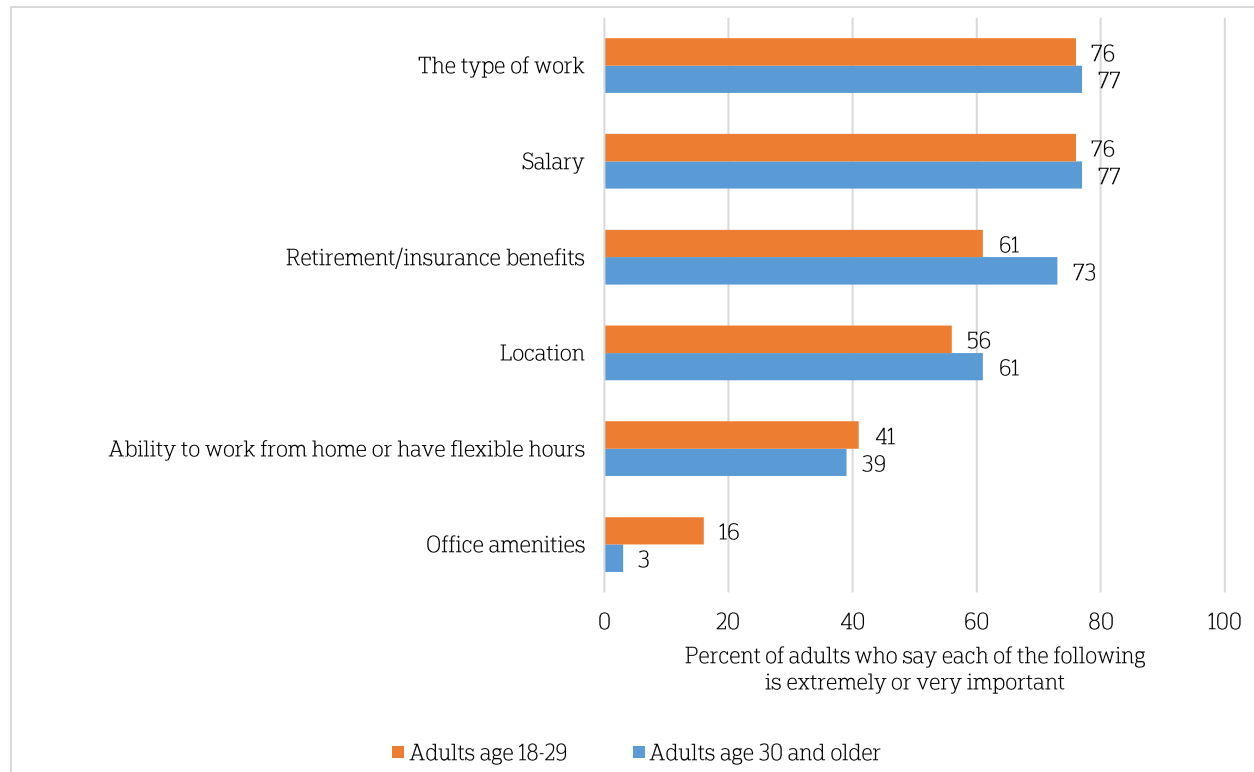
## WHAT MATTERS MOST TO JOB APPLICANTS WHEN LOOKING FOR A NEW POSITION?

More than 7 in 10 Americans say the actual work to be done, the salary offered, and the benefits package are extremely or very important features of any job opportunity. Where the employment is located is important to 60 percent, but only 40 percent say they would take into account the ability to work flexible hours or from home when deciding to accept a new position.

While retirement or insurance benefits are important to most Americans, those under age 30 are less concerned about that aspect of a job. About 6 in 10 of those age 18 to 30 consider benefits to be extremely or very important, compared to nearly three-quarters of older Americans.

Only 6 percent regard office amenities like food, games, or happy hours as particularly important features of any new position. However, 16 percent of adults age 18 to 30 say these types of office extras are extremely or very important in their decision to accept a job, compared with just 3 percent of older adults.

**Americans age 30 and older care more about benefits than those who are younger.**



**Question:** If you were looking for a new job, how important would each of the following be to you when considering whether to accept the offer?

**Source:** AP-CNBC poll conducted October 12-16, 2017, with 1,054 adults nationwide.

**ABOUT THE STUDY**

**Survey Methodology**

This AP-CNBC survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, with funding from CNBC. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC’s probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between October 12 and 16, 2017, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. All interviews were conducted in English by professional interviewers who were carefully trained on the specific survey for this study. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak. The survey was completed by 1,054 adults—914 via the web and 140 via telephone. Of them, 1,030 say they have interviewed for a job at least once. The final stage completion rate is 24.6 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 33.7 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 89 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 7.4 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2017 Current Population Survey. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: <http://www.apnorc.org>. For more information, email [info@apnorc.org](mailto:info@apnorc.org).

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## ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

- The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

The founding principles of The AP-NORC Center include a mandate to carefully preserve and protect the scientific integrity and objectivity of NORC and the journalistic independence of AP. All work conducted by the Center conforms to the highest levels of scientific integrity to prevent any real or perceived bias in the research. All of the work of the Center is subject to review by its advisory committee to help ensure it meets these standards. The Center will publicize the results of all studies and make all datasets and study documentation available to scholars and the public.

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