A PREP GUIDE FOR TRANSITIONING VETERANS

The civilian interview

Tell a hiring manager what you can do, what you've done yourself, and how that experience fits the job.

Think about your last shift. What did the next person need to know before you could go home? Your answer probably says more about your judgment, technical skill, and communication than your rank alone. Start there.

If your interview is tomorrow

First 10 minutes	Open the posting. Circle three things you would actually do on the job. Beside each one, jot down a time someone trusted you to do similar work.
Next 10 minutes	Pick one example and tell it out loud. Ask a friend to interrupt at the first acronym or the first time they can't tell what you personally did.
Last 10 minutes	Practice your introduction. Write two questions for the interviewer. Confirm the time zone, location or video link, and who you'll meet.

Find what you need

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Translate the work you did

Take three duties from the posting. For each one, name what you handled, a decision you made, and a result a civilian could recognize.

WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY	WHAT THE HIRING MANAGER NEEDS TO HEAR
"I stood watch."	"On overnight shifts I monitored equipment, logged abnormal readings, and briefed the incoming operator on what still needed attention."
"I was the supply NCO."	"I tracked repair parts for a maintenance shop. When a part slipped, I checked the delivery date and told the planner which jobs would be affected."
"I qualified new crew members."	"I taught new operators the rounds, observed them doing the work, and documented which tasks still needed practice before sign-off."
"I ran a work center."	"I assigned jobs across my shift, checked tools and parts before work started, and told the supervisor when a delay changed our plan."

These are examples. Use the duties you actually held. Be precise about whether you operated, maintained, observed, supervised, or approved the work.

Build your opening answer

Describe the work you know, give a short example, and say why this opening interests you. Try it in about a minute.

> *"I'm leaving the Army after working in maintenance logistics. I kept our repair team updated on parts that could hold up a job. On one shift, I caught a wrong part number before the order went out and worked with the mechanic to correct it. I'm interested in your field service coordinator role because I like being the person who gets a technician what they need before a customer visit."*

Need civilian search terms? Look up your specialty, then check its suggested occupations against the work you personally did.

My Next Move for Veterans

Tell one story well

A hiring manager who asks “Tell me about a time…” wants to hear a decision you can explain. Use STAR to put that decision in context.

Practice question

> *“Tell me about a time you caught a problem during a shift handoff.”*

Example from a maintenance coordinator

Situation	“Two shifts shared a maintenance queue. The incoming crew was preparing to start a job marked ready.”
Task	“I owned the turnover list and needed to confirm that the crew had what it needed before work began.”
Action	“I spotted a mismatch between the ticket and the parts receipt. I called the parts desk, confirmed the item was still in transit, and told the shift lead. I updated the ticket with an owner and the next check-in time.”
Result	“The lead moved the crew to a ready job. At the next turnover, the incoming planner could tell who was tracking the part and when to follow up.”

Prepare three more stories

A mistake you owned

What did you miss? Who needed to hear about it? What change did you make, and how did you know it stuck?

A disagreement you worked through

What did each person have at stake? Describe the question you asked, the trade-off you discussed, and who made the final call.

Something unfamiliar you learned

Name the task, who taught you, what you practiced under supervision, and what you could do independently afterward.

Use “I” for your contribution and “we” for the team’s result. Use numbers you can verify. Choose details you’re cleared to share.

What they'll ask you first

Use these prompts to practice in your own words. Pick one detail from the actual job posting for every answer about fit.

"Why are you leaving the military, and when can you start?"
Give a brief reason you're comfortable sharing, what you want next, and your earliest realistic date. If it depends on final orders or leave approval, say when you expect to confirm it.

"Why this company?"
Connect a detail you found to work you enjoy. "Your posting says coordinators stay with a service call until the customer has an update. I liked doing that for mechanics waiting on parts. Who would I work with when two customers both need the last part on the shelf?"

"What's a strength you'd bring?"
Choose one tied to the opening. If it's training, describe the skill you taught, how you checked the learner's understanding, and what they could do afterward. A job title alone leaves that work invisible.

"What are you working on?"
Choose an honest skill gap and give evidence of progress. "I used to give our planner too much background before saying what I needed. Now I lead with the decision and the deadline. My supervisor used my last update to schedule the work without a follow-up call."

"Have you used our equipment or software?"
Distinguish hands-on work from classroom or adjacent experience. "I've read alarms on an operator display. A controls technician handled the program changes. I'd need training on your platform before doing that independently."

"What pay and schedule are you looking for?"
Know your own range, travel limit, and shift availability. A recruiter screen is a reasonable time to ask, "What base range is budgeted? How do shift differential, overtime, travel, and on-call coverage work for this role?"

Before you join

For video, test your audio and keep the posting nearby. For an on-site visit, confirm check-in, parking, attire, and any footwear or protective equipment required for a tour. Bring your résumé and the questions you want answered.

Talk through a technical problem

Sketch one system you know. Label what you personally worked on. Then explain it to someone outside your specialty.

IF THE ROLE INVOLVES…	TRY THIS QUESTION OUT LOUD
Critical power	"What does an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) do?" In a battery-backed system, stored energy keeps the protected load powered while the generator starts and becomes available.
Electrical maintenance	"Talk me through a motor schematic." Identify the starter and overload protection. Name a test instrument you used, what you measured, and how the reading changed your diagnosis.
Mechanical or cooling	"Flow is down. Is the filter restricted?" Compare pressure drop across the filter with its normal value under similar conditions. What else would corroborate that reading?
Field service	"A customer wants a repair time before you have a diagnosis. What do you say?" Explain what you know, what you're checking, and who will give the next update and when.

Rehearse the decisions behind a real fault

What did you observe, and what did you expect? Which log, drawing, or approved check narrowed the fault? Describe your part in the diagnosis and repair. Finish with how you verified the outcome and what you recorded for the next shift.

When you reach the edge of your experience

> *"I haven't worked on that model. I'd confirm the asset and its current procedure with the site lead. I can walk you through a similar problem I diagnosed and show you where I'd need support here."*

For work involving hazardous energy, identify your authorization, the site procedure, and when you would stop and involve the site lead.

OSHA: hazardous energy control **UPS fundamentals**

Explain a PLC in plain English

Try this if the job mentions programmable logic controllers (PLCs). It gives you a way to explain both the equipment and your experience with it.

A tank-level example

A level transmitter measures the water in a tank. In this example, the controller turns on a high-level indicator when the measured level reaches a set threshold.

Input	→	Logic	→	Output
Tank level		**Compare to limit**		**Indicator command**

How would you describe the scan?

In a typical scan, the controller reads inputs, evaluates its program, and updates outputs. Ladder logic can express a condition such as “measured level at or above the threshold.”

Which signal is analog, and which is discrete?

The level transmitter reports a value across a range, such as 0 to 100 percent full. The indicator command has two states, on and off. A separate high-level switch could also supply a discrete input.

The command is on. Does that prove the indicator is lit?

A command tells you what the controller requested. An observation of the lamp or independent feedback can confirm what actually happened. Say which evidence you have.

What if the operator display and the field report disagree?

Compare the timestamps, displayed level, threshold, and any independent level indication. Explain who needs to know about the discrepancy before an operating decision is made.

Example answer from an operator

> *“The tank level on my screen hadn’t moved during a fill. The field operator reported a rising level. I spotted a stale timestamp on my display, briefed the shift lead, and gave both readings to the controls technician. They restored the data feed. I confirmed with the field operator that our readings tracked together again and logged the event for the next shift.”*

AutomationDirect: the PLC scan

Use the last five minutes

Ask two questions whose answers could change your decision. A recruiter can explain the offer and logistics. A future supervisor or teammate can tell you how the work gets done.

Choose questions for the person across from you

Hiring manager	"What would you need to see before you'd trust a new hire to cover a shift independently? Who decides they're ready?"
Future teammate	"Think about your last difficult shift turnover. What information did you wish you'd had sooner?"
Recruiter	"How often does this role travel or cover on-call shifts? What are the remaining interview steps, and when should I expect an update?"

Close in your own words

> *"Hearing how your leads train new operators made me more interested in the role. I enjoyed doing that on my last crew. Is there anything about my experience you'd like me to clarify before we wrap up?"*

Follow up while the conversation is fresh

Write down one detail the interviewer shared, anything you promised to send, and the timeline they gave you. A short thank-you that day or the next business day is enough.

Subject: Field service coordinator interview

Hi Sam,

Thanks for walking me through how your coordinators handle a delayed part when a technician is already on the road. I like getting people accurate information in time to change the plan. I'm interested in joining the team and would be glad to meet the service manager next week.

Jordan

If the agreed date passes, send one brief check-in that names the role and asks whether the timeline has changed.

Your one-page interview brief

Use one copy per job. Type short notes into the fields and save a copy, or print the page and write by hand.

Role and employer

What does this team do, and why does it interest you?

Three things the job asks you to do

Pair each duty with something you personally did. Use short phrases you can expand on in conversation.

Duty 1 from the posting	My example or result

Duty 2 from the posting	My example or result

Duty 3 from the posting	My example or result

My opening line

Two questions I want answered

Run a ten-minute mock interview

Hand this page to a partner, or record yourself. Pick a past event you can discuss openly and use a fresh copy for each story.

Spend two minutes on your introduction, four on one question and a follow-up, and two asking about the role. Use the last two minutes to compare notes and try one answer again.

The question I'm answering

Situation / What was happening?

Task / What did I own?

Action / What did I decide, do, or communicate? Why?

Result / What changed, and how did I know?

Ask your practice partner

What do you remember me doing? Which word or acronym lost you? What would you ask me next? If the listener can't name your contribution, try the action sentence again.

One sentence I'll say differently next time