

Mastering the Interview Process

Purpose of the Interview

- For the applicant to learn more about the organization and position.
- For the company to determine if the applicant has the personality fit, qualifications, and ability to learn or do the job.
- For the employer to find the most qualified candidate for the job and the best fit for the company.
- For the applicant to determine if the company is a good fit for them.

Preparing for the Interview

Know yourself

- Know yourself by identifying your strengths and weaknesses based on the job description.
- Determine how these strengths can help meet the needs of the company. Sell yourself confidently!!!
- Weaknesses should represent qualities that you have improved or areas of potential growth.
Example: You have found it difficult to speak in front of groups. To become stronger at this you joined the debate club and were able to win one of the debates.
- Determine how this job would challenge you and help you grow professionally.

Research

- It is critical to research the company and field in preparing for the interview. **You will be asked why you are interested in the company and position!!**
- Research the company on their website, LinkedIn Company Pages, and google them to find relevant stories.
- **Information to find out:** Size, locations, organization structure, types of clients, services or products, mission and vision, competitors, industry trends, financial strength, current and

potential markets, reputation, divisions and subsidiaries, and look for bios of current staff.

Dress for Success (for men and women)

Women:

- The best option is to wear a conservative, professional women's suit.
- Make sure the cut of it is below the knee and the shirt is a modest cut or style.
- You can wear a pant suit as well, but make sure it is cleaned and pressed.
- Shoes should have a medium to no heel.

Men:

- Wear a conservative suit that is cleaned and pressed with matching dress socks and nice tie.
- Wear conservative and comfortable shoes that are clean and polished.

Both Men and Women:

- Be conservative in the use of jewelry and piercings.
- Cover tattoos if you have them.
- Hair should be clean and neatly styled.
- Fingernails should be clean and filed.
- Avoid using perfume or cologne, but do use deodorant.

During the Interview

- Arrive 10 minutes early, so you have time to freshen up.
- Get the interviewer's name and if you can, greet them by Mr. or Ms. ____ and a firm handshake. Be confident and maintain good eye contact.
- Allow the interviewer to lead the interview.
- Maintain appropriate eye contact, while speaking and listening to the interviewer (Do not interrupt).
- Structure your answers to questions to be specific, concrete, and show results of actions. Offer examples of your work (i.e., a portfolio) that document your accomplishments.

- Use the Task, Action, Result formula to answer questions. (**See the Behavioral Interviewing section below**).
- Be prepared with 4 to 5 questions about the organization or position. You will always be asked if you have questions and this is critical to show interest in the position.
- **Be prepared to leave copies of your resume, transcripts, references, or reference letters, and bring your portfolio if you have one.**

Closing the Interview

- Don't expect an offer at the initial interview. That will happen later.
- Remain positive throughout the entire interview. Often the first and last few minutes can make the difference. If you are truly interested state that at the end.
- At the conclusion of the interview always ask what the next steps are in the process. Thank the interviewer for their time and hospitality.

After the Interview

- Take a few moments to jot down some notes about your interview (i.e., questions asked, responses, and how you might improve).
- Be sure to write down the name of every person involved in the interview.
- Write a thank you note to everyone involved in your interview within 24 - 48 hours. This may set you apart from your competition as many fail to do this step.
- If you have been asked to send additional information, do so as soon as possible.
- Follow-up within 7-10 days if you have not heard anything.

Additional Helpful Tips

- Be yourself and let them get to know you.
- Think about what an employer wants to know and prepare relevant examples.
- Prepare a strategy for every interview. Each position will have differences for which you need to prepare.
- Keep to the point. Don't bring up extraneous information, unless asked.
- Don't try to dominate the interview and keep your answers short and to the point.
- Ask well thought out questions that show interest and knowledge of the company.

- Do not ask about salary and benefits until the employer brings up the subject.
- Practicing out loud is very important. Career Services does practice interviews all the time.

Types of Interviews

The Traditional Interview: A typical interview will last between 30 minutes and an hour, though some may be longer if they are on-site interviews. Sometimes interviews can be half or even full day processes. The typical structure of an interview is:

- Casual Conversation and Ice-Breaking: 2-5 minutes
- Questions to evaluate how your background fits the position and how you fit into the culture: 20 to 40 minutes.
- Your opportunity to ask questions and be prepared: 5 to 15 minutes.
- Conclusion of interview. Reiterate your interest and do one last sell of yourself: 5 minutes.

The Behavioral Question: This is becoming the most popular type of question from employers. The questions are designed to find out how you have handled previous situations and equate those actions to future situations.

An Example: Tell us about a time when you had a disagreement with a supervisor and how you handled the situation? In your response you need to be detailed and specific about the positive outcome of your actions. Frame your responses using the following three-step process:

- **Situation:** Describe the issue or problem you faced.
- **Action:** Explain the actions that you took to resolve the situation.
- **Result:** Detail the positive and beneficial outcomes that came from your initiative.

Note: This is actually a good way to frame all of your answers to most questions. You will get these types of questions in all of the different types of interviews, most likely.

Panel Interview: This interview typically consists of the applicant being questioned by three or more interviewers. Address your responses to all members of the panel to keep them engaged.

Group Interview: In this format there are several interviewees being interviewed at the same time by one or more interviewers. The goal of this style is to allow the interviewer to observe your communication style and how you interact in a team.

Case Interview: This is a common approach in the consulting and financial industries. In this method, employers pose a problem and ask the candidate to propose logical steps to solve the problem. The goal in answering these types of questions is not to get a right answer, but to show logical steps to the answer you develop. **Example:** How many golf balls are used in the United States on a yearly basis? There are resources to help you develop a strategy for this type of interview.

Video/Skype Interview: This format is cost-efficient for companies in distant cities. Wear solid, dark suit, focus on the interviewer's image, and speak clearly. You may keep a resume in front of you for reference. Make sure your background is clean and professional. Turn off computer alerts, phone, and anything else that may distract you from the interview.

Telephone Interviews: Telephone interviews have become more common for first-round interviews. Here are a few hints on how to handle them:

- Arrange the interview for an "up" time for you. Be sure you will have a quiet area to talk.
- Practice with someone to get the feel of answering questions over the phone.
- When introductions are made, if it is a group interview, write down all the names so you remember them.
- During the conversation, be sure to be friendly, positive, and establish rapport.
- Be direct in answering questions and use active words to show your qualifications.
- Ask for clarification of questions, if needed.
- Have your questions prepared ahead of time.
- Prepare a closing statement on "Why you are the best candidate".
- Stand up during the interview because this opens up your diaphragm and helps you speak more clearly.
- Dress up for the interview and this can help you feel more confident.
- Keep your materials in front of you so you can refer to them.

Common Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself?
- Why are you interested in us?
- What are your career objectives?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- How has your college career prepared you for this work?

- Why did you choose your major and the college?
- What is your biggest weakness?
- What is your biggest strength?
- Describe an instance in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to do a project your way?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you used good judgment in solving a problem?
- Give me an example of a time when you disagreed with a supervisor and how you handled the situation?

Questions That You Can Ask

Always have questions prepared to ask to show that you are interested and have done some homework. If you answer no when asked if you have any questions it shows lack of preparation and interest.

- Can you give me an example of a typical day?
- What are the most pressing items to complete in the first year?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- What are the opportunities for professional development?
- What does your ideal candidate bring to this position?
- What is the next step in this process?

Illegal Questions

Questions that are asked to obtain information regarding your race, gender, religion, marital status, age, physical/mental status, ethnic background, country of origin, vital statistics, sexual preference, or any other discriminatory factor cannot be asked by the interviewer and are generally illegal as grounds for making employment decisions.

Examples of Illegal Questions:

- What is your country of citizenship?
- What is your native language?
- Where were your parents born?
- Are you married?
- Do you plan to have children?
- How much do you weigh?
- What are your childcare arrangements?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- How old are you?
- Have you had any recent illnesses or operations?

How to respond: You are under no obligation to answer these questions. Often the best way to approach this is to briefly answer the question by saying that this issue will not affect your work. Understanding the employer's concern might help you to structure your best course of action. You can ask the interviewer what their concern is about this issue and respond to that. For example, if the interviewer asks you about your plans to marry or have a family, you can ask what the employer is concerned about and respond that your personal life will not interfere with your career.

Direct Response: A more direct, but less comfortable response is to mention your concern that the issue has no apparent relevance on your qualifications or ability to do the job and is, in fact, illegal to ask. To be this straightforward in an interview usually is not too helpful. Generally, human resources officials know about these questions, but other employees may not know. It may be beneficial to notify the HR representatives that these types of questions are being asked and they will deal with it internally.

Evaluating Job Offers

- How does the position fit with your long and short-term goals?
- Do the most common activities of the job appeal to you?
- Look at the benefits carefully and you can sometimes negotiate better benefits if the salary is not where you want it.
- Is the salary satisfactory for the position?
- What are the advancement opportunities?
- Will you expand your skills in the position?
- Are the demands of the job compatible with the lifestyle you want?
- Are the values and culture of the organization in line with yours?

Negotiating an Offer

Negotiating an offer should be based on research that you have done about common salary levels and benefit levels. Most commonly, the benefits are where you can negotiate (i.e., better vacation, moving expenses, signing bonus, bonus structure, traveling expenses, etc.). If you negotiate on salary you must have data behind your negotiation.

Accepting/Rejecting an Offer

This should be done in writing even if you accept the offer over the phone. You will most likely receive a letter confirming salary, start date, and benefits from the HR

office. You should request at least a few days to respond to the offer, so you can consider all aspects of the offer and position.



Check out the YouTube video above for important interviewing tips.

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