

INTERVIEWING

Interviewing for a job can be a very energizing experience. Whether it is positive or negative is largely up to you. Employers interview candidates to determine how well they will "fit" into their organization. The interview will also allow you the opportunity to determine how well the organization will suit your needs. Before you can assess whether the environment suits your needs, you need to do some PREPARATION.

BEFORE, DURING & AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Before the Interview

- Prepare some general background information on your particular career field. Find out what some of the industry issues are and some of the major news items in that field.
- Research the organization that you are interviewing with. Find out what products/services they provide, and their reputation within the industry. Look at the competition and new products/services on the market. Use printed materials, the Internet and personal contacts.
- Know your rights. It is illegal for a prospective employer to ask questions that relate to race, gender, religion, marital status, or other personal areas, which do not have any bearing on your ability to do the job.
- Relax yourself by planning ahead. Prepare for the "Tell me about yourself" question and to discuss salary, if the question arises. Practice, practice, practice. To help you prepare for an interview, set up an appointment at the Career Center for a videotaped mock interview.
- Dress for success. Wear appropriate attire for the field in which you are interviewing. This shows the interviewer that you understand the position and take it seriously. In the business world, suits are the norm, usually in dark colors. The education and non-profit world is less demanding of its professionals. Check with professionals in that field.
- Let your confidence show through your preparation. Make sure you know what position you are interviewing for and the interviewer's name before you walk in. Know the exact location of your interview (get directions if needed). Arrive a few minutes early.
- What to take with you to the interview. Take a few extra copies of your resume, a list of references, a pad and pen, a portfolio when appropriate, your confidence, and a smile.

During the Interview

- Be aware of your disposition. Establish rapport with a smile, good eye contact, and a firm handshake. Show interest through questions and comments that show you are a part of the conversation. Never be defensive. Be aware of your non-verbal behavior. Good eye contact, relaxed but dignified posture, and a positive tone of voice are all important non-verbal communicators. Show enthusiasm for the position by being sincere, direct, and earnest.
- "Do you have any questions?" This is your time to find out if the organization is indeed a place where you want to work. Questions that are appropriate would include inquiries about the company's management style, policies regarding suggestions or new ideas, and what types of projects an entry-level position would entail. If the only questions you ask are related to salary, vacation time, benefits, etc., you'll leave the interviewer with the perception that you're only interested in what the company can do for you, rather than the contributions you want to make to the company.
- The dreaded SALARY QUESTION. Allow the interviewer to bring up the discussion of salary. This will usually happen toward the end of the first interview or during the second interview. It is wise to have a salary range in mind. Research salary ranges for specific positions using the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), located in the Career Center. Review newspaper ads that quote salary ranges. Conduct informational interviews with established professionals in the field. These sources will give you an idea of what is realistic. You'll also need to assess your personal budget to determine your own salary requirements. For example you could then say:

"I understand the national average for someone with my qualifications for this kind of position is \$____. Given the cost of living, I assume the salary would be ('higher' or 'about that level')." Or

If you know the salary range, you can state your requirements by overlapping the upper level of their range. For example: The range is \$17,000 - \$20,000. Your range could be \$19,000 - \$22,000.

Handled with tact, not only will you then have a better chance of being paid what you're worth; you'll also strengthen your candidacy.

- Show your interest and your competence. Be able to articulate what you're looking for and what you can offer. Reflect before answering the questions. When giving an example, remember the S.T.A. R. method. S.T.A. R. stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Results. First, give the interviewer a brief account of the specific situation and your task in that situation. Then explain the action you took, and the resulting outcome. Be specific. At the end of the interview, make sure to thank the interviewer(s) for their time and get their business card to follow up after the interview.

After the Interview

- Reflect on your experience. What parts of the interview went well? What could use improving? Examine what you could change about your participation. Gain confidence for your next performance.

- Thank the interviewer. Be sure to write a thank-you note to the interviewer. Keep the note personal, mentioning specific things that were discussed. Make sure to briefly include things that you might want the interviewer to know about that you missed in the interview. Express interest again in the position.
- Have patience with yourself and the interviewing process. Remain prepared and don't be discouraged by interviewing with several different organizations. Many job seekers will interview many times before they are offered a position. Keep in mind there are many criteria used in the interviewing process. While working on your technique, remain confident about your abilities!

Second Interviews

- Usually held at the company. Second interviews are usually more lengthy and provide the opportunity to meet with more people than just the recruiter. This is your chance to get a feel for the company climate, the area where you will be working, and the community.
- Accept the second interview only if you are seriously interested in the position. Second interviews require more time, energy, and expenses than the previous interviews. If the interview is out of town, clarify with the employer how expenses will be handled. Usually, the employer pays lodging, transportation, and food as long as you keep your receipts.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Behavioral Interview

Behavioral-based interviewing is a new style of interviewing that many recruiters are using in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral-based interviewing is this: The most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. Instead of asking you how you *would* behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave. The interviewer will ask you to provide details and usually will not allow you to generalize. Utilize the S.T.A.R. (Situation, Task, Action, and Result) method described on page 2.

Committee Interview

Committee interviews are a common practice. You will face several members of the company who have a say in whether you are hired. When answering questions from several people, speak directly to the person asking the question. It is not necessary to answer to the group. In some committee interviews, you may be asked to demonstrate your problem-solving skills. The committee will outline a situation and ask you to formulate a plan that deals with the problem. You don't have to come up with the ultimate solution. The interviewers are looking for how you apply your knowledge and skills to a real-life situation.

Group Interview

A group interview is designed to uncover the leadership potential of prospective managers and employees who will be dealing with the public. The front-runner candidates are gathered together in an informal, discussion-type interview. A subject is introduced and the interviewer will start off the discussion. The goal of the group interview is to see how you interact with others and how you use your knowledge and reasoning powers to win others over. If you do well in the group interview, you can expect to be asked back for a more extensive interview.

Lunch Interview

Lunch interviews follow the same rules as office interviews. The setting may be more casual, but remember it is a business lunch and you are being watched carefully. Use the lunch interview to develop common ground with the interviewer. Follow his or her lead in both selection of food and in etiquette. Attend an Etiquette Luncheon Seminar sponsored by the Career Center during the Fall and Spring semesters.

One-On-One Interview

In a one-on-one interview, it has been established that you have the skills and education necessary for the position. The interviewer wants to see if you will fit in with the company and how your skills will complement the rest of the department. Your goal in a one-on-one interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer and show him or her that your qualifications will benefit the company. Use specific examples to highlight your abilities.

Screening Interview

A member of the human resources department usually conducts the screening interview, which is meant to weed out unqualified candidates. Providing facts about your skills is more important than establishing rapport. Interviewers will work from an outline of points they want to cover, looking for inconsistencies in your resume and challenging your qualifications. Provide answers to their questions, and never volunteer any additional information because that information could work against you.

Stress Interview

Stress interviews usually are a deliberate attempt to see how you handle yourself. The interviewer may be sarcastic or argumentative, or may keep you waiting. Expect this to happen and, when it does, don't take it personally. Calmly answer each question as it comes. Ask for clarification if necessary and never rush into an answer. The interviewer also may lapse into silence at some point during the questioning. Recognize this as an attempt to unnerve you. Sit silently until the interviewer resumes the questions. If a minute goes by, ask if he or she needs clarification of your last comments.

Whatever the interview situation or style, remember to:

- Be articulate.
- Demonstrate confidence.
- Avoid "yes" or "no" responses.
- Show enthusiasm.
- Respond to non-verbal cues such as nodding or smiling.
- Avoid excess mannerisms or fidgeting.
- Avoid bringing up negative information about past jobs, co-workers or employers.
- Always present the best of your background or qualifications.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• What are your goals for the next five years?

The safest answer is a desire to be regarded as a true professional in the field and as a team player. Furthering your education (i.e. part-time graduate school) to better yourself and benefit the company is also a good answer.

- **What is your experience? Why would your skills benefit this organization?**
This is a time to state your experience in the field (if any). If you have not had direct experience in the field, highlight your transferable skills that have been utilized in part-time/summer jobs or in internships.
- **What is your major weakness?**
If there is a minor part of the job at hand where you lack knowledge, but will obviously pick up quickly, use that for the weakness. For instance: "I haven't worked with this type of spreadsheet program before, but given my experience with two other types, I don't think it should take me more than a couple of days to pick it up." Here you remove the emphasis from weakness and put it onto a developmental problem that is easily overcome.
- **Tell me about yourself.**
This is not an invitation to tell about your life history. You may need to know more about the question before giving an answer. "What area of my background would be most relevant to you?" This enables the interviewer to help you with the appropriate focus, whether business or personal life. However the interviewer responds, the story you tell should demonstrate at least one of your characteristics (honesty, determination, or ability as a team player). If you choose to accent yourself as a team player, part of your answer might include something like this: "I put my heart into everything I do, whether its sports or work. I find that getting along with your peers and being part of a team makes life more enjoyable and productive."
- **Describe a problem that you encountered and how you dealt with it?**
This question is designed to explore your analytical skills. It is not so much the problem that's important - it's the approach you take to solving problems in general. Explain to the interviewer the steps you take when solving a problem. Then specifically cite a problem and your solution.
- **Why should I hire you?**
Your answer should be short and to the point. It should emphasize areas from your background that relate to current needs and problems in the organization or the industry. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, meeting it point by point with your skills. Finish your answer with: "I have the qualifications you need, I'm a team player, I take direction, and I have the desire to be successful."

Questions and answers from this section taken from Knock 'Em Dead: The Ultimate Job Seeker's Handbook, 1997 edition, by Martin Yate.

THE OUTCOME AND YOUR RESPONSE

If you're offered the position:

- Some offers are made in writing by the firm with a starting date and salary commitment. Most are made over the phone or in the second interview. Make sure to get the offer in writing!
- It is always necessary to respond in writing to an offer. In accepting, send a letter as soon as possible. If the offer being accepted was made over the phone or verbally in the interview, repeat the offer in writing, as it was understood.

- You may receive an offer while waiting to hear from other firms. If you need more time to make your decision, ask the employer making the first offer whether a time extension is possible.
- If you are going to refuse an offer, do so promptly. Be diplomatic when refusing an offer because you might find yourself wanting to work for that firm in the future. In addition, your new organization might be doing business with that firm, and you may meet many of the same people.

If you're not offered the position

- There is a possibility that no matter how well you prepare, you may not be offered the position. A study completed by Northwestern University cited several reasons why candidates get turned down for jobs. Avoid these, if possible, to increase your chances for success.
 - Lack of preparation (not doing your “homework: on the company).
 - Poor personal appearance.
 - Overbearing “know-it-all” attitude.
 - Inability to express oneself clearly.
 - Lack of interest and enthusiasm.
 - Over emphasis on money.
 - Unwilling to start at the bottom--expecting too much too soon.
 - Condemnation of past employers.
 - Makes excuses or blames others for poor performances.
 - Unable to learn from your mistakes and explain what you learned.

FINALLY

Keep in mind that interviewing is a skill. You perfect your skills by becoming aware of techniques that work for you. Practicing helps you discover what you already do well and what you need to work on. Preparation and Practice are keys to success. While practice will help you master the necessary skills, be cautious of rehearsing answers to a point that they become “canned” and routine. Employers will pick up on this and won't look favorably on your candidacy. Treat each interview and interviewer individually and your odds for success will increase.

The following is a partial list of suggested books that are available in the Career Center library:

- Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions
- Jobsmarts for Twentysomethings by Bradley G. Richardson
- Knock 'Em Dead: The Ultimate job seeker's Handbook by Martin Yate
- Successful Interviewing for College Seniors by John D. Singleton
- Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed by H. Anthony Medley.