
Interviewing Strategies & Tips

Career Center
For Vocation & Development



Before the Interview

A job interview is an opportunity to showcase your strengths, experience, and interest in the position for which you're applying. An interview is also a chance for you to ask questions of the employer and find out if the position is a good fit for your career interests and values. The secret to a successful interview is found in the preparation stage. In order to be effective in an interview, it is essential that you do your research and take time to practice. It's certainly not something you want to take lightly!

Before the Interview Checklist

- Know what you have to offer.** Employers are interested in your self-awareness. Are you able to articulate your strengths, weaknesses and career goals? What have you learned from previous experience and how does this relate to the position for which you're applying? Do you know what you to offer to a prospective employer and what makes you a strong candidate?
- Know the position.** If you have not been given a position description, request one from the organization. What qualifications are they seeking? What particular strengths are they looking for in a candidate? Do you possess these? If so, make sure you highlight this during the interview.
- Know the organization.** Do your research! Spend time exploring the organization's website and/or informational literature. What is the organization proud of? What is their mission/vision statement? What is the primary population they serve? Employers will expect you to know some background information on their organization, so be ready.
- Know your interviewing strengths and weaknesses.** Take advantage of the Practice Interview service through the Career Center. You will be asked a list of general interview questions, and a Career Counselor will provide you with feedback on your performance and suggested areas for improvement. Don't let your first interview experience be with the interviewing committee!

First Impressions

As you know, first impressions are critical! To make a good first impression on a potential employer, read the following tips carefully.

- Arrive early.** You should arrive at your interviewing destination approximately 10-15 minutes early. This should give you some time to organize your thoughts and observe the working environment.
- Dress appropriately.** Depending on the type of organization, typical interview attire includes a well-tailored professional suit. Avoid overdoing accessories, makeup, cologne or perfume.
- Firm handshake.** Always extend a firm handshake to your interviewers. It's important!
- Eye contact.** This shows confidence and engages the interviewer.
- Smile.** Attitude matters! You want to come across as enthusiastic, friendly and approachable. Avoid negativity – verbally and via facial gestures.

During the Interview

What to Bring with You:

- Extra copies of your resume
- A typed list of at least 3 references
- Approximately 3-5 typed questions you would like to ask of your interviewer(s)
- A professional-style portfolio that contains a pen and paper (these are available in the College Bookstore)
- A portfolio which showcases your past experience (if appropriate)

Interviewing Tips:

- Make sure your answers are clear, articulate and concise.
- Pay attention to your non-verbal cues.
- Answer the interviewer's questions using examples from past experiences.
- Convey your strengths and primary assets which relate to the position.
- Avoid talking too much or getting off track on tangents.
- When addressing weaknesses, be sure to communicate how you are working to overcome them. Think of weaknesses associated with your personality type (Contact the Career Center for more info on this).
- Remember that it's okay to take a moment to think about your answer rather than blurting something out prematurely.
- Be aware of the experiences listed on your resume. Many interviewers ask questions specifically related to this information.
- Always ask questions of your interviewer(s) at the end. Avoid asking questions related to salary or benefits during a first interview.
- Remember to write down the names, positions and contact information of your interviewers or request a business card so that you can follow up appropriately with a thank-you note.

Common mistakes job candidates make during interviews, based on a recent global recruiter survey.

- Talking too much
- Lack of knowledge about company or position
- Over-inflated ego
- Appearing overly confident
- Inquiring about compensation too early in the process
- Unkempt appearance

Source: Wall Street Journal

Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral-based interviewing is a style commonly used by interviewers. According to Katherine Hansen of Quintessential Careers, "The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations...Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant's potential for success." Behavioral-based questions typically start out with "Tell me about a time when you..." or "Describe a situation where you..."

Behavioral-based questions are often related to skills such as *innovation and creativity, teamwork, decision-making, critical thinking, conflict management, leadership, flexibility, communication and motivation.*

Preparation is the key to successfully answering behavioral-based questions. Try using the following strategies to help you organize your past experiences (also known as “stories”) as potential answers.

- Make a list of skills or experiences which are relevant to the position being sought. Use materials from the employer and the job (job description, company reports, research, etc.).
- Think about situations that reflect those skills. Come up with 5-6 stories from college, class projects, jobs, internships, volunteer activities, and hobbies. One or two should focus on situations that did not go as planned or were difficult but turned out to be a learning experience.
- Practice telling your stories to others such as friends and family, or a career counselor.
- Make sure your stories are concise, well-told, and interesting. They should create word pictures of what you have done or learned that relates to the job for which you are interviewing.
- Don't hesitate to market your accomplishments; this is not the time to be too modest!

The STAR Strategy

SITUATION

TASK

ACTION

RESULTS

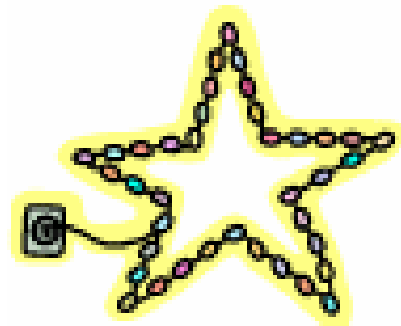
The objective here is to think of anecdotes or concise examples that illustrate the skills and competencies associated with the position for which you're interviewing. The STAR strategy is helpful in knowing how to organize your stories.

Situation

- What was the situation?
- What problems or challenges did I face?
- Where did this situation occur?

Task

- What needed to be done?
- How did I need to become involved?



Action

- What did I do specifically?
- When part of a team, what was my role?
- What did I put my energy into?

Results

- What were the outcomes?
- What were the unintended outcomes?
- What did I learn?
- What would I do differently next time?

Additional Interview Styles

(From "You've Graduated, Now What?")

Telephone Screening Interviews:

- Used when a company is considering you for a full round of interviews or when companies want to screen people quickly. In five minutes, the interviewer can often determine whether he/she wants to meet with you in person.
- Enthusiasm is the key. Smile when you talk into the phone (it makes a difference!)
- Make sure you are in a quiet room with no distractions.

Screening Interviews:

- Usually first interviews; conducted by a personnel specialist in a large organization.
- Short (5-10 minutes) interview to screen out those applicants who are clearly not appropriate.
- Interviewers generally ask about technical competencies and open-ended questions to assess personality and potential fit with the company. Sell your personality!

Non-directed Interviews:

- Rely on traditional, sometimes random questions - *"Tell me about yourself"* and *"What are your career goals?"*
- Remember that while you do not control the direction of the interview, you do control the content.
- Remain focused, share stories of skills and experience, and project enthusiasm.

Stress Interviews:

- Creates stress through questioning and situations to reveal how you may handle stress on the job.
- Examples include "rapid fire" questioning (little time to think) or using silence—the interviewer silently looks at you after you answer a question to see your reaction. If you get flustered or defensive, you lose.
- The interviewer may comment that you do not have enough experience. Your reaction is critical.
- Once you realize that the interviewer is deliberately putting you under stress, say to yourself, *"Aha, I know what you're doing, and I'm not going to panic or get angry or become defensive."*

Board Interviews:

- Two or more people interview you simultaneously, usually taking turns in questioning.
- Each interviewer may have his/her own separate agenda and the only person really listening to your answer may be the person who asked the question.
- Make eye contact with each of the interviewers at the table.

Series Interviews:

- Consecutive interviews (in one day) with several people in an organization. You may interview with someone from personnel, your potential boss, and some potential colleagues both inside and outside the department.
- Assumes several heads are always better than one. Combined, they see qualities that would make a candidate suitable or unsuitable for the position and come to agreement on the strongest candidates.

Remember to take advantage of the Practice Interview Program through the Career Center! Just stop by or call us at 691-6016 (ext. 6016) to set up an appointment.

After the Interview

It's not over yet! Be sure to send a thank-you note to each of your interviewers immediately following your interview. This is a chance for you to thank them for taking the time to interview you and to restate your continued interest in the position. Thank-you notes can be in the form of a hand-written professional-looking thank-you card or a well-crafted email. If you are no longer interested in the position, you still should send a thank-you, but alert them to the fact that you would like to be eliminated from the candidate pool.

General Interview Questions

Below are sample interview questions for you to practice with. Note that not all of these questions will be asked, and you are likely to have additional questions which are directly related to the field or position.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your long-range goals and objectives?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What are your strengths, weaknesses, and interests?
- How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
- Describe a situation in which you had to work with a difficult person (another student, co-worker, customer, supervisor, etc.). How did you handle the situation? Is there anything you would have done differently in hindsight?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort? Describe a situation in which you did so.
- In what ways have your college experiences prepared you for a career?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
- Describe a contribution you have made to a project on which you worked.
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- What interests you about our product or service?
- Why did you select your college or university?
- What led you to choose your major or field of study?
- What college subjects did you like best? Why?
- What college subjects did you like least? Why?
- What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Describe a situation in which you worked as part of a team. What role did you take on? What went well and what didn't?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What two or three things would be most important to you in your job?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
- What makes you a strong candidate for this position?
- If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?

Potential Questions to Ask of Interviewers

Do your homework. Don't ask questions which you could have easily researched before the interview. However, prepare several questions in order to convey interest, maturity, and a grasp of the profession. Consider which of the following questions could be tailored to your prospective employer(s). Adapt content and style as appropriate.

- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
- How important does upper management consider the function of this department/position?
- What is the organization's plan for the next five years, and how does this department fit in?
- Could you explain your organizational structure?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom?
- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- Do you provide any training for new hires?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- What are some of the skills and abilities necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
- What is the company's policy on providing seminars, workshops, and training so employees can keep up their skills or acquire new ones?
- What particular computer equipment and software do you use?
- What kind of work can I expect to be doing the first year?
- What percentage of routine, detailed work will I encounter?
- How much opportunity is there to see the end result of my efforts?
- Who will review my performance? How often?
- How much guidance or assistance is made available to individuals in developing career goals?
- How much opportunity will I have for decision-making in my first assignment?
- Can you describe an ideal employee?
- What is your organization's policy on transfers to other cities?
- Do you encourage graduate study outside of work time? If so, does your organization offer incentives? (tuition reimbursement, for example)
- Why do you enjoy working for your firm?
- What makes your firm different from its competitors?
- How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?

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