Office of Career Services

Interview Guidelines

For many people, the prospect of an interview is intimidating. However, with practice and preparation, an interview can be a positive experience. The goal is to answer questions about yourself and your experiences, while demonstrating your knowledge of the organization and position. The most common interview format today is behavior-based, which stresses specific examples of past experience. The success of a behavior-based interview depends on your ability to articulate examples that best illustrate what you can do for an employer by telling stories with a beginning, middle and end. Your answers should clearly demonstrate:

What did you do? **How did you do it?** **What was the result?**

Your interview is a great opportunity to establish a connection between your skills and what the organization is seeking. Organize your thoughts before speaking. Be sure to answer the question first and follow up with examples and additional information. The more you practice and become familiar with questions that could potentially be asked, the more comfortable and organized you will be.

Getting Ready for the Interview

To ensure a smooth interview, take care of the details in advance. Some simple, yet important details include:

What should I bring with me?

- Extra copies of your resume and references on resume paper
- Relevant, well-prepared questions
- Portfolio (transcripts, work samples, performance reviews, etc)
- Money (in case you need to pay for lunch or parking)
- Accurate directions, including how long it will take you to get there and how long the interview will last. If possible, try to "test drive" prior to your interview.
- Interviewer contact name and phone number

What should I wear?

First impressions are very important when interviewing for a job. Take your personal appearance and presentation seriously. Most industries have their own dress code. Industries that prefer professional dress include accounting, banking, consulting, and sales. There are some situations when business casual is acceptable; check with the recruiter if in doubt. It is important to dress professionally for an interview unless you are told otherwise. When unsure, making a conservative choice is safest.

General Tips

- Ensure that your clothing is clean, pressed and fits well.
- Keep jewelry to a minimum.
- Have neat, well-trimmed fingernails.
- Wearing perfume or cologne is not recommended.
- Do not smoke before an interview.
- Bring breath mints.

Non-Verbal Behavior

Actions often speak louder than words. In an interview, it is important to act with professionalism and enthusiasm. Remember that anyone you encounter throughout the day may be asked their opinion of you.

- Check in for your interview five minute before the start time. Arrive to the location earlier, but wait outside or in your car until 5 -10 minutes before your scheduled time.
- Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake.
- Sit up straight and maintain eye contact.
- Show your enthusiasm in a way that feels natural to you, such as smiling when speaking of something that excites you or something of which you are proud.

Preparation

Studies have shown that people who take the step of preparing for interviews are better able to handle difficult interview questions, adequately communicate their strengths and be themselves.

- Prior to an interview, assess your strengths and weaknesses, skills and abilities, interests, values, goals and aspirations. Be prepared to describe the value that you will bring to the position and organization.
- Be ready to discuss and prove them in the interview by telling your success stories. It is essential that your stories state what you did, how you did it, and what resulted.
- Research the organization, review literature and the company website, know the structure of the organization, the size, the industry, product lines or service, history, revenue and recent news stories.
- Search the Internet to find recent news not mentioned on their website and their public profile.
- Talk to current and past employees to learn more about the organization's culture.
- Practice responding to questions. Being able to respond to questions well involves anticipating what will be asked, and preparing examples for your responses. When asked a question, you should feel comfortable explaining you response and elaborating with an example. Your answers should be concise, but also complete.

Preparing for Behavioral Interview Questions

A behavioral interview is based on the idea that a candidate's past performance is the best predictor of future job success. Many employers use a mix of behavioral and traditional questions when interviewing candidates. As a job seeker in a behavioral-based interview, it is most appropriate to answer behavioral questions with a **P.A.R.** story. P.A.R. stands for **P**roblem, **A**ction, and **R**esult. A successful P.A.R. story is one that includes a problem from your past, the action you took to overcome that problem and the result of your action. This can include examples from internships, work experiences, volunteer experience, or academic classes. Results should include the lessons you have learned in addition to the resolution of the problem.

Example Question: *Tell me about a time when you were faced with a difficult situation completing a project.*
Answer: Once, when I was working on a project for Course Name, my group was asked to turn in our work ahead of schedule because of an upcoming holiday break (Problem). Since we originally planned to have two weeks to complete the work, this task became a bit of a challenge. As the group leader, I thought about what each of my team member's strengths were and I delegated part of the project to members based on each of their strengths (Action). Because we divided up the workload and each team member was working on a section with which they were highly skilled and efficient, we were able to complete the project within the allotted time (Result).

The Interview

Tell me about yourself.

This is the first question in a majority of interviews. Before you go to an interview, create a "positioning statement" or "elevator pitch" of no more than 60-90 seconds. In this statement highlight your profile, what makes you unique from the other candidates and why an employer will want to hire you. Tell **WHO** you are, **WHAT** your main strengths and skills are, and **WHERE** you have gotten your experience. Practice your response to this question by using this script for introducing yourself as a guideline:

I am a _____(professional label) with _____ years experience in _____ and _____.
My strengths are _____ and _____. I'm interested in this position because _____.

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Common Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position/organization?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What motivates you?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What accomplishment has given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe your most rewarding educational experience.
- Cite a situation from your past that required you to respond to pressure. How did you deal with it?
- What are your short term/long term goals?
- Give an example of a problem that you have solved and the process you used.
- Describe a situation in which you had conflict with another person and how you dealt with it.
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- How would you define a conducive work atmosphere?
- Give an example of an important goal that you had set for yourself and tell about your success in reaching that goal.
- Tell me about a team project you are particularly proud of and your contribution.
- What have you done that shows initiative?
- How would your past professors and employers describe you?
- Why should we hire you?
- How do you handle stress?
- Will you relocate? In the future will you relocate?
- Is money important to you?
- What kind of salary are you looking for?

Questions You Should Ask

Most employers will provide you with an opportunity to ask questions. It is very important that you go to the interview prepared to ask insightful questions about the organization and position. Keep in mind that you are also evaluating the organization during the interview. Write your questions down and take them with you. Some examples are:

- If you had an ideal candidate, what skills and personal qualities would the candidate possess?
- Where do you see the organization going in the next five years?
- You seem very enthusiastic about the organization. Can you tell me some of the reasons why people like working here?
- What are the success factors for a person to be effective in this role?
- How are employees evaluated?
- What is the promotion/advancement potential within the organization?
- What is the time frame for selecting a candidate?
- What are the next steps? What does your hiring timeline look like?

Remember to…

- Answer questions honestly.
- Listen— If you don't understand a question, ask the interviewer to rephrase it.
- Relax. Don't be afraid to pause for a second before beginning your answer.

After the Interview

Don't make the mistake of thinking your interview is over once you walk out the door. Following up is a very important step. Send a thank you note within 24-48 hours of the interview to all of the people with whom you interviewed. Be sure to ask for their business cards while at the interview so you have their contact information. The note does not need to be long, but it should mention something meaningful from the interview. The format may vary depending on the type of organization. For tips on content and delivery, see the resources available in the Office of Career Services.

If you don't hear anything from the organization within the suggested hiring timeline, it is appropriate to call or email to find out the status of the hiring process. Remain positive and professional in all of your communication with the potential employer. Even if you are not hired right away, maintaining a good impression in the employer's mind can lead to future opportunities.

The Job Offer

Once you receive an offer, it is important to evaluate everything including the position, growth potential, professional development, salary and benefits. Keep in mind that the best job is not always the one that pays the most. Research indicates that most organizations leave room in the first offer for salary discussions. Job candidates may be hesitant to engage in salary negotiations for many reasons. It is reasonable to assume that your initial offer is negotiable, so you should take the time to thoroughly review it. If you feel you are worthy of a higher salary, you must prepare a case based on facts. Consider the following: What is the salary range of this position, considering the organization and industry? What makes me worth a higher salary? What is the target salary that I am looking for? Also consider other benefits such as insurance, vacation, and retirement. Be careful about the resources you use to collect salary information. It is recommended that you utilize information provided through federal and state government resources. If a salary isn't negotiable, you may be able to propose other forms of compensation such as flex time, working from home, increased vacation days, bonuses, or moving expenses. Most importantly, you must approach salary negotiations in a tactful and diplomatic way.

Additional Resources

The resources below and many others are available in Career Services:

- Job Interview Almanac (Adams Publishing)
- More Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions (Matthew J. DeLuca)
- 101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions (Ron Fry)
- Fearless Interviewing (Marky Stein)
- Quintessential Careers (http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/)
- Riley Guide (http://www.rileyguide.com/interview.html)