

Interviewing

Interviewing is a **mutual** exchange of information between you and a prospective employer. Aim to communicate information about your skills and qualifications clearly and accurately, and to relate this information to the requirements of the job for which you are interviewing. In addition to providing the employer with information about you, it is important that you seek additional information about the position and employer. This process will benefit you in deciding whether the position is an appropriate fit.

An interview gives the employer the opportunity to meet you in person and to evaluate the "total" you. This includes your attitude, appearance, personality, confidence, knowledge about yourself, knowledge about the company, and basic ability to do the job.

Preparing for the Interview

- Practice answering questions you may be asked during the interview (see page 3). Rehearsing your responses in advance will help you communicate more effectively during the interview.
- Research the company before the interview and investigate the role of the position within the organization.
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer that reflect your knowledge of the position and company.
- Write down the time and place of your appointment and the name of the person interviewing you. Get detailed directions and visit the site prior to the interview.
- Wear professional attire that is appropriate for the position. First impressions are important!
- Bring extra copies of your resume in a folder or briefcase and have your papers arranged for easy reference (resume, references, and transcripts).

Consider the employer's perspective when preparing and presenting yourself to a prospective employer. Be prepared to address:

1. How your education and experience relate to the position
2. Why you really want to work for this company
3. Why you are interested in this kind of work
4. Whether or not you have a good work attitude
5. How you would fit into the company



Interviewing Techniques

- **Be on time**, preferably 10-15 minutes early. Know the interviewer's name and how to pronounce it. Use a firm grip when shaking hands and smile. When concerned about whether to shake hands or sit, follow the interviewer's lead. Sit up straight. Look the prospective employer in the eye; don't gaze at the floor, ceiling, or papers on the desk. Your non-verbal communication sends a message. Maintain appropriate eye contact, posture, and voice tone. Try to avoid nervous mannerisms.
- **Let the interviewer take the lead in the conversation.** Expect to spend time developing rapport; personal chemistry is a main ingredient in the hiring process. Listen carefully to the interviewer's questions. Don't be afraid of pauses in the conversation; take time to think. Silence is okay! It aids reflection and thought. As soon as possible after the interview starts, **tell the employer about skills, training, and experience** you possess that would be useful for the job. Try to be very complete. Emphasize your qualifications – never say, "I need a job" or "I'll do anything." If you don't tell the interviewer about your skills, no one else will. Avoid mention of your personal, domestic, or financial problems. Discuss only matters related to the job.
- **Give specific examples to communicate your skills.** Emphasize what you can do for the organization. Portray self-confidence and emphasize your positive traits. Do not undersell your qualifications but do not exaggerate or lie (it may come back to haunt you). Be businesslike and brief. Ask for clarification if you do not understand a question. Show the interviewer you are sincerely interested in the position and company.
- **Ask the interviewer questions** based on your research about the position and organization. Be prepared with a list of questions covering things you want to know about the job, company, its policies, and practices. You want to understand what is required of you before you are hired, and to get a true sense of the organization's "climate." This will avoid later disappointment for you and your employer.
- **Never slight a former employer, colleague, teacher, or institution. Avoid debating the interviewer.** Arguing with the interviewer will shorten the interview and weaken your chances of getting the job.
- **Don't apologize or offer excuses for shortcomings** – we all have situations that challenge us. Neither avoid nor seek to emphasize the presence of a personal challenge or lack of experience. Strive to keep the focus positive.
- **Emphasize what you can do for the organization.** This means outlining your transferable skills. Employers want to know what you can do for them. Focus on your ability to learn quickly and easily, your communication skills, interpersonal abilities, analytical thinking talents and other highly desirable skills and personal attributes. Don't try to give the answer "he or she wants." Most recruiters and employers know a "canned" answer when they hear one.
- **Be alert to signals from the interviewer that it is time to end the session.** Express a desire for the position and inquire about future contact. Thank the interviewer for his/her time and consideration and let him/her know that you are looking forward to hearing from him/her. *If you are not good at closing conversations, don't linger. End quickly and courteously.*
- **Don't discuss salary until you have an offer.**
- **Send a follow-up thank you letter or note immediately after the interview.** Make certain that you furnish your prospective employer with any additional information, work samples, or recommendations that you indicated were available and/or were requested. A thank you letter also provides an opportunity to address any question you feel you didn't adequately answer.

A Few Tips for Answering Tough Interview Questions

- **“Tell me about yourself.”** Talk briefly about your academic and work history. Identify the strengths and skills you possess that qualify you for the position.
- **“What is it about this job that interests you?”** Talk about which responsibilities of the job are attractive and how you would be an asset to the company.
- **“What are your weaknesses?”** Use this question as an opportunity to highlight effective strategies for overcoming a challenge, rather than emphasizing your shortcomings. Present an example of an area that you have identified and are improving upon. For example, “I have received feedback that I need to be more assertive when working on projects and I am asking more questions and requesting assistance when I need it.” Again, an example can be very useful! Don’t use examples that are very negative – being late for work, conflict with co-workers, etc.
- **“Tell me about a time when you had multiple tasks to complete and how you accomplished them.”** Think about what skills and attributes the employer wants to see in a successful candidate. Can you prioritize? Do you meet deadlines? Can you work with other people and elicit help? Your research on which skills they are looking for will help you to prepare for questions like these.
- **“What motivates you at work?”** Review experiences that have motivated you in the past. These could include managing information, helping people, being creative, speaking publicly, etc. Then determine which of these would be useful in the job for which you are interviewing.
- **“Why do you want to work here?”** Articulate clearly what a good company it is, or that the work will be challenging and interesting or that you have a commitment to the type of work you wish to do. Do not emphasize the time off, fringe benefits or free employer tuition.
- **“Why did you leave (or wish to leave) your past (present) employer?”** There are many legitimate reasons to leave a job. You may have had a lack of promotional opportunities or you were looking for new challenges. During interviews, **never speak badly of a present or previous employer**. Even if your boss was awful or the company didn’t treat you fairly, you do not want to tell a possible future employer about it in an interview. It will concern them that you may be a complainer or a difficult employee.
- **“What are your goals?”** Respond with goals appropriate to work and company. For example, “I hope to begin in this position, demonstrate my abilities and do quality work. After a year (two, three) I would like to seek other appropriate challenges in the company with more responsibility.” Longer-term goals to continue your education or plan for management or advance positions are appropriate as well.
- **“What areas in school or work have been of greatest challenge to you?”** Think of a challenging college assignment (an end of the year group assignment required you to work with other students, some of whom did not do their fair share; or a big project at work or an internship site such as a report was due and you could not easily get the info you needed). How did you accomplish the task and what success did you have. Successes might include an “A “ on the assignment or meeting an important deadline.

Learn the STARR Technique - Prove by Example!

Situation: Describe the specific situation. Set up your story.

Task: What was the task you were trying to accomplish? Tell who, what, when, where, and why (only include relevant details!)

Action: What did you do to solve the problem or meet the task?

Result: Specify results. What happened?

Relate: Link the skills you were demonstrating in this example to the job for which you are interviewing. Tell how the employer is going to benefit from hiring you.

Questions for the Interviewer

The interviewer usually provides you with an opportunity to ask questions. Before the interview, think about some questions that are of real interest to you. A few guidelines:

- ☛ Ask questions that you are fairly sure the interviewer can answer (remember how you feel when you can't answer a question during an interview).
- ☛ Don't ask about salary information or fringe benefits during the first interview.
- ☛ Avoid asking your questions in a manner that seems like an interrogation (i.e. don't pull out a list of questions and 'fire away').

A few examples of questions you might ask:

- What is a typical day on the job look like?
- What personal qualities, skills, or experience would help someone do well in this position?
- What do you see as the greatest challenge in this position?
- To whom would I report? May I meet my prospective supervisor?
- What, specifically, are you looking for in the candidate you hire for this position?

*** Remember: The interview is a **mutual** exchange of information between you and a prospective employer. You need to learn about the organization and the position to determine how well it fits you. ***

The Job Offer

It is usually best to resist accepting a job offer on the spot. It's okay to express your interest and appreciation for the offer and to request a reasonable amount of time to consider it (anywhere from a few days to 1-2 weeks depending on the situation). This gives you time to evaluate all aspects of the job before accepting it.