

INTERVIEWING GUIDE

This guide will help you prepare for interviews. This is a summary of some of the most important aspects of successful interviewing. Interviews should be a two-way communication between the candidate and the interviewer(s). During the interview session the interviewer(s) will ask questions, listen, and make observations to determine your fit in the position and organization. You will also ask questions, listen, and observe to determine whether the organization and position will be a good fit for you. Both interviewer and interviewee will determine if your skills, values, needs, and goals meet those of the position. Good interview skills are crucial to your job-search success; never underestimate the value of preparation, research, and practice. Most employers say their worst interview experiences were with candidates who knew nothing about the organization or the job opening. Know who you are, who you are interviewing with, and why.

STAGES OF AN INTERVIEW

The following are some tips and suggestions of things to know and do during different stages of the interview process:

Before the Interview

- Know yourself (skills, talents, abilities, needs, goals, values) Use the Career Center's Skill Assessment to help.
- Know your past (work experience, volunteer experience, community service, school or community activities, achievements, challenges, etc.)
- Review the items listed in your resume and your cover letter as these may be discussed.
- Research the company or organization you are interviewing with (policies, procedures, values, structure, systems, people you are interviewing with and their positions.)
- Be able to articulate where you want to go in the future (career-related, job-related, personal life).
- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early to the interview and know how to get there.
- Do not chew gum, smoke, drink, or eat during the interview (finishing a breath mint is recommended a few minutes before you arrive to the interview location.)

During the Interview

Bring to the Interview

- Multiple copies of your resume.
- List of professional references.
- Portfolio pad and pen to take notes.
- Examples of any relevant work you have done (or professional portfolio).
- A list of questions to ask the interviewer(s) about the position and organization.

Wear to the interview

- Dark colored suit, cleaned and pressed
- Light colored shirt or blouse, cleaned and pressed
- Neutral hose for women and dark(non-flamboyant print) tie for men
- Comfortable dress shoes, cleaned and shined
- Avoid trendy clothing or labels showing on the outfit
- Avoid excess cologne, jewelry, or accessories
- A clean and well-groomed look, SMILE
- Dress for the job you want, not the job you have

Do at the interview

- Be attentive and show interest in your interviewer(s) and the position
- Maintain eye contact with everyone, but don't stare
- Greet your interviewer(s) with a firm handshake and look them in the eyes
- Sit up straight and tall, and minimize fidgeting
- Be friendly and positive even if you don't think this position is right for you
- Answer questions in complete detail and provide examples of your skills and don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions
- Ask well-planned questions at the appropriate time
- Be yourself and let the interviewer(s) get to know the real you
- Highlight your skills, qualifications, and benefits you can bring to the organization
- Thank your interviewers when the interview is completed

After the interview

- As a common courtesy, be sure to send a thank you note to the interviewer(s) and anyone else who assists you.
- Follow-up with the interviewer/company immediately if you decide the position is not the right fit and politely withdraw your candidacy.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are several types of interview questions that may be asked by the interviewer and should be prepared for in advance.

Credential Interview Questions

These questions are direct questions asking about your specific qualifications for the position. These will often be short answers or even yes/no answers. These questions may not need much preparation. These questions might include:

- What is your GPA? When do you plan to graduate with your Bachelor's Degree?
- Are you certified in CPR/First Aid?
- Do you have reliable transportation? Or Are you willing to relocate?

Case Study or Hypothetical Questions

Hypothetical questions allow employers to understand how you might act/react in certain situations. Employers may use these to gauge your technical knowledge from the classroom, your thought process, honesty levels, leadership potential, or other specific skills. These questions may often start with: What would you do if...? Remember to not panic, think about your answer, and respond to the best of your ability, drawing on what you know, and your skills set.

Random or Brainteaser Questions

There is no way to prepare for these questions. The best advice for these questions is to remain calm, think about the question and formulate your best answer. Employers are looking for different things in each answer, so it could be as simple as they are looking to learn more about you or your thought process and some are just trying to see if you can think on your feet instead of the prepared "correct" interview questions. These questions might be similar to:

- How many ping pong balls fit inside of a 747 jet plane?
- If you were a zoo animal which would you be?
- If you were a pizza delivery man, how would you benefit from scissors?

Behavioral based interviewing is a style of interviewing that is gaining popularity in the hiring processes of many companies and organizations. Behavioral based interviewing focuses on past experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that are job or project related to see if a candidate possesses certain "key competencies." The basic premise of BBI is this, the best predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. So how do you answer these questions? Tell the interviewer a "story" (with a beginning, middle, and an end) about how you used a practical skill. As you think about stories to tell in relation to the various skills you think the interviewer is looking for, you can use the STAR model:

1. The Situation you were in, provide context to the story.
2. The Task you had to perform.
3. The Action you took in response to the situation or task.
4. The Results of your actions.

There are certain things employers cannot legally ask about you. These may vary based on state, federal, and local ordinances but in general employers cannot ask questions about:

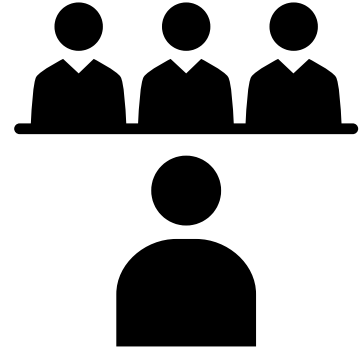
- Birthplace, nationality, or ancestry
- Birthdates or age
- Applicant's gender, marital status, or family members
- Race or ethnicity
- Religion or religious days observed
- Physical disabilities or handicaps
- Health or medical history
- Pregnancy, birth control, or child care

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Ultimately every question boils down to, "Why should we hire you?" Keep that in mind as you answer these questions.

Personal Attributes

- Do you like to work with groups or by yourself? Why?
- Tell me about a major problem you have encountered and how you dealt with it.
- What will be the most difficult about making the transition from college to career? Why?
- How would a friend/family member/supervisor/professor describe you?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strength and weaknesses?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What is it that you do very well?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable? Uncomfortable?
- Give me an example of a time when you have been under pressure.
- Why do you want to join our organization?
- What other types of jobs are you considering? Other organizations?
- What qualities do you admire most in others?
- How do you feel about relocating/traveling/working overtime/working weekends?
- What magazines or books do you read? Why?
- What qualities do successful supervisors/managers have?
- Tell me about your best/worst supervisor.
- What criteria are you using to evaluate potential employers?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- Tell me about your management philosophy. Give me your definition of success.
- What kind of reference do you think your last employer will give you?
- Are you seeking employment in an organization of a certain size? Why?
- Are you willing to spend at least 6 months as a trainee?
- How do you react to criticism?



Goals

- Do you have plans for further education?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What are your short term goals? Long term? Or Where do you see yourself in 5/10/15 years?
- If you could do anything in life, and know you could not fail, what would you do?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- How do you plan to achieve your career objectives?

Education

- Why did you choose your particular college major? If you were starting all over, would you choose the same one?
- Are your grades an accurate reflection of your scholastic achievements?
- Why did you choose to attend your university?
- What college classes have you enjoyed the most and why? The least?
- Tell me about your most rewarding college experience.
- How has your education prepared you for the work world? This specific job?
- Tell me about the extracurricular activities you have pursued. What have you gained through your involvement?
- What percentage of your college expenses did you earn? How?
- Which of your college years was most difficult?

Experience

- Tell me about your experience working at _____.
- Have you had any supervisory experience?
- Have you ever spoken before a group of people? How large?
- What job-related skills have you developed?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- Have you ever done any volunteer work?
- Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.

Motivation

- What do you think determines a person's work success?
- What motivated you to put forth your greatest effort?
- Who has inspired you the most in your life?
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- What are the most important aspects you expect from your career?

Regarding the Job or Organization

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What position in our company interests you the most?
- What do you know about our company?
- In addition to the literature we sent you, what other source(s) did you use to find out about us?
- Why are you interested in this field?
- What career related skills do you possess as a result of your academic preparation?
- What have you read recently in your field?

Previous Experience Questions

- What have you learned from your past jobs?
- How often, and in what way did you communicate with your subordinates and superiors?
- What were the biggest pressures in your last job?
- How did your job description for your last job change while you held it?
- What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?
- How does your previous experience relate to this position?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?

Be Prepared to Ask Your Own Questions! Here are some examples.

- Please describe the duties of the job for me.
- What is a typical day on the job like?
- What personal qualities or characteristics are most important for success in this job?
- How often will my performance be evaluated? What criteria will be used to measure my performance?
- Is there a probationary period involved?
- What happens during the training program?
- What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
- What are examples of typical first year assignments?
- How much opportunity will I have for decision making in my first assignment?
- What objectives would you like to see accomplished during the first year?
- How does this position relate to other positions within the organization?
- Where would I fit in on the organizational chart?
- What kind of supervision will I receive?
- Could you tell me about the people who will be reporting to me?
- What are the primary results you would like to see me produce if employed?
- How would you describe your company's management style?
- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
- What are some of the problems facing the staff today?
- What particular computer equipment and software do you use?
- What type of career paths do employees typically follow in this organization?
- Do your employees participate in any professional associations or conferences?
- As an employee of this organization, what do you see as some of its outstanding attributes?
- Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?
- What is the retention rate of people in this position for which I am interviewing?
- Are you happy with the performance of the company?
- How much travel is involved in this position?
- When should I hear from you about the next steps in this process or your hiring decision?

IMPORTANT NOTE: Generally speaking, you should not ask about salary and benefits during a first interview. Instead, concentrate on finding out about the job itself. The employer should be the one bringing up the topic of money. Once you receive an offer from the company then it is acceptable to begin salary negotiation.

INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

An important but sometimes overlooked piece of the interview process is following up with the employer.

Thank You Letters

Why send a thank you letter? A thank you letter is an essential component of the interview process, whether for the job search, graduate school, and/or an informational interview. This simple gesture can speak volumes about your interest and true appreciation for the opportunity to interview. Although nearly all job seekers may see value in sending a personalized thank you note, the majority never send one. The thank you letter is another opportunity to show an interviewer what a great fit you would be with their organization or program.

General Tips

- Be sure to write and send the letter within two days of the meeting.
- Remember to be genuine when writing a thank you note.
- If multiple people interviewed you, send a thank you letter to each and personalize each one by talking about something specific you discussed with them. You can mention some key points that you think the employer should remember about you.
- Ask for your interviewers' business cards, or write down the interviewers' titles and the proper spelling of their names before leaving the interview site.
- Conclude the thank you letter by mentioning again how interested you are in the position/program and why.
- Carefully proofread each letter, and have one other person review it.
- Remember to keep your thank you letter to ONE page.

Formats to Use

Many wonder what type of thank you letter should be sent: typed, handwritten, or emailed. Traditionally, the thank you note has been handwritten. If your handwriting is legible, then consider personalizing your correspondence. However, if your handwriting is poor, typing the correspondence is perfectly acceptable. In addition, if the impression from the individual is strictly formal, then typed would be more appropriate. If there is a more informal atmosphere, you may want to hand-write the letter. Thank you note cards with matching envelopes are appropriate for use, as long as you stick to a simple card without cute graphics and sayings. High-quality stationery paper with a matching envelope is suitable as well. Both can be found at stationery stores and greeting-card shops. It is best when sending a thank you note to use neutral paper, such as white or cream, and to stay away from colored paper.

E-mailing your thank you note is acceptable today, as people are more environmentally conscientious and do not prefer papers. If you are interviewing with a high-tech company, the interviewer may expect your response electronically. Also, if you get the sense the individual prefers electronic correspondence over paper when interviewing, e-mailing would be appropriate. If all previous correspondence was via e-mail, then emailing the thank you letter is fine. Many applicant decisions or second-round interviews will be made quickly; emailing a thank you note will reaffirm your interest in the position. However, a follow-up thank you note can really make you stand out as a quality candidate.

Phone Calls

The last question you ask during an interview should be when you can expect to hear back from the interviewer. This sets the timeline for your follow up. If an employer says they plan to make a decision within a week. That is when you should follow up. Give them a call one week from your interview and ask how the process is going and if they require any additional information from you to assist with their decision. If the employer states they do not have a decision but give you a timeline for the decision, use this as a timeline for the next follow-up call. Do not pester than employer with multiple phone calls, this will not help your application status. It is acceptable to follow-up once or twice based on the employer established timeline.

PRACTICE!

The key to improving interview skills is to practice interviewing. Use the list of sample questions with friends, family, etc. Review the questions and formulate your answers; this will increase your confidence and calm your interview jitters! It is easy to practice with friends, but it can be really helpful to practice with someone you do not know. It creates a more realistic atmosphere, which is why we offer Mock Interviews in the Career Center. Call the Career Center to schedule a Mock Interview! A staff member will review your resume and the job description of the position you are interviewing for and tailor the questions to industry specific area.