

THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

An interview, whether it is for the purpose of securing full-time employment, part-time employment, or an internship, is a two-way conversation between you and the person(s) conducting the interview. An interview is not a performance. You don't need to be perfect. Just be yourself and do the best you can. Listen carefully to the questions and take time to think before answering. You are not expected to know the answer to every question, so if you are unsure, don't fake it. If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.

The interview provides an arena for you and the interviewer to share information about one another and to evaluate how well you and the organization fit together. Your role in the conversation is to: (1) provide adequate and accurate information that will assist the employer in evaluating your skills and experiences, and (2) obtain information regarding the position, environment, and employer that will assist you in determining whether this position interests you. The key to a successful interview is to communicate effectively.

Preparation For the Interview

Research the Organization

It is likely that an employer will expect you to know the basics about her/his organization before the interview. Conducting this research will increase your knowledge of the organization and give you more confidence, assist you in asking intelligent questions, and help convince the employer that you are seriously interested in the organization.

At the minimum, you should know:

- ▶ What the organization produces or the services it offers.
- ▶ Where the organization and its branches are located.
- ▶ Basic information about its financial status.

Answers to these questions can be found by researching the organization's annual report, website, and employee newsletter, as well as trade journals, newspapers, or magazines. Preus Library, the Career Center library, and the public library may house many of these resources. You can also locate information by calling, writing the organization, or speaking directly with employees. The internet may also be a valuable resource for your research.

In addition to researching the organization, it is important to research the position or type of position for which you are applying. To be better informed about the requirements of the position, request a job description from the organization or talk with someone who has a similar position.

Spend Time Thinking About YOU

It is also extremely important to spend some time analyzing YOU. Remember, during an interview you are selling yourself to the interviewer. The individuals who are most successful in this process are those who have taken the time to identify their career goals, the skills they would bring to an organization or program, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how their education inside and outside of the classroom has helped prepare them for this experience. Consider what you can do for the organization based on your interests and skills. Again, give some thought to the kind of position you want, why you want it, and how you qualify for it.

Think About Your Responses

During your interview, there will be little time for you to hesitate and search for words or plan your answers to the questions you are asked. Even if you are a quick thinker, it is a very good idea to PRACTICE your responses to potential interview questions. Do not memorize your responses word for word, but have a good idea of the points you want to cover in your interview. You may want to schedule a mock interview with a member of the Career Center staff. The mock interview will be video taped and you can review the tape to critique yourself. Are your responses to questions clear and do you appear confident? Is your speech free from distractions such as "you know" and "um"? Are you interesting to listen to?

Consider your responses to some of these common interview questions:

- ▶ Tell me about yourself.
- ▶ What skills will you bring to our school/organization/field?
- ▶ Give me an example of a time you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- ▶ Tell me about a situation when you became frustrated or impatient when dealing with a peer/team member or professor. What did you do?
- ▶ Have you ever trained/tutored anyone? How did you go about it? What were the results?
- ▶ Tell me about a time when you had to get someone to accept your idea at work/school. What did you do? Why?
- ▶ Do your fellow students/co-workers see you as a leader? Why? Give examples.
- ▶ Tell me about a time when you found errors in your work. What caused those errors? How did you handle the situation?
- ▶ Describe the biggest work or project related problem you have faced. How did you handle this?
- ▶ Tell me about a time when you were faced with conflicting priorities. How did you determine what was a top priority in scheduling your time?
- ▶ Can you describe some circumstances where you wished you would have acted differently with someone at work/school?
- ▶ What college subjects did you like most?
- ▶ What college subjects did you like least?

- ▶ What would you like to know about us?

Prepare Sample Questions to Ask the Interviewer

During the interview, it is likely that you will have an opportunity to ask questions of the person or persons interviewing you. It is important that your questions show a sincere interest in the particular employer and their needs. Listed below are some sample questions:

- ▶ How much exposure to and contact with management (or supervision) is there?
- ▶ Why is this position open?
- ▶ How would you describe the community in which your organization/university/program is located?
- ▶ What are the day-to-day duties involved in this job?
- ▶ In your organization, is this position more analytical or people-oriented?
- ▶ What is the nature of the training program and level of supervision given in the early stages of employment?
- ▶ How are performance reviews or evaluations given?
- ▶ Can you describe the clients/students, customers/associates you work with?
- ▶ What skills are you seeking in the individual selected for this position or program?

Questions that show your interest in the organization as a whole are desirable. Try to phrase questions in such a way that it will show your knowledge of the organization:

- ▶ I read in the newspaper that you are opening two new sites. How will this impact hiring?
- ▶ I know that (organization name) is committed to providing continuing education opportunities to its employees. Will you explain more about these opportunities?

- What is the long-range plan for this organization/program?

Interview Types

There are basically two types of interviews: screening and selection.

Screening

This is usually the first interview. The interviewer is trying to determine whether or not you should be considered a viable candidate and invite you for a follow-up interview or terminate discussions at the end of the screening interview. On-campus interviews are usually screening interviews.

Selection

A screening interview may be followed by a selection interview, which is usually held at the site of the organization. This visit, if offered, will allow you more in-depth talk with an employer to determine how your interests match the needs of the organization. The selection interview is usually longer than the screening interview, and you are likely to meet many more people. Therefore, you will be expected to be more conversant about the organization, your strengths and weaknesses, as well as how your accomplishments will make you a valuable member of the organization's team.

Forms of Interviews

One-on-One Interview

This interview format of meeting one-on-one with an interviewer is the most common format. Candidates and interviewers exchange questions and answers during a set period of time.

Panel Interview

This interview format involves several people interviewing you at once. This style is typically used for positions where teamwork is required. A panel interview can be fast-paced. It is all right for you to slow the pace by allowing yourself to pause between your responses. Keeping a balance of eye contact with all members of the panel is important.

Successive Interview

A successive interview involves meeting with one person after another to discuss the particulars of the position. In essence this is a series of one-on-one interviews. This format requires a good deal of energy, as you will want to demonstrate the same level of energy with the first person you meet as with the last.

Group Interview

In the case of a group interview, all job applicants are brought together in the same room and are usually interviewed by several people at the same time. In a group interview situation, remember to consider the nature of the position for which you are interviewing and what skills you need to demonstrate most.

Styles of Interviews

Traditional Style

This style is the most commonly used. The interviewer asks a variety of questions often based on your resume as well as skills specific to the position.

Behavioral Style

This style works on the assumption that past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior. In the behavioral interview you will be asked to describe specific situations that demonstrate behavior necessary for the position.

Case Style

Consulting firms commonly use this style. In the case interview you are given a business problem and asked to offer a solution and/or recommendation. Typically there are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of this style is to assess your problem-solving abilities. With this style the interviewer is as interested in your thought process as he/she is with your solution or recommendation.

Stages of the Traditional Interview

Once you have completed your initial preparation, you are ready for the actual

interview. The interview consists of four parts: opening, body, closing, and follow-up.

Opening

The opening is the ice-breaking portion of the interview. Typically, the interviewer will set the tone to establish a positive atmosphere and put you at ease. First impressions will be influenced by your appearance and manner. Remember that the overall evaluation of you as a candidate begins the moment you walk in the door.

Try to arrive a few minutes early for your interview. Introduce yourself to the receptionist and, above all, be courteous. This person's opinion of you counts! When you are introduced to your interviewer, smile, shake hands, and maintain good eye contact. Always speak clearly and directly. It is likely that you and the interviewer will engage in some casual conversation at first. This is one of the ways an interviewer can assess your social skills.

Etiquette and good manners are an important part of the interview process. Be seated only after the interviewer indicates where you should sit. Try not to sprawl, slump, or sit too rigidly. Refrain from chewing gum, smoking, or fidgeting during the interview. If you are nervous and you feel your heart pound, take a few deep breaths and remember it is normal to be a little anxious.

Body

The body is the most important stage of the interview. This is your opportunity to show how your skills and abilities can benefit the organization.

The interviewer will also be determining your qualifications and how to match these with the organization or particular position. They will do this by asking a variety of questions. Be prepared to discuss your qualifications and long-range career goals in an organized fashion. Do not bring up benefits or salary in the interview. If discussion of benefits or salary occurs, it should be initiated by the interviewer.

Closing

The closing portion of an interview is important and sometimes overlooked. Your interviewer might ask if you have any further questions or if there is any additional information you might like to offer about yourself. This is a perfect time to ask the questions you have prepared and highlight your skills and abilities. Even if you are not asked for more information take the initiative and restate your qualifications for the position. If you are interested in the position say so. An interviewer is more likely to offer you a position if she or he knows you are clearly interested. It is appropriate at this point to ask the interviewer what the next steps may be in the selection process. Before leaving the interview be sure to thank the interviewer for his or her time and consideration. A handshake is appropriate at this time.

Follow-up

Your interview should be followed by a thank-you letter or handwritten note, which conveys your gratitude for the interviewer's time, restates your qualifications, and indicates your enthusiasm for the position. This gesture, while seemingly insignificant, has been known to separate the successful candidate from the unsuccessful. However, if you are not interested in the position, send a letter indicating your withdrawal from the process and thank the interviewer for his or her time.

Evaluating the Interview

While the interview is still fresh in your mind, take some time to write down your impressions of the interview. Since it is unlikely an organization will give you feedback regarding your interview, you may wish to evaluate yourself.

- ▶ Was I able to develop a good rapport with the interviewer?
- ▶ Did I effectively communicate my skills as they relate to the position?
- ▶ Did my questions reflect a thorough knowledge of the organization as well as the

position?

- ▶ How could I improve my interviewing skills?

Accepting Offers

Your decision whether to accept or reject an offer will likely be the result of a very personal process that may rely on facts *and* intuition. When you receive an offer from an organization, be sure to take some time to evaluate the offer thoroughly. Sometimes you may need an extension of time to consider an offer or a number of offers. When you feel this need, don't be afraid to ask for additional time. Most employers will accommodate your request.

Make certain that you understand the details of the offer including: the essential functions of the position, the location of employment and the starting date.

Once you have accepted an offer of employment, you have committed yourself to that organization. It is unprofessional to renege on such an agreement in all but the most unusual circumstances. After you have accepted, contact the other organizations to which you have applied and notify them of your decision. Do this with great care. You may wish to consider employment with these organizations in the future.

It is also important to notify your reference writers that you have found employment, and thank them for their help. Remember to keep in touch with your references for future job searches.

Rejection

Rejection is a part of any search for employment; so if you are rejected as a candidate, remember not to take it as a rejection of you as a person. Even the best interview may not result in an offer. There are many reasons a position and a candidate do not match. If you remain interested in an organization, make sure that you send that

message in a follow-up letter and ask to be considered for future openings.

Closing Tips

- ▶ Bring along extra copies of your resume and samples of your work if appropriate.
- ▶ Be sure to have directions to the interview site and arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- ▶ Bring the interviewer's telephone number in the event you get lost.
- ▶ Dress professionally.
- ▶ This is your chance to make a positive impression, so be at your best!
- ▶ Relax! Remember the interview is a two-way conversation.