

Career Services Center

Effective Interviewing

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Getting ready – know yourself

Interviews won't be effective until you have some idea of what you're after.



KNOW YOUR DIRECTION

Figure out what you want to do - be specific.

Make a list of exactly what you want, *and* what you *don't* want in a career opportunity.

IF YOU'RE UNSURE

Look at your recent past for clues i.e.: major, clubs, activities, summer jobs, internships...



Ask yourself some questions:

What do you like to do?

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

What motivates you?

How important is money, location, and/or travel?

Where you will be happy, energetic, and productive?

Still unsure? Make a career counseling appointment by calling the Career Services Center.

Strengths Exercise

The qualities that best describe you might be important to a potential employer.

Enthusiastic	Work well with animals	Serve society
Work well with children	Outdoors person	Diplomatic
Creative/Inventive	Nurturing	Tactful
Keep accurate records	Operate equipment	Artistic
Manually dexterous	Outgoing showmanship	Craftsman-woman
Plan & organize events	Industrious	Efficient/Organized
Physical strength	Help others	Teaching abilities
Leadership ability	Persuasive	Listening skills
Detail oriented	Problem solver	Precision
Quick learner	Sales ability	Dependable
Decision maker	Write well	Work with the aged
Quantitative skills	Public speaking skills	Level-headed
Work well w/ physically or emotionally challenged people	Calm	Scientific
Analytical skills	Mechanical	

Getting ready – know the employer

Why

- ✓ Time won't be wasted on issues that could have been answered by researching the organization.
- ✓ Shows the employer that you are serious about the opportunity and that you have initiative.
- ✓ Makes you stand out from your competitors who did not do their research.
- ✓ You will be better able to anticipate questions and fine-tune your answers.
- ✓ Helps to reduce your anxiety by knowing you're prepared.

What you should know

- ✓ Structure of the organization
- ✓ Division or departments that interest you
- ✓ Products and services
- ✓ Size of organization (including number of stores, plants, divisions, and employees)
- ✓ History (how long the organization has been around)
- ✓ Philosophy and objectives
- ✓ Growth and earnings
- ✓ New products, research, or services planned
- ✓ Personnel policies and benefits
- ✓ Geographic locations of home office and divisions
- ✓ Career paths and training programs

How to obtain this information

- ✓ World Wide Web Home Pages
 1. Do a search using a search engine (Yahoo or WebCrawler, etc.), or
 2. Call the organization to ask if they have a home page and for the address
- ✓ Request corporate literature and annual reports
- ✓ Check with reference librarians for resources
- ✓ Talk to others in the organization
- ✓ Visit the organization
- ✓ Attend job fairs
- ✓ Carefully read job descriptions and Help Wanted ads
- ✓ If relocating: research the community, and check out cost of living comparisons

Getting ready – know the interview routine



Types of interviews

One-on-One Interviews
Group Interviews
Search Committees
Human Resources
Hiring Managers
Phone Interviews
Lunch Interviews

Stages of an interview

Introduction and rapport building
Verifying information
Questions and answers
Candidate questions
Promoting the organization
Closing and follow-up

Skills desired by employers

Communication skills
Honesty
Teamwork
Interpersonal skills
Strong work ethic
Motivation/Initiative
Flexibility
Analytical skills
Organizational skills

From Job Outlook '03, National Association of Colleges and Employers Annual Report

Verbal and non-verbal communication: The first and last impression



The handshake

- Firm grip, but not too strong
- About one arm's length away
- Hold for about 3-5 seconds
- Greet employer while shaking his/her hand



- Weak
- Sweaty palms
- Iron grip
- Pump the arm excessively
- Too close
- Hold for too long

Non-verbal communication

- Maintain good eye contact
- Smile when appropriate
- Good posture

- Staring or looking at the ground
- Nervous giggling
- Slouching
- Hand twisting, overuse of hand gestures



Verbal communication

- Speak clearly and articulately
- Not too fast and not too slow
- Be professional
- Proper grammar and pronunciation

- Mumbled
- Too fast or too slow
- Too casual
- Incorrect grammar or pronunciation
- Over emotional



Personality

- Enthusiastic and motivated
- Genuine and sincere
- Decisive
- Responsible and self-reliant

- Unresponsive
- Artificial
- Non-committal
- Overbearing
- Excessively nervous



Dress for success: appearance counts!

Clothing



- Conservative and neat
- Neutrality is important
- Conservative suit: stick with navy blue, brown, black or grey
- White or pale colored shirts/blouse
- Black or dark shoes and coordinating hosiery or dress socks
- Combine personal style with good taste
- Wear something that makes you feel terrific and is comfortable, but not casual, and does not expose too much skin.

Accessories



- Simple and tasteful, jewelry, watches, ties, scarves, hair barrettes, ribbons, etc...

Grooming



- Hair and makeup should be neat and not attract attention
- Scents, perfumes, and aftershave should be subdued...don't overdue it.
- Men - clean shaven or beards/mustaches trimmed.
- Hand and nails manicured.
- Watch what you eat before/during an interview

Interview follow-up what it is and why it's needed

The importance of following up after a personal interview cannot be stressed enough. "Follow-up" means that within one to two days of your interview, you prepare and send a letter of thanks to the person(s) who interviewed you. The basic points to be made are:

1. Thank him or her for the opportunity to interview for the position.
2. Reiterate the key factors that make you a qualified candidate for the job.
3. Express your interest in hearing from him or her.

Writing a follow-up letter indicates that you are courteous, knowledgeable about the job search process, are still interested in the position, and have thought further about the match-up between the employer's needs and your background.

Even though you may not be offered the position interviewed for, the impression made on the interviewer is usually very positive and can lead to employment with the same organization at a later date. It is worth the time and effort involved.

Your Name
Street
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Name of person
Title
Company Name
Street or P.O. Box
City, State, Zip Code

Dear _____:

First Paragraph. In this paragraph, thank the person for the opportunity to interview and explore the position further.

Second Paragraph. Review some of your personal attributes/background that you feel make you qualified for the position. You may also want to indicate further interest in the position. If you feel that you are no longer interested, mention this here and formally withdraw yourself as a candidate.

Third Paragraph. Generally express an interest in hearing from the interviewer (s) regarding your candidacy. You may want to indicate that you'll call on a certain date to check on things or some other message.

Closing,

Signature

Name (Typed)

Commonly asked interview questions

1. What goals have you set for yourself? How do you plan to achieve them?
2. Who or what has had the greatest influence on the development of your career interests?
3. What factors did you consider in choosing your major?
4. Why are you interested in our organization?
5. Tell me about yourself.
6. What two or three things are most important to you in a position?
7. What kind of work do you want to do?
8. Tell me about a project you initiated.
9. What are your expectations of your future employer?
10. What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your ability?
11. How do you solve conflicts?
12. Tell me about how you perceive your strengths. Your weaknesses. How do you evaluate yourself?
13. What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
14. What was the most useful criticism you ever received, and who was it from?
15. Give an example of a problem you have solved and the process you used to solve it.
16. Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical skills.
17. What has been your greatest challenge to date?
18. Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it?
19. What were the biggest challenges you have encountered in college? How have you handled them? What did you learn from them?
20. What are your team-player qualities? Give examples.
21. Describe your leadership style.
22. What interests or concerns you about the position or the company?
23. Have you held any leadership roles? If so, what was the greatest challenge?
24. What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?
25. What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
26. How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
27. Take me through a project where you demonstrated leadership skills.
28. How do you think you have changed personally since you started college?

Commonly asked interview questions (continued)

29. Tell me about a team project which you are particularly proud and your contribution.
30. How do you motivate people?
31. Why did you choose the extracurricular activities you did? What did you gain? What did you contribute?
32. What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with the pressure?
33. Give an example of a situation in which you failed and how you handled it.
34. Tell me about a situation when you had to persuade another person to your point of view.
35. What frustrates you the most?
36. Knowing what you know about your college experience, would you make the same decisions?
37. What can you contribute to this company?
38. How would you react to having your credibility questioned?
39. What characteristics are most important in a good manner? How have you shown one of these characteristics?
40. What challenges are you looking for in a position?
41. Are you willing to relocate or travel as part of your career?
42. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
43. How are you conducting your job search and how will you make your decision?
44. What is the most important lesson you have learned in or out of school?
45. Describe a situation where you had to work with someone who was difficult. How was the person difficult and how did you handle it?
46. We are looking at a lot of great candidates; why are you the best person for this position?
47. How would your friends describe you? Your professors?
48. What else should I know about you?

Sample questions for candidates to ask

1. What is your method of training new employees?
2. What type of orientation would I receive?
3. How closely will I be supervised?
4. What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
5. How often are performance reviews done?
6. How soon will I be given responsibility?
7. How much travel is normally expected?
8. What are some of the major short and long range goals that the company/organization has?
9. What outside influences affect the company's/organization's growth?
10. In what areas does the company/organization excel, or in what area does it have limitations?
11. What are some of the common denominators among the organization's successful employees?
12. Based on what you have seen of me so far, where do you think I could contribute most effectively?
13. Is there anything you perceive as a weakness in my background?
14. What are some of the characteristics that the company/organization considers to be unique?
15. What would add or subtract from the incumbent's performance to increase their effectiveness?
16. Can you give me some idea of the projects that I may be working on?
17. Could you describe any opportunities for advancement within the organization/company?
18. What is the typical time frame for these advancements?
19. What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
20. Has the company had to lay off employees in the past couple years?
21. How has the company/organization changed over the past 5 or 10 years?
22. Who would you consider to be your major competitors?

Probing questions

a look at behavioral based interviewing

Behavioral based interviews (BBI) are based upon the premise that the best predictor of a candidate's future performance is his or her past achievements. In behavioral based interviewing, interviewers try to elicit real examples of your past performance, as opposed to asking questions about hypothetical situations. BBI requires a structured procedure. One that involves a prescribed method of questioning and a predetermined set of questions, and it closes in on a scientific evaluation of the answers, and hence, of the candidate.

Detecting the format:

To succeed in a behavioral based interview, you must first recognize you are in one. You probably won't be able to tell during the introductory stages, since most behavioral interviewers still lead off with the traditional "getting-to-know you" chitchat, such as "tell me about yourself." Soon after however, the line of questioning will become more focused and directed towards your previous work experiences. Key tip-off phrases to listen for include:

- "Give me an example of a time when..."
- "Tell me about a situation in which you..."

In behavioral interviews be prepared to provide much more detail to the hiring manager than you normally would. You will need to answer precise questions regarding your coping abilities, decisiveness, assertiveness, organizational talents and other skills the employer think you need to succeed in this particular position.

Preparation is the key:

Candidates who do the best in these conditions are those who have predicted the questions (or at least the topics) and have planned and practiced their answers. By focusing on the following three areas, you will be able to provide more detailed responses that are essential in behavioral interviews.

1. Know the prospective employer

Thoroughly research the company and industry you're targeting. The better you understand the company and the industry, the easier it will be for you to provide relevant examples from your previous work experience. Based upon your research, think about the strengths the employer is likely seeking.

2. Know the potential job

Don't make assumptions about the available position based upon the title. Two positions with identical titles may require very different skills and distinctly different duties. Request a copy of the job description before interviews. It would also be helpful to have copies of your prospective supervisor and subordinates job descriptions. These will give you a more complete picture of the department you would join. Armed with this information you will have a better sense of the strengths necessary to succeed in the position you are applying for.

3. Know yourself

Before each interview, try to determine how you would best help the prospective employer. Ask yourself the following questions:

What can I really do for this employer?

(What are my strengths and competencies?)

What could get in the way of success?

(What are my weaknesses?)

What motivates me to succeed or do my best?

Your resume is a starting place, but keep in mind that the interview will focus on what's behind the bulleted points you listed. If you stress your strong interpersonal, organizational or team-playing skills, choose accomplishments to support your contention. This will allow you to answer behavioral questions with more detail and confidence.

Handling failure

Be prepared to provide examples of occasions when results were different than expected. Your skills in handling failure(s) as well as successes will be probed. Think back over the past few years and outline a few job-related errors. As you document these incidents think about what you have learned and how you have changed as a result. Use good judgment when selecting "errors" to mention

Common skills targeted for BBI Probing by employers

- ✓ Alertness
- ✓ Assertiveness
- ✓ Clarification
- ✓ Commitment to task
- ✓ Coping
- ✓ Corporate policy and procedures
- ✓ Creativity and imagination
- ✓ Dealing with ambiguity
- ✓ Decision making
- ✓ Focus
- ✓ Goal setting
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Listening
- ✓ Management
- ✓ Oral communication
- ✓ Organization and planning
- ✓ Perception
- ✓ Problem solving and analysis
- ✓ Team building

Some common mistakes

The following are four key mistakes that candidates frequently make.

1. *Giving just the facts* – While you want to be concise and direct, behavioral questions can't be answered well in 15 seconds. It is important to take the time to reply to the questions, then support your answer.
2. *Rambling* – To avoid making the interviewer feel bombarded, gauge the effectiveness of your responses by their content, not on the length of time or quantity of words you're using.
3. *Twisting*: To avoid revealing negative information about themselves, interviewees may twist their responses to make it seem like they are responding to a hypothetical, rather than a behavioral question. If you really can't think of an example from your background that will address the interviewer's question – say so, then go into a hypothetical mode.

For example, you might say: "I can't think of a time when I faced that type of problem, but if I were in such a situation I believe I would..." This lets the interviewer know that you understood the question and are replying to the best of your ability. It is important to try to answer the question you're asked, not the ones you prepared for.

National Business Employment Weekly, November 2001

Guide to appropriate pre-employment inquiries

ACCEPTABLE	SUBJECT	UNACCEPTABLE
"Have you worked for this company under a different name?" "Have you ever been convicted of a crime under another name?"	NAME	Former name of applicant whose name has been changed by court order or otherwise.
Applicant's place of residence. How long applicant has been resident of this state or city.	ADDRESS OR DURATION OF RESIDENCE	
	BIRTHPLACE	Birthplace of applicant. Birthplace of applicant's spouse or other relatives. Requirements that applicant submit a birth certificate, naturalization or baptismal record.
"Can you, after employment, submit a work permit if under eighteen?" "Are you over eighteen years of age?" "If hired, can you furnish proof of age?" /or/ Statement that hire is subject to verification that applicant's age meets legal requirements.	AGE	Questions which tend to identify applicants 40 to 64 years of age.
	RELIGIOUS	Applicant's religious denomination or affiliation, church, parish, pastor or religious holidays observed. "Do you attend religious services /or/ a house or worship?" Applicant may not be told "This is a Catholic/Protestant/Jewish/atheist organization."
Statement by employer of regular days, hours or shift to be worked.	WORK DAYS AND SHIFTS	Inquiries about work availability used to screen out applicants because of obligations to the military reserves or National Guard, or religious affiliation.
	RACE OR COLOR	Complexion, color of skin, or other questions directly or indirectly indicating race or color.
Statement that photograph may be required after employment.	PHOTOGRAPH	Requirements that applicant affix a photograph to his application form. Request applicant, at his option, to submit a photograph. Requirement of photograph after interview but before hiring.
Statement by employer that if hired, applicant may be required to submit proof of authorization to work in the U.S.	CITIZENSHIP	Whether applicant or his parents or spouse are naturalized or native-born United States citizens. Date when applicant or parents or spouse acquired U.S. citizenship. Requirement that applicant produce his naturalization papers or first papers. Whether applicant's parents or spouse are citizens of the U.S.
Languages applicant reads, speaks or writes fluently.	NATIONAL ORIGIN OR ANCESTRY	Applicant's nationality, ancestry, national origin or parentage. Date of arrival in United States or port of entry. Nationality of applicant's parents or spouse; maiden name of applicant's wife or mother. Language commonly used by applicant. How applicant acquired ability to read, write or speak a foreign language.
Applicant's academic, vocational, or professional education: schools attended.	EDUCATION	Date last attended high school.
Applicant's work experience.	EXPERIENCE	Applicant's military experience (general). Type of military discharge.
"Have you ever been convicted of any crime?" If so, when, where and disposition of case?	CHARACTER	"Have you ever been arrested?"
Names of applicant's relatives already employed by this company. Name and address of parent or guardian if applicant is a minor.	RELATIVES	Marital status or number of dependents. Name or address of relative, spouse or children of adult applicant.
Name and address of person to be notified in case of accident or emergency.	NOTICE IN CASE OF EMERGENCY	"With whom do you reside?" "Do you live with your parents?"
Organizations, clubs or other associations of which applicant is a member, excluding any names the character of which indicate the race, religious creed, color, national origin, or ancestry of its members.	ORGANIZATIONS	List all organizations, clubs, societies, and lodges to which you belong.
"By whom were you referred for a position here?"	REFERENCES	Requirement of submission of a religious preference.
"Can you perform all of the duties outlined in the job description?" Statement by employer that all job offers are contingent on passing a physical examination.	PHYSICAL CONDITION	"Do you have any physical disabilities?" Questions on general medical condition. Inquiries as to receipt of Worker's Compensation.

Employer feedback

Other questions you have developed:

Common Constructive Comments Made by Recruiters

- Unsure of career goals
- Work on presenting self
- Not assertive/aggressive enough
- Unable to communicate
- Nervous
- Did not know anything about company
- No enthusiasm
- Lacks confidence
- Too quiet
- Too arrogant, boastful
- No eye contact
- Not serious
- Will have problems dealing with people
- Sounded artificial

Negative factors evaluated during an interview frequently leading to rejection

- Poor interpersonal appearance
- Overbearing, overaggressive, conceited "superiority complex," "know it all"
- Inability to express him/herself clearly, poor voice, diction, grammar
- Lack of planning for career, no purpose and goals
- Lack of interest or enthusiasm, passive, indifferent
- Lack of confidence and poise, nervousness, ill at ease
- Failure to participate in activities
- Over emphasis in money
- Poor scholastic record, just got by
- Unwilling to start at bottom
- Make excuses, evasiveness, hedges on unfavorable factors in record

- Lack of tact
- Lack of maturity
- Lack of courtesy, ill mannered.
- Condemnation of past employers
- Lack of social understanding
- Marked disked for school work
- Lack of vitality
- Fails to look interviewer in the eyes
- Limp, fish handshake
- Indecision
- Unhappy personal life
- Friction with parents
- Sloppy application form
- Merely shopping around
- Wants job only for a short time
- Little sense of humor
- Lack of knowledge of the field
- Parents make decisions for him/her
- No interests in company or in industry
- Emphasis on who he/she knows
- Unwilling to go where we send him/her
- Cynical
- Low moral standards
- Lazy
- Intolerant – strong prejudices
- Narrow interests
- Poor handling of personal finances
- No interest in company activities
- Inability to take criticism
- Radical ideas
- Late to interview without good reasons
- Never heard of company
- Failure to express appreciation for interviewer's time
- Did not ask questions about the job
- High pressure type
- Indefinite response to questions

As reported by 153 companies surveyed by Frank Endicot, Northwestern University.

Sample interview evaluation form

CANDIDATE NAME		EMPLOYER		INTERVIEWER		DATE	
CHARACTERISTICS	OUTSTANDING	ABOVE AVERAGE	SATISFACTORY	LIMITED POTENTIAL	NOT ACCEPTABLE		
A. APPEARANCE Grooming Bearing Dress Posture Manners Neatness		(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
B. PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW Knowledge of Company, Knowledge of Positions Open, Asked Pertinent Questions							
C. VERBAL COMMUNICATION Delivery and Animation, Presentation of Ideas, Grammar and Vocabulary							
D. DIRECTION Well-Defined Goals, Confidence in Abilities, Realistic and Practical							
E. MATURITY Responsible, Leader- Campus, Self-Reliant, Judgment, Decisive, Leader-Work							
F. SINCERITY Genuine/Wholesome Attitude, Hones and Sincere, Artificial							
G. PERSONALITY Enthusiastic, Aggressive, Extrovert, Unresponsive, Motivation, Noncommittal							
H. QUALIFICATIONS Academic preparation, work experience, Position match							
I. OVERALL EVALUATION Long-Range potential, Drive and ambition, Ability and qualification							
Strong points Sour notes Advice Hiring Problems Background Amplify above Suggestions Plans Personal Hints	CANDID COMMENTS PLEASE? EXTREMELY HELPFUL!!						
PROBABLE ACTION							
<input type="checkbox"/> Invitation <input type="checkbox"/> No Job Match <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertain at This Time <input type="checkbox"/> Offer <input type="checkbox"/> No Mutual Interest <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer to _____							
Candidate will be contacted by what date? _____							