Stanislaus State
CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Effective Interviewing

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CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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STEP 1 - Before the Interview

An interview is a *planned* conversation between an employer and a prospective employee. A successful job interview is not a matter of luck or "winging it"; it is a crucial step in your job search that requires more preparation than you may think. With preparation you can effectively communicate your abilities, interests, background, work experience, education, and motivation to a prospective employer.

Pre-Interview Checklist

- ✓ Review the position description and your qualifications
  Know yourself. Understand your interests, values, abilities, skills, and goals, as well as what you have learned from your previous jobs, extracurricular activities and volunteer experiences. Know what you do and don't want in a career opportunity.

  Know the job. You must understand the job and its requirements so you can articulate your knowledge, skills, and abilities.

- ✓ Research the company or organization
  Know the company. Gather information about the company's history, products or services, philosophy, locations, standing in the industry, organizational structure, and prospects for growth or change. Use this information to present yourself as a candidate who can solve problems and one who shares the organization's philosophy.

- ✓ Prepare for Common Interview Questions
  Utilize the STAR Method to prepare many positive examples, situations, and stories to describe your interpersonal and work skills and abilities *ahead of time.* Keep in mind that employers attempt to predict your future behavior based on your past experiences.

STAR Method	
Situation	As a member of a group working on a project, I noticed another member missed meetings and did not come prepared.
Task	Utilizing one another's strengths and being supportive is important.
Action	I decided I would talk to him about my frustration and concerns rather than simply be angry. I found out he was frustrated because he felt his ideas were not being considered.
Result	After our conversation I made sure he had a chance to be heard and after that he appeared to make more of an effort on his part and he didn't miss any more group meetings.

- ✓ Develop your own list of questions
  Write down three to five good questions to ask the employer at the end of the interview (*refer to page 10*).

STEP 1 - Before the Interview (continued)

- ✓ Practice interview skills
  The Career Services staff provides interview coaching. Prepare for the interview by reviewing commonly asked interview questions which can be found on pages 8 - 9.

- ✓ Know the different types of interviews
  - One-on-one Interviews
  - Group Interviews
  - Search Committees
  - Phone Interviews
  - Skype Interviews

- ✓ Print 3 copies of your references. Gather 3 copies of transcripts and work samples (if necessary).

- ✓ Plan logistics to arrive 15 minutes early. Review maps and directions. Allow ample time for traffic and finding parking. Perform a trial run when you visit the company to pick up company materials and assess the culture and dress of the company.

- ✓ Dress for Success. Dress according to the standards of the organization. If you are unsure, dress conservatively.

Men	Wear slacks, a collared dress shirt, and tie. A suit jacket is optional, depending on the company. Shoes should be polished.
Women	Wear a dress or skirt and blouse that are at least knee length. Dress pants are also appropriate. Shoes should be closed toe and flat to medium sized.
General Appearance	▪ Conservative and neat ▪ Stay with neutral colors such as navy blue, brown, black, gray or white ▪ Use solid colors or subtle pinstripes ▪ Coordinate shoes with hosiery or dress socks ▪ Combine personal style with good taste ▪ Avoid sheer clothing and do not expose too much skin ▪ Simple and tasteful jewelry, watches, ties, belts, and other accessories in subtle colors ▪ Hair and makeup should be neat and not attract attention ▪ Perfume, cologne and aftershave should be subtle ▪ Men – clean shaven or beards/mustaches trimmed ▪ Nails should be manicured. Avoid bright nail polishes

STEP 2 - During the Interview

Discuss ways you can contribute to the organization. Let the interviewer know how you can meet a need or solve a problem. Emphasize your strengths, focus on work experience, courses, and personal qualities that would be beneficial for the job. Give examples from your experience or education to support these.

- Be Friendly: Smile and give a firm handshake. Greet the interviewer by name.
- Show your Enthusiasm: Enthusiasm, energy, and a sense of humor help create a good impression.
- Maintain Eye Contact: Maintaining good eye contact with the interviewer is a key to building trust.
- Body Language: Sit up straight and lean slightly forward. Face the interviewer in a relaxed, open manner.
- Be a Good Listener: Pause to think of appropriate responses that specifically answer questions asked.
- Express Yourself: Speak clearly and confidently. Avoid saying "Um" by thinking before you speak.
- Be Yourself: Don't try to change your personality. You want the employer to hire you!
- Close the Deal: Ask for the job (if you want it). Gather the interviewer's business card to avoid misspellings or incorrect titles in your thank you note.

Behavioral Based Interviews

The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Behavioral-based interviewing is touted as providing a more objective set of facts to make employment decisions than other interviewing methods. Traditional interview questions ask you general questions such as "Why should we hire you?" The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently.

In a traditional job-interview, you can usually get away with telling the interviewer what he or she wants to hear, even if you are fudging a bit on the truth. And even if you are asked situational questions that start out "How would you handle XYZ situation?" you have minimal accountability. How does the interviewer know, after all, if you would really react in a given situation the way you say you would? In a behavioral interview, however, it's much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to your character. When you start to tell a behavioral story, the behavioral interviewer typically will pick it apart to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer will probe further for more depth or detail such as "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person," or "Lead me through your decision process." If you've told a story that's anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through the barrage of probing questions.

Obviously, you can prepare better for this type of interview if you know which skills that the employer has predetermined to be necessary for the job you seek. So, how do you find out what skills, abilities, values, and knowledge are being sought? Your best indicator will be the ads and job postings for the type of position you seek, which likely will list the skills and behaviors the employer will be looking for in candidates who interview for those positions. These steps will help you narrow down the skills:

STEP 2 - During the Interview (continued)

- Identify a dozen or so job postings that match the kind of job you seek.
- List keywords that describe the skills and characteristics required for these jobs.
- Now, highlight all the skills and characteristic keywords the job postings have in common and make a list of these frequently appearing skills/characteristics.
- For each skill/characteristic listed, compose an example.

Now you'll be prepared for behavioral interviews for positions within your industry. As you are invited on interviews for specific positions, go through the process again with each individual ad/job posting to ensure that you have examples/stories ready for each skills and behavior listed.

Your response needs to be specific and detailed. Candidates who tell the interviewer about particular situations that relate to each questions will be far more effective and successful than those who respond in general terms. For example, take the following question and response:

> *Question:* "Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?"
>
> *Response:* "In my current job, I have to handle multiple responsibilities in developing new projects, maintaining existing ones, and maintaining good client relations. I allocate a certain amount of time for each area daily. That way clients can see very clearly that projects are progressing, and I have more satisfaction in accomplishing multiple tasks under pressure" It's not a bad response in that it has good details and targets the multi-tasking skill the employer wants to know what. But it does not relate to a specific incident, so the interviewee could compose a better response.

An example of a detailed question and answer would look like the example provided below.

> *Question:* Give me an example of a time you set a goal for yourself and successfully pursued it.
>
> *Answer:* I had a long-term goal to become an excellent program manager. I applied myself in developmental positions and learned the ins and outs of the organization from the bottom up. I got to know the staff and managers well. I volunteered for projects and to enhance and streamline the existing workflow. In doing so, I had an opportunity to apply for a temporary management position and obtained it. Through four years in this acting position, I strived to continuously learn and improve processes and policies. I have brought forward many success stories that have been recognized by the corporation and have earned several awards for these achievements.

Adapted from K. Hansen (2008). The Quintessential Guide to Behavioral Interviewing.

STEP 3 - After the Interview

Write a short thank-you note or letter and send immediately!

- ✓ Express your appreciation for the interview in a short thank-you note or letter.
- ✓ Restate your interest in the job, summarize key points of the interview, and add further information to help your candidacy.
- ✓ Bring up something which relates specifically to you and to your interview.
- ✓ Address the note or letter to "Dear Mr. or Ms." rather than using the first name of the person(s) with whom you interviewed.
- ✓ If you type your thank-you note, use 8½" x 11" business stationery of good quality.
- ✓ Be sure that the letter is spaced to use at least three-fourths of the page.
- ✓ Do not repeat everything that was said in the interview or printed on your resume.
- ✓ A handwritten note conveys a personal touch that an email lacks.

Contact the references on your list to alert them about your recent interview.

Evaluate your performance. Determine how well you emphasized your strengths and abilities. If you didn't get the job, ask for honest feedback about your performance from the interviewer.

Follow-up. If the interviewer stated you would hear from him or her in one week, then it is appropriate to make a follow-up telephone call after one week to inquire if a decision has been made.

Don't get discouraged. Rejection is an inescapable part of any job search. Reflect and learn from the process. Be persistent.

Sample Thank You Note & E-Mail

Handwritten Thank You on plain, business-like note card stationery

July 26, 2020

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. (Last Name):

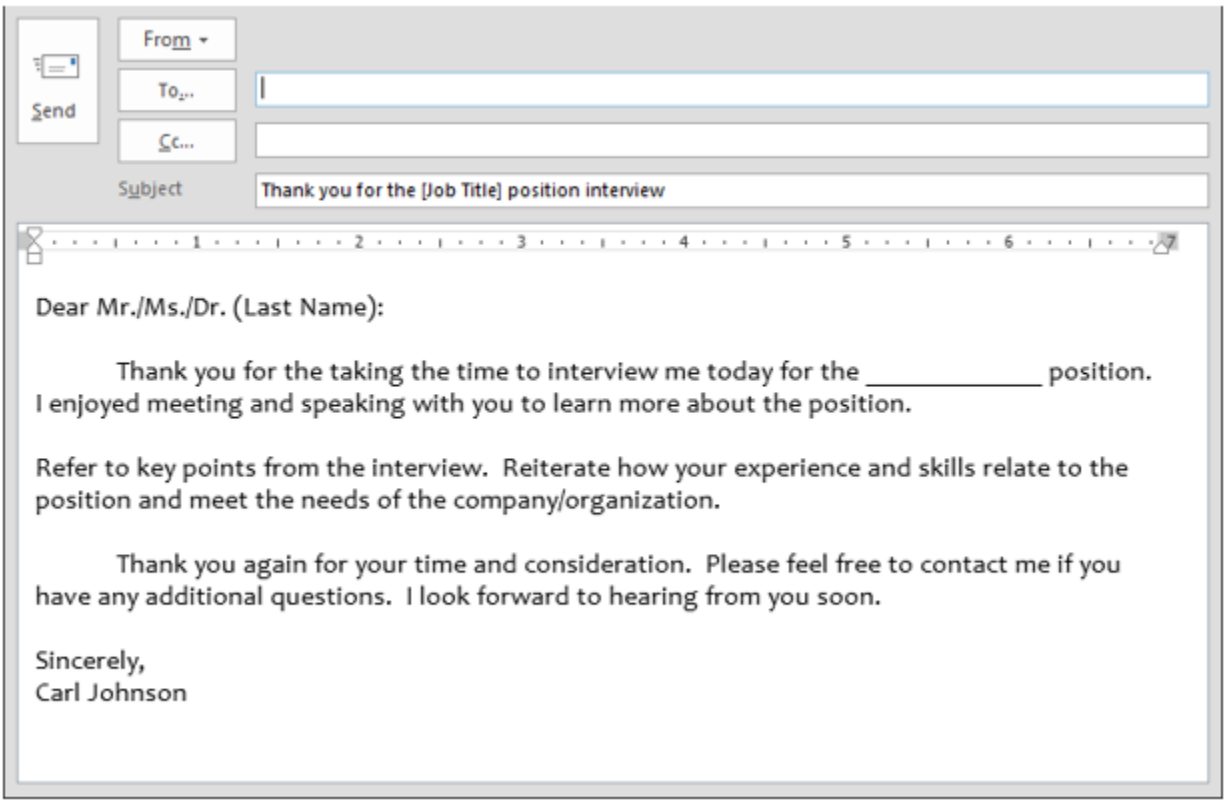
Thank you for the taking the time to interview me today for the _____ position. I enjoyed meeting and speaking with you to learn more about the position.

Refer to key points from the interview. Reiterate how your experience and skills relate to the position and meet the needs of the company/organization.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any additional questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Carl Johnson

Thank You E-Mail



Top 5 Interview Questions

Well thought-out answers to these questions will help you make a professional, polished presentation during an interview. Do not memorize your answers, but know enough about yourself, the company, and the position you are seeking in order to be able to answer any question spontaneously.

1. Tell me about yourself. Expand on your résumé.
   Keep answer short but focused on *summarizing* relevant information about yourself – education, years of experience, courses of study, and how your intentional career and education decisions have brought you to interview for this particular position at this particular company. Being thoroughly prepared gives you the confidence to communicate this information naturally throughout the interview. If you don't know this information, you haven't prepared well enough.

2. What do you know about our company?
   Do your research. Take the time to learn more about the company and what they do. If you try to "wing it" or skimp on this important preparation, the employer will select a candidate who demonstrated they really wanted the job by preparing for the interview.

3. What is your biggest weakness? And greatest strength?
   For your *weakness*, use the Sandwich Method. Start with a positive, insert a negative, end with a positive: I really like a challenge (positive). Sometimes that means I take on too much and find that I have overextended myself (negative). Over the last couple of years in college, I have learned to manage my time better, to prioritize my projects, and to take on only as much as I can handle *(positive).* Try to relate your *strengths* which would help you succeed in the position.

4. In what type of position are you most interested?
   Be specific and tell them WHY. Your answer indicates your knowledge of the company and the position. It also indicates your experience and motivation - do you know how well your previous experience prepares you to do this job? Don't reply that you are interested in "anything available." Don't expect the interviewer to be a career counselor; it's not his or her job.

5. Why should I hire you?
   Really the most important question. You must be able to communicate why you are the perfect person for the position. Sell yourself! Go beyond your course work. Textbook knowledge is great, but the employer also wants to know what practical experiences you've had. Describe how your abilities will benefit the organization.

FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:
Are you legally able to work? What limitations do you have from INS with regard to work? If you are only eligible to work for one year, why should I hire you? (Be up-front and honest but also emphasize the unique attributes you bring as an international student - multilingual, culturally diverse, and willing to take risks, work experience abroad).

Common Interview Questions

1. What are your goals? What are you doing (or what have you done) to reach your objectives?
2. What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?
3. What have been your most satisfying and most disappointing experiences?
4. What do you consider your greatest abilities and how will they help you in this job?
5. Tell about a time when you had too many things to do and were required to prioritize your tasks.
6. What was the most difficult situation you've ever encountered and how did you deal with it?
7. Describe a situation in which you displayed teamwork (or initiative or motivation).
8. What are your salary requirements?
9. How would your supervisor (or friends) describe you?
10. Why are you leaving your current position, or why did you leave your past jobs?
11. Are you more energized by working with data or by collaborating with other individuals?
12. Tell about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?
13. What are your plans for the future?
14. Have you found any ways to make school or a job easier or more rewarding or to make yourself more effective?
15. How does your previous experience relate to the jobs we have?
16. How do you deal with constructive criticism?
17. What do you dislike about your present/last job?
18. Describe how you've handled a stressful work situation.
19. Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.

Common Interview Questions (continued)

20. What questions do you have?

21. Tell me about a time when you did not agree with your boss. How did you handle the situation?

22. Why are you interested in working for (company name)?

23. What can you offer us that someone else cannot?

24. What are three things your former manager would like you to improve on?

25. Are you willing to relocate or travel?

26. Tell me about an accomplishment you are most proud of.

27. Tell me about a time you made a mistake.

28. What would you look to accomplish in the first 30/60/90 days on the job?

29. Why should we hire you?

30. How would you deal with an angry or irate customer?

31. Give a time when you went above and beyond the requirements for a project.

32. What motivates you?

33. Where do you see yourself in five years? Where do you see yourself in ten years?

34. What are you looking for in a new position?

35. Tell us about a time you disagreed with a decision at work.

36. How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?

37. Give an example of a problem you solved and the process you used to solve it.

38. What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?

39. What characteristics do you think are important for this position?

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

1. What is your method of training new employees?
2. What type of orientation or training would I receive?
3. How soon will I be given responsibility?
4. How much travel is normally expected?
5. What are some of the major short and long range goals that the company/organization has?
6. What outside influences affect the company's/organization's growth?
7. What are some of the common denominators among the organization's successful employees?
8. Based on what you have seen of me so far, where do you think I could contribute most effectively?
9. Is there anything you perceive as a weakness in my background?
10. What are some of the characteristics that the company/organization considers to be unique?
11. Can you give me some idea of the projects that I may be working on?
12. Could you describe any opportunities for advancement within the organization/company?
13. Has the company had to lay off employees in the past couple years?
14. What assignments would be expected in the first few months on the job?
15. Does your company/organization encourage further education?
16. What do you enjoy about working for this company?
17. What specific qualities are you looking for in a candidate?
18. What does a typical day look like in this position?
19. What are the prospects for growth and advancement?
20. If offered the position, how soon would you like me start?
21. When should I expect to hear back from you?