

Interviewing

An interview is a meeting between an employer and applicant to discuss a potential job opportunity. You need to know how to effectively market yourself, communicate your skills and experience, and portray your personality as one that will fit with the culture of the organization. Being properly prepared and informed about the interviewing process can help you positively focus your energies and lead you to the right job opportunity. The Experiential Learning & Career Center can help you plan your interviewing strategy.

Goals of the Interview

Goals of the Candidate (you):

- To communicate important information about yourself
- To obtain information about the position and organization
- To highlight your skills, abilities, personal qualities, and enthusiasm for the job
- To determine whether the position is suitable for you

Goals of the interviewer:

- To gather information about you as a job candidate and as a whole person
- To effectively communicate information about the position and organization
- To assess if your qualifications match the job requirements
- To determine if you are a good fit for the position, department or organization

Preparation for the Interview

Research the organization

Find out some basic information about the organization before you go for the interview. You will be in a better position to ask intelligent questions and you will impress the interviewer with your initiative and your knowledge of the organization.

Prepare and anticipate questions

Analyze the job description and match your experience, skills, interests, and abilities to the job. Review your resume and identify specific activities, work experiences, or classes that have allowed you to develop and demonstrate the skills, abilities, or specialized knowledge that is required for the position. **Knowing what you have communicated on your resume is essential.**

Anticipate questions that may be asked of you in an interview and prepare your answers beforehand (as if you were studying for an exam). Be mindful of potential questions that might be considered more difficult or sensitive for you to answer. If you have limited experience, you should try to emphasize your strong points and other aspects. Also, prepare questions you would like to ask the employer.

Knowing what you want to do as you start your career, connecting past success relating to the job opening and mentioning them in your interview will impress the interviewer and identify you as a top candidate. Providing evidence of your skills, experience, and capabilities should distinguish you from others. Interviewers are also focusing on your personal qualities and character to ensure that you possess the enthusiasm and work ethic necessary for the position.

Be prepared to prove your:

- Ability to work in teams
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Experience with conflict resolution
- Strong work ethic
- Ability to set priorities and meet commitments
- Decision-making skills
- Integrity
- Practical experience

Practice good communication skills

It is important that you use good communication skills during the interview. Try to:

- Present yourself in a positive and confident manner
- Offer a firm handshake
- Speak clearly and effectively
- Listen attentively and maintain eye contact
- Avoid the use of unnecessary verbal and non-verbal distractions

Appearance and Punctuality

Dressing appropriately conveys a good first impression. If in doubt about what to wear, dress slightly more on the conservative side. Be on time for the interview (it's advisable to arrive about 15 minutes before your appointment). This will allow you time to relax, review anticipated questions/answers, read organizational literature, and observe the work environment and interactions.

Interview Questions

Here are some examples of questions you may be asked in traditional and behavioral interviews. There are a number of other potential questions. Visit the *Experimental Learning and Career Center* for additional resources.

- Why did you choose this career track?
- What college subjects (or jobs) did you like best/least and why?
- Tell me about yourself

- What is one of your greatest strengths? ... weaknesses?
- Which two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What attributes do you have that will help you be successful in this position?
- Where would you like to be 3 years from now?
- How do you think a friend, professor or supervisor who knows you well would describe you?
- In what type of work environment are you the most comfortable?

Behavioral interview questions are often used to determine how you responded to a variety of specific situations and the results of your actions in each situation. The best predictor of future work performance is often past performance in a similar circumstance. Possible questions include:

- Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do?
- Can you tell me about a major risk that you took? What happened?
- Can you recall an instance when you convinced your supervisor (or professor) of an idea or concept? How did you proceed? What was the result?

The people who interview you for a job will typically ask if you have any questions about the position or organization. Don't pass up the opportunity to gather more information. This indicates that you are interested in the job and may help you decide if you actually want the position. **Prepare questions that you would like to ask the employer.** If your questions have been covered in the interview, you should let the interviewer know that you did have questions, but they have all been answered. It's usually appropriate to ask if you may contact him/her if you think of any additional questions.

Here are a few *closing questions* that may be appropriate to ask:

- How did this position become available? Or... How did this job opening arise?
- Could you describe the ideal candidate for this position? Or What qualities (attributes) and skills would someone need to be successful in this position?
- Who else would I be working with in this department? How much contact would I have with people from other departments?
- How would you describe the work environment here?
- What opportunities do new employees have for training and professional development?
- I am very enthusiastic about pursuing this position with you. What would be the next step in the process?

Remember to:

Try to postpone questions about salary, benefits and vacation time until the final stages of the selection process. If asked about salary requirements early in the interview say, for example, that you need more information about the position. If you feel obligated to respond more

directly, give a broad salary range based on your research and knowledge of the position and industry.

Also remember:

If the interviewer asks you a question that seems to be inappropriate or illegal, try to respond to the interviewer's apparent concern rather than the actual question itself

Strategies for Answering Interview Questions

- Concentrate on the employer's needs, not yours
- Emphasize how you can help the company or organization achieve its goals
- Describe accomplishments instead of simply reciting your past responsibilities
- Explain how your specific skills will benefit the company or organization
- Use strong confident language
- Don't downplay your accomplishments or attribute them to luck

Summary

The job interview is a strategic conversation with a purpose. Your goal is to persuade the employer that you have the skills, background and ability to do the job and that you can comfortably fit into the organization. At the same time, you should also be gathering information about the position, future career opportunities and the organization to determine if the job and work environment are a good match for you.

Keep in mind that an interview is not always an objective process in which the employer offers the job to the best candidate based on skills and experience alone. A Candidate's personality, confidence, enthusiasm, general outlook, and interpersonal/communication skills can also weight heavily in the decision-making process.

Always send a **thank you** letter, note or e-mail to the interviewer(s) within a couple days of the interview.