

## INTERVIEWING

The single most crucial part of the job-hunting process is the formal job interview, the face-to-face meeting with a hiring official when there is a definite job opportunity at stake. During the interview, both parties assess if they like each other and if they satisfy each other's needs. Not only will you be letting the employer know about your best qualities, but you will be attempting to gain a clearer impression of the employer and the position. All the time and effort you have spent preparing to make an oral presentation of what you have learned come together at this point. Now is the time to sell yourself!

The secret of good interviewing is good presentation, which requires preparation and skilled communication. You will not get a second chance in an interview. From the moment you greet the interviewer until you say good-bye, the impressions you create on that interviewer are irreversible. Making a formal, personal presentation of your knowledge, attitudes and skills as related to the job you are seeking means preparing by researching and practicing, just as you would if you were making a presentation to a class.

A good recruiter will attempt to evaluate those qualities you have that are not revealed in your resume: your behavior, what motivates you, your personality, your values, whether you are a leader or a follower, your ambitions, how well you communicate, and how much career planning you have really done. The interview will be a test of the preparation you have done and your ability to communicate it.

## GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWING

### Tips for Preparing to Interview

Remember, first impressions are lasting impressions, so it pays to be prepared. Practice your interviewing techniques in advance by doing a digitally recorded practice interview in The Career Services Center. Do as many practice interviews as necessary to help you feel comfortable with the process. You might want to practice in front of the mirror or with family and/or friends.

### Things to Bring with You to the Interview

- Extra copies of your updated resume.
- List of references.
- Detailed notes of past employers, dates, addresses, etc. for completing an application.
- Portfolio of examples of work (more common for creative positions).
- Note pad and pen (preferably black ink for completing an application).
- Copy of the job description or advertisement for the position.
- Copy of the company web site or annual report with your notes on it.
- Your appointment calendar in case another appointment needs to be scheduled.
- Kleenex or handkerchief in case you sneeze.
- Pocket mirror and comb.
- Breath mints.

A helpful hint when you are in the interviewing stages of your job search is to make an interview kit to keep in your car. In the kit you can have most of the above items along with a toothbrush and toothpaste and an extra pair of hose for women or an extra tie for men. That way if you are in a hurry and forget to bring something you can pull out your kit. The kit may also come in handy if you are unexpectedly in a position of wanting to drop off your resume with a potential employer.





### Be Focused

- Develop a sound resume with experience and skills that support your objective or summary.
- Research job responsibilities for the position in advance; know what will be expected of you.
- Have a copy of the complete job description for that specific job.
- Research the potential employer.
- Know how you can benefit the employer; know the skills you have to offer.
- Prepare a "commercial" about yourself; include your background and experience and the reason you are interested in the position.



### Arriving for the Interview

- Have directions in advance; if driving, ask where you should park.
- Get there early; find a restroom and use the mirror to be sure you are put together.
- Brush your teeth and take care of breath odor.
- Notify the receptionist of your arrival; ask if you need to complete an application.
- Be respectful of the receptionist or anyone else you should encounter. You never know where the power lies.
- Be sure you know how to pronounce the name of the person with whom you'll be interviewing.
- Observe the environment (corporate culture) and take note of newsletters or journals in the waiting room.
- Relax; take deep breaths.
- Reframe your thoughts if you're nervous; focus on "what it would be like to work here".

### Stages of the Interview

1. Developing rapport; follow the lead for small talk.
2. Background information; keep them focused on your resume.
3. Determining if your skills are a good fit for the position and company.
4. Closing; you should ask questions here.

Rehearse in advance your answers to commonly asked interview questions. Keep in mind that employers are interested in HOW you respond, i.e. in a logical and thoughtful manner. Try not to hurry your responses; take time to formulate your thoughts. It's OK for a few seconds of silence as you prepare your answer.

Pay special attention to questions for which you answer "no". If you have to answer "no" then qualify it positively. For example, if you are asked if you can do something like sprout wings and fly to the moon and back within 24 hours, you might respond by saying "No, I didn't realize that was part of the job responsibilities. However, I know that I can learn..." The point is not to leave a negative perception with the interviewer.

Also pay attention to "illegal" questions that the interviewer may ask. If you perceive that the information is irrelevant to the responsibilities, you could ask how that information would affect your employment with the company or your ability to perform the responsibilities of the position. If you think that the interviewer is asking about something that may be an issue at some point in the future, you may want to address the subject up front and help put the interviewer at ease.

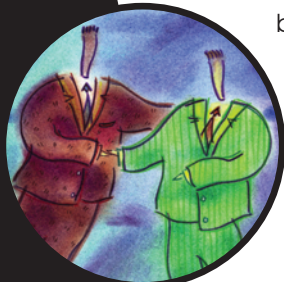
Remember to analyze your answers after an interview. If you forgot to say something, you can follow-up with a phone call or put the information in your thank you letter. It is a good idea to remind the interviewer of your qualifications and re-emphasize your strengths in your thank you letter. ALWAYS follow up with a thank you letter!

## Interview Questions

Most interview questions come from one of two foundation questions: Why do you want this position? and Why should we want you? If you keep this rule in mind while answering any interview question, you've won part of the battle.

Listed below are some typical interview questions. It is a good idea to rehearse your answers to these questions before you go into an interview situation. You can arrange a digitally recorded practice interview with The Career Services Center if you would like to be able to critique your interviewing skills in more depth.

- Tell me about yourself
- How did you select your college or university?
- How did you choose your particular field(s) of study?
- What courses and subjects did you like most/least and why?
- Do you think your grades are an accurate reflection of your achievements in college?
- What would you change about your academic program?
- What would you change about your college or university?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience. How has your college experience prepared you for a career in...?
- What have you learned from your college activities?
- Do you plan to continue your education?
- Why are you looking for employment?
- Why did you leave your last place of employment?
- Why should I hire you?
- If I hire you, how long a commitment do you plan to give me?
- What are your career goals?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?
- Why did you choose your particular field of work?
- Describe your perfect job. What are the most important aspects that you are looking for in a job?
- Define success.
- What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in your field?
- How would you describe yourself? How would a co-worker (or friend) describe you? A boss?
- Describe two or three accomplishments that have given you the most satisfaction.
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What is your philosophy of life?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What do you know about this company?
- What determines a person's progress in a good company?
- Do you prefer working by yourself or with others?
- What kinds of people frustrate you?
- Who do you admire? Why?
- Describe the greatest challenge or problem that you have encountered. How did you resolve it?
- Describe how you handle stress. How do you work under pressure?
- How do you react to criticism?
- What is your major weakness? What are three of your strong points?
- From what mistakes have you learned the most?
- What are your own special abilities?
- What qualities would you expect in a supervisor?
- Describe the supervisor you have liked the most. Tell me about the worst boss you've ever had.
- What do you think it takes to make our company a success?
- What are the main elements needed to develop team spirit?
- Do you object to working overtime?
- Are you willing to travel? Would you be willing to relocate?
- What size organization do you want to work for?
- Do you have a geographical preference for where you work?
- In what type of environment do you want to work?





- What is important to you in selecting an organization for which you would like to work?
- In what ways will this company benefit from your services?
- What contributions do you see yourself making to this organization?
- How long would you expect to be trained for this position?
- How long would you expect it to take you to become a contributing member of our organization?
- What qualities would you look for in a person if you were hiring someone for this position?
- Do you have any objections to taking a drug test or psychological evaluation?
- What are your salary expectations?

### Illegal/Improper Interview Questions

Improper interview questions are those that do not pertain to the nature of the job, or to the applicant's ability to perform that job, or those that are not asked of every candidate. They are illegal only if the information is used to make a hiring decision. Due to Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity legislation, most recruiters now know what they can ask candidates and what they cannot. However, if you are confronted with a question you think is unreasonable, it is best to deal with the underlying issue (i.e. why it was asked) rather than become defensive or hostile. There are legal/proper ways to ask some of these questions; be sure to notice the difference.

#### Improper/Proper

- Do you have any children? (Legal: What hours (shifts, days) are you available to work?)
- How old are you? (Legal: Are you over the age of 18 (or required age)?)
- Are you a U.S. citizen? (Legal: Of what country are you a citizen?)
- Do you have a car? (Legal: Will transportation be a problem when overtime is required?)
- With whom do you reside? (Legal: What is your current address?)
- Are you disabled? (Legal: Are you able to perform all essential functions of the job and perform them with or without any accommodation?)

#### Improper (in the USA)

- Do you attend church regularly?
- What are your outstanding debts?
- Your last name is \_\_\_\_\_. What kind of name is that?
- Do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend? Are you planning to have children?
- This is a (fill in the blank religion) company. Do you think you can be happy working here?
- What does your father/mother do for a living?
- What is your IQ?
- How much do you weigh?
- What is your religion?

#### Interview Questions That Test Problem Solving Ability (From MBA Style Magazine)

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. The employers want to see how you think.

- It is the 15th century. How do you convince the Pope that the Earth is round?
- If I gave you an elephant where would you hide it?
- Why are soda cans tapered on the top and bottom?
- You are in a boat on a fresh water lake. In your hand is a rock. You throw the rock into the lake. How is the lake's water level affected?
- If it rained music what would grow?
- Should Prozac be added to the water supply?
- What kind of animal/vegetable would you be and why?
- Tell me a joke.

## Education Specific Questions:

### Elementary School Specific

- What type of reading program did you use in student teaching? (basal, novel, whole language, etc)
- How would you describe the ways that children learn from birth to age 9?
- If you could design the ideal classroom for the elementary grades what would it look like?
- We know that children learn by making connections. What implications does this have for curriculum at the elementary level?
- Which subject area do you believe is your strength, which is your weakest? What steps will you take to improve in this area?

### Middle School Specific

- A lot has been discussed regarding motivation of students at this age. What do you think contributes to the lack of motivation students feel?
- What do you think is an appropriate amount of homework for this age student? How much weight would homework hold in your consideration for grading on report cards?
- What do you think are the top three qualities needed to be a successful middle school teacher?
- What is meant by "teaming" at the middle school level? How does it support instruction?
- What are some characteristics of middle school-aged students that need to be considered when planning middle school programs?

### Secondary School Specific

- What do you believe is an acceptable failure rate in courses at the high school? What do you believe causes school failure?
- How would you get a student to do their work when they absolutely refuse to do anything? (i.e. A senior who says, "I don't care if I flunk, I have enough credits to pass anyway.")
- Describe your grading practices. What ingredients go into grades and what percent would you give to each?
- What are some alternative scheduling configurations being used at the high school level? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
- Which should be the primary concern of high school teachers: the content or the kids? Provide a rationale for your choice.

## Nursing Specific Questions

- What certifications do you have?
- Why did you choose (ER, OR, ICU, LTC, etc.) as your specialty area?
- What journals do you read?
- What kind of recommendations will you get from your clinical supervisor?
- How do you stay current in your practice?

## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

### What exactly is behavioral interviewing?

Behavioral interviewing is a style of interviewing that more and more organizations are using in their hiring processes. The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is this: The most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It provides more objective facts on which to base employment decisions than other interviewing methods. Traditional interviewers ask general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and tries to pinpoint certain characteristics.





### Important Points About Behavioral Interviewing:

- Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job opening and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. To assess which skills the employer is seeking, talk with alumni, read the company literature carefully and listen closely during the company's information session.
- In the interview, your response needs to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Tell them briefly the situation, what you did specifically and the positive result or outcome. Frame it in a four step process:
  - Situation
  - Task
  - Action
  - Result/Outcome (STAR method)
- The interviewee tells a story for a few minutes. Typically, the interviewer will pick apart the story to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer can 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."
- Always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary and make sure you answer the question completely.
- Your interview preparation should include identifying examples of situations where you have demonstrated the behaviors sought by a company.
- Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering these questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from internships, classes, activities, team involvement, community service and work experience. In addition, you may use examples of which you may be especially proud, such as running a marathon, running for student body president, exhibiting paintings at an art show, climbing half of the high peaks in the Adirondacks or biking across the country.

### Examples of Behavioral Interviewing Questions

To evaluate you on your **people/interpersonal/customer service/supervisory skills:**

- Give an example of a time when you had to deal with a particularly difficult person/client.
- If you had a similar situation now, would you handle it differently? Why?

On **communication competencies:**

- Describe a time when you had to explain a project to a group, and realized that you had been misinterpreted. How did you finally get your point across?

To identify whether you have experience in **strategic planning:**

- Tell me how you plan and organize your schedule to ensure that everything gets done.
- Give me an example of a time when you failed to meet a deadline. When did you realize that you would miss the deadline? What did you do? What did you learn?

On **decision-making:**

- Give a specific example of a particular problem you've had at work, at home or at school. Go through the process you used to analyze the problem and arrive at your decision.

## POSITIVE PHRASES & WORDS EMPLOYERS LIKE TO HEAR

Well organized  
 Works well under pressure  
 Thorough  
 Good long range planner  
 Problem solver  
 Good short range actions  
 Negotiation skills  
 Flexible  
 People oriented  
 Ability to make quick decisions  
 Writing/editing skills  
 Cost conscious  
 Decisive  
 Can affect the bottom line  
 Can make tough decisions  
 Can hire and fire people  
 Clear vision of the future  
 Good oral skills  
 Original thinker  
 Aggressive with sensitivity  
 Persuasive  
 Adaptive  
 Versatile  
 Ability to motivate  
 Good time manager  
 Sense of priorities  
 Attentive to detail  
 Diplomatic  
 Establishes good rapport  
 Relates well (upwards & downwards)  
 Good trainer/teacher  
 Sense of humor  
 Ability to get cooperation  
 Enthusiastic  
 Easily wins confidence  
 Creative  
 Good sense of goals  
 Cost-effective

## GUIDELINES FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWING

Tips for handling telephone interviews adapted from Glenn Mandelkern (Career Consultant):

- If you will be interviewing with multiple people on one end, write their names on sheets of paper and put them across from you. When "Mary" asks you a question, look at "Mary's" sheet of paper. This will help you remember who you are addressing.
- Go into a room with no distractions before the interview begins. Close the door to pets, family, roommates, etc. You don't want to be explaining the crash in the background when Fluffy knocked over the fish tank and is now screeching because she's wet.
- Stand when talking or sit in a chair with a straight back. Amazingly, your position affects the quality of your voice. If you are sitting down in casual clothes, you just won't project the same readiness as if you are standing or sitting at attention in a better wardrobe.





- Do your best to be the one who calls. It's very disconcerting to be in the middle of something, only to have an employer call. If the employer calls, either try to schedule an appointment for the interview, or simply excuse yourself politely and offer to call back in five minutes. The person who makes the call has a certain advantage of command in knowing how he/she would like to structure the call, especially in terms of points he/she wants to cover. However if you sense agitation by the employer concerning your calling them back, do not insist on it. Speak with the employer at that time.
- Talk only as much as necessary. Interviewers sometimes use silence in an attempt to make you talk more and more. You may feel that supplying more points helps you build your case, but that may work against you. Because you do not have the visual cues of body language to guide you, at times it is difficult to gauge when you've said enough or if the person is buying what you have to say. You can always mark clearly the end of your response with a question such as "So I believe my experience in System XYZ does apply to your current project, wouldn't you agree?"
- Prepare a loose script. If you write something word for word, you will sound like you're giving a speech (like telemarketers). However, by just using trigger words on a notepad or Post Its, you can make sure you get your points across by eliminating the Post It (or scratching off the notepad), and you will be able to jog your memory by referring to the words.
- Practice talking about unrelated items. Open up to any page in the Yellow Pages. Many times you will find two subjects on the top of the page, such as "Bathtubs/Batteries". Talk about these two supposedly unrelated topics and link them. You can practice this alone or with others. It can be a lot of fun. Use this exercise to help build your confidence. Then if you are hit with a question from left field, you know you have the ability to tie it back to the subject at hand.
- Follow up the phone interview with a thank you letter, just as you would for a regular interview.

## SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

At the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. Below are examples of things you may want to know:

- Identify typical career paths based on past records.
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
- Describe the typical first year assignments.
- Tell me about your initial and future training programs.
- What are the challenging facets of the job?
- What are the company's plans for future growth?
- What industry trends will occur in this company?
- What makes your firm different from its competitors?
- Describe the work environment.
- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
- Is it company policy to promote from within? Tell me the work history of your top management.
- What are your expectations for new hires?
- What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
- What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
- What characteristics does a successful person have at your company?

## DRESS AND BODY LANGUAGE

How you dress and act can be as important as what you say. First impressions count. You will be evaluated on grooming, poise, enthusiasm, and confidence. Dress in appropriate professional attire, and in good taste; it's better to be on the conservative side. A good business suit is a great investment.

### Tips for all interviewees

- Well-groomed appearance.
- Clothing and accessories should be in good taste, clean and ironed.
- Minimal cologne or perfume (preferably none).
- No visible body piercings/tattoos.
- Well-brushed teeth and fresh breath.
- No body odor.
- No gum, candy or other objects in mouth.
- Avoid very tight or extremely loose clothing.

### Tips for Women

- Dark suit with white or cream blouse; make sure that the blouse is not too low cut.
- Human Resources personnel still suggest that women wear a skirt-suit, with neutral hose.
- Tailored dress in a solid or subtle color, with no extreme slits; the hemline should be at the knee or lower.
- Sensible (not too high) polished closed-toe pumps.
- Hose (Take an extra pair of stockings in case of a run).
- Long hair should be pulled away from face.
- Jewelry and accessories should be minimal, and makeup understated.
- Wear small earrings (knobs) and one necklace.
- If you wear nail polish use a pale or clear color.
- Small shoulder bag or attaché case.

### Tips for Men

- Dark suit (black, navy, brown or gray).
- White or soft pastel shirt and a conservative tie.
- Well polished shoes and dark socks.
- No flashy cuff links, rings or neck chains.
- No earrings.
- Hair should be cut and groomed, and fingernails trim and clean.
- Beards and moustaches must be neatly trimmed.
- Carry a simple but nice briefcase or portfolio.

### Did you know that your body talks?

Your body language will leave both positive and negative messages. Ensure that yours is positive. Have a firm handshake, smile, give steady eye contact, be optimistic and confident, bright and alert. Do not twitch, scratch, fidget, slouch, mumble, talk too loudly, too softly or sound pessimistic.



# EIGHT INTERVIEW TIPS

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

### 1. Assess yourself

Know your strengths and weaknesses before you walk in the door. Never expect an employer to tell you where you might fit in an organization—you should already know.

### 2. Read Employer Literature

You should have some knowledge of company policies, employment opportunities, products and services. Look for a chance in the interview to communicate what you know.

### 3. Verify the Particulars

Find out the exact time and place of the interview. Arrive at least five minutes early. There is no excuse for being late—ever! Learn the interviewer's name, its proper pronunciation and his/her title.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

### 4. Sell Yourself

Don't just answer the questions. Illustrate your personal qualities and strongest abilities with examples from your past. Try to address any underlying questions you think the employer might have about your suitability for the job.

### 5. Dwell on the Positive

Should the recruiter ask about past failures or shortcomings, try to explain circumstances rather than give excuses or blame others. You'll create a better impression by being honest and candid.

### 6. Non-Verbal Communication

Body language is critical. Are you sitting up straight? Are your hands and/or feet giving your nervousness away? Are you dressed in a professional manner?

### 7. Always Have Your Own Question to Ask

If appropriate, ask meaningful questions. Find out, for instance, what the job responsibilities are, how training is provided, what advancement opportunities are available, how much travel is involved, what other individuals or departments you would work with most, how job performance is measured, etc.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### 8. Follow-up

Provide whatever credentials, references or transcripts are requested by the prospective employer as soon as possible. Be sure to write down the name, title and address of the recruiter. You will want to write a brief typed letter of appreciation for the interview opportunity.

