

Interview – Basic Information

Description

An interview is a screening process in which you are given the opportunity to learn about an organization and the organization has the opportunity to evaluate you as a prospective employee. The interview is an exchange of information between you and the interviewer to determine whether there is a match between your interests and qualifications and their requirements and needs.

Three major functions of an interview

- Serves as a learning experience regarding the employer and available career opportunities
- Permits you to “present” your qualifications and interest in the position to the employer
- Enables the employer to determine if you will “fit in” with the company and fulfill the needs of the organization

Purpose of an interview

While getting the interview is the purpose of your résumé, getting the job is the purpose of the interview. The interview process provides you with a face-to-face opportunity to set yourself apart from your competition and expand on the information the employer already knows about you from your résumé. As a well-prepared candidate, you can use the interview process to send the message, “I am

the best person for this job” through everything you say and do.

Qualities Employers Seek

- Communication skills
- Honesty/integrity
- Teamwork skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Motivation/initiative
- Strong work ethic
- Analytical skills
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Computer skills
- Self-confidence

To succeed in today’s job market you must do more than be able to establish evidence of your talents and skills – you must be prepared to sell yourself. This requires you to have a thorough understanding of who you are, including your long and short term goals, what motivates you, and what you believe sets you apart from the competition

The Interview Process

The interview process involves three stages. Solid preparation for each stage will increase your chances for success.

Stage 1: Before the Interview

Know Yourself

- Analyze your strengths and weaknesses and know exactly what you want to say
- Identify several key strengths with examples from your past experience
- Evaluate problem areas in your record and be prepared to offer a strong case for these during the interview
- Do not volunteer negative information about yourself or a former employment situation

Prepare yourself

- Keep your objective concise and realistic. Research the types of positions that are appropriate for someone with your background and accomplishments
- Consider what you want to communicate and how you are going to communicate – your personal qualities, functional skills, and special areas of knowledge that relate to the particular organization
- Write out practice answers to possible questions from the interviewer
- Prepare a list of well-researched questions for the interviewer
- Be aware of cultural differences in communicating, especially if you are looking for international jobs

Write your résumé

Make it individualized and accurate. It is your best advertisement. Be able to support everything with specific examples as you will probably be asked to elaborate on some of them during the interview.

Research the organization

Learn as much as you can about the company. Read the company literature, review their website, request information directly from the company, and speak with employees and people in the field. Read the business section in local newspapers, trade journals, newsletters, business magazines and directories. If the company is public look for information on SEC's Website at www.sec.gov, and Reference USA, www.referenceusa.com, Listed below are some of the things you may wish to find out.

Look for these attributes

- The size of the firm, including the number of employees
- The location of the organization’s headquarters
- The potential growth of the company and the industry it represents
- The annual sales growth or expansion of services for the last several years
- The product lines or services
- Types of clients
- Identify the competition and their strengths
- Name of recruiter or others with hiring responsibility
- Is there a training program? Is it structured or unstructured?
- What is the typical career path within the organization
- The CEO and President
- What are the philosophies of the organization? Read their mission and vision statements
- Does the organization and position fit in with your employment objectives?

Company research is the key to heading in the right direction. Remember that research will help you narrow your field of potential employers and avoid employers who do not match your career aspirations. Some of your questions may not be answered but the effort you put into research will help you take charge of your future.

Know how your experience, education, and interests relate to the position and anticipate possible questions

This knowledge will allow you to answer why, when, and where questions, and reflect your self-confidence and your ability to communicate and relate to others effectively. This will help tremendously when you are asked open-ended questions such as, ‘Tell me about yourself,’ or ‘What do you think makes you a strong candidate for our position?’

Practice interviewing

Talk to Career Center staff members, people in the field, and your friends. Discuss techniques with the staff, or arrange a mock interview. Practice in front of a mirror or videotape yourself.

Consider creating a portfolio

Portfolios are not just for artists and teachers anymore. Provide documents and materials that demonstrate your knowledge and accomplishments. These might include samples of your writing, portions of a successful project, letters of merit and appreciation – anything you believe will contribute to your attractiveness as a candidate.

Acknowledge all preliminary correspondence promptly

This includes verifying the specifics of your interview including date, time, place, individuals conducting the interview, and an itinerary. Determine who will bear the costs of necessary transportation, meals and overnight lodging.

Stage 2: During the Interview

Dress appropriately and comfortably

First impressions are important and include how you look. Most employers consider a conservative dress as a sign of good judgment. Check your clothes the day before in case something is amiss. Be sure your clothing is clean, pressed, and in good repair.

Be punctual

Know the exact location and time of your appointment. Arrive about fifteen Minutes early. This will give you time to relax and catch your breath. Go alone. To bring another person with you indicates insecurity. Be alert and prepared.

Items to bring

- Pen and paper
- Social security number
- Extra copies of your résumé
- List of references (include full names, business titles, business addresses, and telephone numbers of at least three individuals who will serve as reference for you. You must ask these individuals for permission, informing them that they may be contacted by an employer. Use adults whose references will be of value to you – supervisors, professors, etc.)

Play the part

- Stand until asked by the interviewer to sit down. Do not slouch
- Build rapport with the interviewer. That involves your attitude, non-verbal behaviors, and verbal behaviors.
- Be friendly, polite and respectful to everyone
- Show interest in the employer, the facilities, its mission and its people
- Watch your grammar. Speak with a good voice and diction. Say “yes”, Not “yeah”
- Once you have given your name, repeat the interviewer’s name, using “Mr” or “Ms” and correct pronunciation.

Non-verbal behaviors

- How you dress, stand, sit, use your hands, move your head and eyes, how you listen, all work together to provide your interviewer with information about you beyond what you say.
- **Posture** – Walk confidently into the room, hold your head up and offer a firm, positive handshake. During interview sit up straight in your chair and lean forward to indicate interest and attention
- **Greeting** – Express your gratitude when meeting someone for the first time. Maintain eye contact and smile.
- **Eye contact** – Be open and direct when listening, asking and responding to questions. Do not stare.
- **Gestures** – Try to control nervous gestures like hair-twisting, nail biting, and pen clicking. Hands should be used in a relaxed way, for animation, communication, excitement and interest
- **Voice** – The sound of your voice should be warm and friendly. Project, speak slowly, and enunciate. Use good grammar skills to avoid misuse of verb tense, pronouns or other grammatical errors.

Verbal behaviors

- Use active verbs
- Use concrete examples
- Summarize and make transitions
- Be positive and specify what you have done and what you know
- Ask for more information when a vague or difficult question is put forth.

Sell yourself

This is your opportunity to prove that you are the best candidate for the job. All your preparation will now pay off. Remember, the interviewer's job is to determine whether or not you are a good fit between you and the position for which you are applying.

If you know yourself and understand the position, you can sell yourself. Most jobs are complex and it helps to let the interviewer know that you are used to handling successfully, a number of responsibilities at the same time: academic, part-time work, community service, family obligations, etc. Use the name of the interviewer once or twice in each conversation (do not use a first name). Dale Carnegie, who made millions telling people how to make friends and influence people, maintained that a person's favorite word is his or her name.

Be a good listener

Focusing on the interviewer and the questions being asked will lessen your nervousness and enable you to answer questions more directly and succinctly. Although you are the one being asked most of the questions you have total control of all the information your interviewer receives. When you are prepared and you listen carefully, you can make sure you answer each question with the information about yourself you want the employer to have.

Be honest and enthusiastic

The interviewer wants to learn about your background and abilities. Good communication skills are important to all employers. Respond as accurately as possible to the questions asked – in sentences, not

paragraphs or yes and no answers. Use specific examples whenever possible to illustrate specific skills and accomplishments and stress the positive rather than the negative. Be positive in your comments. Express thoughts clearly and concisely. Do not ramble. Some of the commonly asked questions are:

Commonly asked questions

- **Tell me about yourself**
 - Be brief. Keep responses relevant to the position and the organization. The interviewer is interested in the following information: Your education and previous experience, your attitude toward people and work, and your future career plans as they relate to the job.
- **Why do you want to work for us?**
 - This is to learn how much you know about the organization and your chosen career field. If you haven't done your homework the question can be devastating.
- **Why should we hire you?**
 - Know your strengths and abilities to be able to convince the interviewer that you will be an asset to the organization. Emphasize where and how you expect to contribute, not what you expect the employer to do for you.
- **What is your greatest weakness?**
 - Whatever you mention, be sure to state how you have worked to strengthen yourself in that particular area or turn it around to be a potential strength.
- **What are your long-term goals?**
 - The interviewer would like to know if you plan to stay in this career field and with this organization. General goals that confirm your commitment are best.
- **What accomplishments are you most proud of?**
 - Be ready with at least two or three concrete examples that illustrate your personal strengths. Ideally these examples will illustrate qualities that will be valuable once you are on the job

Show that you are likable and professional

Employers hire people that they like, as well as, those they believe can do the job. Smile, be friendly, and maintain your composure no matter what. Sometimes interviewers are testing how professional and unflappable you are.

Be prepared to ask questions

Remember the interview is an exchange of information. You can ask for additional information or clarification of information you found in your research. You can also ask questions that will help you to decide if the organization can meet your goals and work needs. Your questions will demonstrate both your interest and understanding of the position. Techniques for asking good questions begin with the use of who, what, where, why, and how.

Never speak badly of a former employer, colleague, or teacher

If there were problems with previous experiences, try to put your answers in positive terms

Wait for an offer to discuss salary

Discuss salary only after you have been offered the job. Think in terms of salary ranges and fringe benefits (insurance, pension plans, stock options, sick leave, etc.)

- Should you be asked difficult questions such as:
 - Have you thought about salary?
 - What salary are you expecting?
 - What is the minimum salary you would accept?
- Consider the following responses:
 - What is the salary range for this position?
 - Most of my peers who are also graduating in this major are receiving
 - Offers in \$_____range. What range is offered for this position?

Know when the interview is over

Signs from your interviewer such as looking at a watch, putting papers in a pile, and moving back a chair are your cues that the interview is over. At this point you can help your interviewer by providing them a summary of your qualifications, expressing your interest and desire to work for them, and thanking them for their time and consideration. If there are other steps in the application process be sure you understand them

Don't expect an offer on the spot.

Offers usually follow the interview, sometimes two or three weeks later. If you are not offered the job during the interview, ask about the next step in the employment process.

Stage 3: After the Interview

Analyze the interview

Although it is not recommended that you take notes during the interview, it may be helpful for you to do so immediately afterwards. How did it go? What did you learn? What was your impression of the organization, the interviewer, and other people you may have met? It is a good idea to keep some kind of written record of each interview you have that includes any information you believe to be important.

Write a thank you note

This is an extremely important aspect of interviewing and one in which is most often neglected. You can get an edge simply by being one who always sends a note within forty-eight hours to thank the interviewer and stress points in your background that qualify you for the position. If additional information or materials were requested, verify that it is being forwarded. Notes may be typed or hand written. You will have to determine which form is most appropriate for each interview.

When appropriate, follow up

If you are told you will hear about a position by a specific date but do not, call the organization and ask about the current status of your candidacy.

Job Offer

If an offer is extended verbally, ask for it and the details in writing, including the job title, starting date, salary, location and any other important information. If anything appears vague, ask for clarification before accepting the offer.

- Make your acceptance in writing, restating the important details
- If you are going to reject the offer, do so in writing as soon as possible
Indicate appreciation for their confidence in you. Do not burn any bridges!
- If you need more time to consider the offer, ask for an extension of the deadline and tell them why.

Job related considerations	Life style considerations	Monetary considerations	Geographic Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Job responsibilities •Promotion and advancement potential •Your supervisor and co-workers •Degree of autonomy •Professional development and growth opportunity •Dress code •Philosophy and reputation of the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Work schedule •Amount of travel •Social life for singles or couples •Commuting time to work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Starting salary (consider all taxes) •Salary potential •Bonuses and commissions •Profit-sharing •Company car •Cost of living •Expense account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Climate •Size and type of community •Availability and cost of housing •Cultural and cost of housing •Proximity to academic institutions

Coping with Rejection

Being rejected by potential employers is an inevitable part of every job search. This doesn't mean that it will be easy to accept or that you have to like it. No one likes to feel unwanted. This is as true in the job search as in any other aspect of life. Keep in mind two things that may help you handle negative feedback in a positive way.

First, you will hear "no" many more times than "yes." This is a fact of the job search and realizing this should help you put an employer's "no" into proper perspective. Second, don't just accept an employer's negative response without looking at the reasons. Try to determine why you were turned down. Was there a poor fit between the position and your background? Did you fail to present yourself as a strong candidate in your cover letter and résumé or in the interview? You may be able to see the answers to these questions yourself, but it is also a good idea to seek guidance and input from Career Services staff or from the interviewer by asking, "How could I have presented myself better?" Accept the fact that you will be rejected more often than not, but learn from the experience to better prepare for the next interview.

Career Center Resources

Great Interview, Successful Strategies for Getting Hired, by Vivian V. Eyre, 2000

Interview for Success, by Caryl and Ron. Krannich, 2003

Job Interviews for Dummies, by Joyce Lain Kennedy, 2000

Savvy Interviewing, by Caryl and Ron Krannich, 2000

Sweaty Palms, by H. Anthony Medley, 2005

Website Repository

For even more information, please search through our hand-picked list of websites on [The Career Center's Website Repository](#).