

Interviewing Guide

The interview is one of the most important steps in the job search process, and thorough preparation is essential. The purpose of an interview is for the employer to gather enough information about your background, strengths, and level of interest to determine if you meet their needs. Interviewers have three major criteria in mind when interviewing candidates:

- 1) Can you do the job? (skills)
- 2) Will you do the job? (interest/motivation)
- 3) Are you a good fit with the organization? (personal qualities)

The interview is also a time for the interviewee (you) to gather additional information about the job, organization, and staff. You will be deciding if the job is a close match to what you are looking for in an opportunity.

Part 1: Preparing for the Interview

Preparation is the key for a successful interview. There are many steps to take in the days prior to your scheduled interview:

Research the Organization

Before you head for the interview, you must research the organization. Employer web sites are a good place to start. You can also use resources on the Office of Career Services web site such as Vault. The amount of information available may depend on whether the organization is public or private. When researching, look for information on the organization's locations, products or services, financial picture, management and culture, and anything else that is available.

Another great way to gather information about a company is through informational interviewing, which is talking with people in the organization, or people who are familiar with the organization. You should be able to discuss the organization in an intelligent manner and ask appropriate questions of the interviewer.

Research the Position

If you do not have a detailed description of the position, call or email the organization and ask them for one. Carefully review the job description to identify key skills and qualifications the employer has outlined. Be sure to think about the education and skills you have developed which match those requested by the employer.

Schedule a Mock Interview

Receiving feedback from reliable and knowledgeable professionals on your interviewing skills can be invaluable at helping you to become more skilled at interviewing. A Career Advisor can identify your strengths in the interview, as well as point out the areas in which you need further development. We can also provide you with information and tools to help you develop the aspect of your interviewing skill-set that needs further improvement. To set up a mock interview contact the Office of Career Services at 440-775-8140 or stop by Stevenson-Longman.

Reflect on Your Background

Study your resume so that you can speak eloquently about your education and experiences and how they relate to the position for which you are interviewing. Refer to the list of sample interview questions later in this guide. This will help you prepare for answering similar questions asked by your interviewer. Think about the skills you may bring to the position and have examples for each.

First Impressions

Evaluating the way you are dressed is one of the first ways employers will make a decision about whether you are ready to transition from the college setting to a work environment. This means that you want to communicate, through your clothing choices, that you are a professional. Traditional business attire is the safest choice for an interview, even if the company dresses casually.

Business attire often needs to be tailored before it is ready to wear, so purchase your clothing well before the date of the interview.

- We all know the basics: shower, neat hairstyle, trimmed nails, and fresh breath.
- Women look most professional in a gray, black or navy suit (neutral colors), or a solid skirt with coordinating jacket. Makeup should be applied sparingly, and no perfume should be used.
- Men should choose a neutral color suit, and wear a tie that is a solid color, or has a conservative pattern. Socks should match the suit, while belts should match the shoes. The goal is to call attention to your resume, and your strengths as a candidate, not to your clothing.
- Make sure that you are comfortable in your interview clothing. Wear your outfit and accessories to a practice interview (which you can set up by calling the Office of Career Services), to make sure everything fits, so you are not distracted during your interview.

Part 2: Types of Interview Situations

Telephone Interviews

Some companies, in an effort to cut down on costs associated with the process of staff hiring, will conduct an initial interview over the phone. They are most often used to narrow the pool to applicants who will be invited for on-site interviews. The phone interview may be one-on-one or panel and could range from 30 minutes to 1 hour in length.

Before the Interview:

- Select a quiet spot for the interview that is free from distractions. Noises may also indicate to the employer that you are not taking the interview seriously.
- Have paper ready to take notes.
- Have your resume and any supporting documents in front of you.
- Have your calendar/planner handy – at the end of the phone interview the employer may want to schedule time for you to come for an in-person interview.
- Be sure you have a clear phone line with consistent service. Cell phones are not always the best option for a phone interview; you don't want to have a dropped call with an employer. If you don't have a land line, you can use a land line in the Office of Career Services. Simply contact Career Services to schedule the use of the phone.

During the Interview:

- Make sure your voice is enthusiastic since you will not be able to use body language to convey your enthusiasm for the position.
- Stand up or sit up straight when talking. The positioning of your body can impact your voice quality.
- Write down the name of the person(s) conducting the phone screen. You may need to address them later in the interview.
- At the end of the interview you will have the opportunity to ask your own questions about the position and organization. Be prepared.
- Ask about next steps in the interview process such as when you will be informed of the organization's decision to move forward with your candidacy, and when a second interview will take place.

After the Interview:

- **Send out thank you email(s) or letter(s)** to the person(s) who interviewed you.
- Feel free to **contact the organization if you have not received a response** in the agreed-upon timeframe. Also contact the interviewer if you have additional questions.

On-Site Interviews

The site visit or interview is the make or break point for job offers. If you are offered an interview at the employer's facility, you can consider yourself in a strong position. But don't think that an offer is a "sure thing." Rather, think of this phase of the interview process as the way for both you and the employer to get a more in-depth assessment of each other.

An employer is offering you the opportunity to convince all of the principal players that you are the right candidate. After a site interview you can make a more informed decision about the position, the people, the environment, long-term career opportunities, and the community.

Before the Interview:

- If you accept the offer for a site interview, you should ask the person coordinating the trip who will be responsible for making the arrangements for the trip and if you should **keep track of your expenses**. Most medium- and large-sized companies (as well as many smaller ones) will pay your expenses, but some will not.
- **Request a schedule and directions to the hotel and the organization before traveling.** Maintain a phone number for your contact person.
- You should plan to **bring several extra copies of your resume**; copies of paperwork (e.g., applications) that you may have forwarded to the employer; names and contact information of your references; an up-to-date transcript; the names and addresses of past employers; and a notebook and black or blue pen.
- Travel lightly to **avoid checking luggage**, if you can. When you arrive, make a trial run to the office location. At the hotel inquire about any messages or packages that may have been left for you. Note: You should verify prepayment, but be prepared for a credit card imprint.
- Many times you can **expect a full day of interviews** including a lunch meeting. During your site interview, you may meet potential co-workers, department managers, and potential supervisors, all the way up to the president of the company. The interviews may be one-on-one or panel and could range from 30 minutes to 2 hours in length. You may also participate in a tour.

On the Interview Day:

- Be sure to arrive approximately 10-15 minutes early for your scheduled interview. Arriving early will give you a chance to collect your thoughts. If you arrive earlier than 10-15 minutes go somewhere else and then return when it is 10-15 minutes before your interview time.
- Dress appropriately for the interview.
- Dressing appropriately means, in most cases, wearing a professional-looking suit with minimal accessories.
- A firm handshake is extremely important because it is one of the first items an employer will notice about you. Practice your handshake with your friends – make sure it is not too weak (portrays a lack in confidence) and not too strong (portrays aggressiveness and over-confidence) – it needs to be in the middle.
- The way in which you speak is extremely important. You want to portray confidence, a genuine interest in the position, passion for your prior experiences, communication skills, etc.
- Like a firm handshake, eye contact portrays confidence in what you are saying. It also shows that you have a genuine interest in what others are saying. Often when you break eye contact it is because you are formulating an answer to a question. If you have prepared appropriately you should be able to come up with your answer easily and you will naturally be able to maintain eye contact.
- If you attend a lunch or dinner meeting, remember to **remain professional**. Although the atmosphere may seem more relaxed, the employer is still evaluating you. Abide by the following: Do not order alcohol, Do not talk or chew with your mouth open, Do not swear.
- You should **be prepared to discuss salary**, understanding what the going rates are for people in your field and how certain geographic areas affect salaries. Remember: Your best bet is to let them bring up the discussion of salary.
- Often the final meeting of the day is with your contact person or employment manager. During this session they often offer answers to any final questions you may have, explain follow-up procedures, and discuss reimbursement of your expenses. **Make sure all of your questions are answered.**

- Most companies only offer site interviews to candidates they are seriously considering, so you may find yourself with an offer at the end of the day or very soon afterwards. **Do not feel compelled to accept an offer on-site.** You should take time to consider the offer in terms of your needs and in comparison to other offers you may have.

After the Interview:

- After your interview, you should **manage expenses according to the company's policies.**
- **Send out thank you email(s) or letter(s)** to the person(s) who will be making the hiring decisions.
- Feel free to **contact the organization if you have not received a response** in the agreed-upon timeframe. Also contact any of the interviewers for whom you have additional questions.
- If you decide that the job and the employer are right for you, don't feel shy about telling the employer that you are eager to join their team. But, never be afraid to decline an offer if it is not right for you. Remember that long-term career satisfaction is the goal of the whole process.

Part 3: Types of Interview Questions

Traditional Interview Questions

Traditionally employers have asked questions designed to help them gain a feel for who you are and what makes you unique: your motivation level, your background and strong points, your interest in the position, and the aspects of your personality that may affect how you perform on the job, such as organization, interpersonal skills, decision making, teamwork, etc. The questions asked might be seeking expansion of information presented on your resume, or focus on the qualities and skills that you can bring to the table.

Examples of Traditional Interview Questions:

- Tell me a little about yourself. (Provide information on your education and work/volunteer experiences.)
- Why are you interested in this particular job?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- How did you get interested in this field?
- What was your favorite class? Why?
- What was your least favorite class? Why?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Name three personal characteristics that best describe you.
- How do you keep yourself organized?
- Where would you like to be in five years? What are your career goals?
- What is your greatest accomplishment?
- Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team?
- What makes you different from the other candidates?
- Why should we hire you?

Behavioral Interview Questions

Based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to examine past behavior, behavioral interviewing is now common in interview situations. This involves a set of questions based upon necessary skills for the job. The technique involves asking a series of questions designed to get the candidate to talk about how he or she handled certain situations in the past. Interviewers feel that they can make more accurate hiring decisions by focusing on an applicant's past actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions of a candidate's self-proclaimed qualities.

Typically, the interviewer will have determined several behavioral characteristics that would be most important for on-the-job success and will base questions on the characteristics identified. You will be asked to share situations in which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors. You won't be able to theorize or generalize about events, rather, you will be asked to provide details. The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas identified by the interviewer, rather than on areas that you may feel are important.

How to prepare for behavioral interview questions:

- Think of recent situations that demonstrate some of the most commonly sought after behaviors, especially leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; remember **STAR**
 - **S**—Describe the Situation.
 - **T**—What Task(s) did you identify that had to be completed?
 - **A**—What Action did you take?
 - **R**—What was the Result of your actions?
- Be honest. Don't exaggerate or omit any part of the story.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

One of the supposed benefits of this technique for employers is that candidates cannot prepare for these questions in advance. However, you can help yourself by anticipating the types of questions you might receive and dredging your memory for examples of past behavior. You may be able to guess at some of the questions by analyzing the job requirements beforehand.

Examples of Behavior Based Interview Questions:

- Tell me about a difficult situation where you took initiative and went beyond your normal responsibilities.
- Tell me about a difficult situation that you faced in a previous job and how you solved it.
- Give me an example of a time when a classmate or co-worker criticized your work in front of others. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.

Case Study Interview Questions

Case studies are a good way for interviewers to gather information about how you would respond to certain situations. They are most often used in consulting and business interview. You will be asked to read or listen to a story or problem and respond using theories, formulas or ethical lessons you have learned.

Refer to Career Services' Vault for more information on preparing for Case Study interviews. Once in the Vault system, click on the link "Download Guides." Then, under the Interview/Resume Guides tab click on the "Vault Guide to the Case Interview."

Illegal Questions

Prospective employers are not allowed to ask personal questions before you are hired. These questions include your age, marital status, number of children, religious affiliation, and national origin. Additional questions might include weight and height, disabilities, and arrest record. These questions may be asked out of ignorance or to see how you answer difficult questions. There are several ways to handle these questions. You can answer the question, but be aware that you are giving information that may exclude you from being considered for the job. Second, you can refuse to answer the question. However, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative. A third, and better way, is to consider the intent of the question and answer that. For example if you were asked about a disability, you might assure the interviewer that you are able to perform the job duties required. If asked about your citizenship, you would state that you are authorized to work in the United States.

Questions You May Ask the Interviewer

After the interview, the interviewer will usually ask you if you have any questions. If the interviewer does not ask, you should ask the interviewer if s/he has the time to answer a few questions. Prepare at least 5 - 10 questions in case the interviewer answers some during the interview.

- Why is this position open?
- What would be my primary responsibilities?
- Who does this position report to?

- What qualifications would you expect the successful candidate to possess?
- What are the greatest challenges facing the person in this position?
- Describe a typical workday.
- Does the job require any travel?
- What are the chances of being relocated after starting the job?
- Are there opportunities for career growth with this position?
- How often are evaluations done?
- What is the next step in the hiring process and when will a decision be made?

Questions You Should NOT Ask the Interviewer

There are several topics you should avoid discussing on the first interview. These will be brought up at a later date if you are offered the position. These include: **salary, benefits, raises, vacations/days off, flex time, and family responsibilities.** If you bring them up in the first interview, the interviewer will think you are more interested in compensation than in the company. Timing is everything!

Part 4: Follow up

Thank You Letters

Thank you emails or letters should be written as soon as possible after the interview. Send one to everyone who interviewed you. (Collect business cards at the interview!) You should do this after a second interview also. They may be emailed, hand written or typed on good quality paper or simple blank cards. Email is the most common. In your letter, tell the interviewer you enjoyed meeting with her or him. Show your enthusiasm for the job and the company. Stress again one or more of the points covered in the interview. You can indicate that you will follow up with a telephone call or email at a later date.

Sample Letter – Thank You Email Example:

Dear Ms. Jennings:

Thank you for meeting with me last Friday to discuss the position of project manager with your company. The position sounds interesting and challenging. I believe my knowledge of financial operations will prove to be an asset to your marketing department. I also appreciated the tour of your company. It gave me valuable insight into the workings of your company and further increased my desire to become a part of your organization. Our discussion has strengthened my interest in this position, and I would welcome the opportunity to proceed to the next step. Again, thank you for the time and courtesy extended to me. I look forward to meeting with you again.

Sincerely,

Michelle Kennedy

Sample Letter – Typed & Snail-Mailed Thank You Letter Example:

March 12, 2010

Mr. Brian Andersen
 Helping And Healing
 246 Walker Road
 Cleveland, Ohio 44111

Dear Mr. Andersen:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the opening for a caseworker at Helping and Healing. I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about your organization and its services. My education, as well as my experience working as a caseworker assistant during my summer internship with the Lorain County Department of Social Services, will allow me to make a significant contribution to your organization over time. My enthusiasm and interest in this position have increased and strengthened after our interview. I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. Please contact me if you have any additional questions. Again, thank you for the interview and for your consideration.

Sincerely,
 (Signature)
 Thomas Ramirez

Part 5: Salary and Job Offer Negotiations

Negotiating an Offer

Salary

What are you worth? This is not an easy question to answer, but with a little research, you should have an idea of the salary range for the position you are considering. Never discuss salary until you have been offered the job.

There are several places to research salaries on the Internet. One place to start is at www.salary.com.

You should be aware that salaries vary from city to city. When negotiating a job offer, you will have to justify wanting a higher salary. Do this by pointing out your high GPA, your internship or other experience or specific skills you possess. Also consider negotiating for additional benefits if the employer is not very flexible on salary. If you are still unsure about negotiating, there are many books written on the subject that will give you more information.

It is also important to research the cost of living in the area the job is located. Housing costs especially vary from city to city. Most cities have newspapers online, look at the "apartments for rent" section and compare prices. Consider the part of the city in which you want to live. Is it close to where your new job will be located? Are utilities included? Will you have a car or will you have to use public transportation? Having a preliminary budget will help you consider your expenses.

Multiple Offers

Sometimes you must decide between multiple offers. It helps if you compare the offers side by side. Write down the elements of a job that are important to you. These might include: pay, benefits, location, commute time, potential for promotion, opportunity to travel, challenge, freedom, flexibility, use of abilities and helping others. Across the top, list the two or more job offers. You now have a grid. Fill in each part with a value from 1 to 5. The point value will depend on its importance to you. Add up the totals and use them to help you make your decision. The results might be surprising!

If you decide that the job and the employer are right for you, don't feel shy about telling the employer that you are eager to join their team. But, never be afraid to decline an offer if it is not right for you. Remember that long-term career satisfaction is the goal of the whole process.

Please contact the Office of Career Services if you have ANY questions about the interview process. Our highly trained career advisors are available to assist you!

Parts of this guide have been adapted from interview guides used at Pennsylvania State University, University Park and Dickinson College.