

ACING THE INTERVIEW

An interview is a conversation between a job seeker and an employer. For the employer, it is an opportunity to see if you, the job seeker, would be a good candidate for the job. For you, it is an opportunity to judge if the employer and the position would fit your career objective.



The interview is your chance to market your skills, knowledge and abilities to the employer. While the resume gets you the interview, it is the interview that will get you the job!

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Depending on the size of the organization and the kind of the position you are seeking, the interview process may have multiple steps.

The Screening Interview:

For most jobs today your first interview will be a “screening.” Employers today are overwhelmed with job candidates. Screening interviews are used to select a pool of candidates to go on to the next stage of the interview process.

Screening interviews may be conducted over the phone or in-person. Sometimes organizations have candidates respond to a series of questions via computer as a means of screening likely candidates.

Today, an increasing number of organizations are using telephone interviews as a method of screening. Most often you will be telephoned ahead of time to schedule the telephone interview. However, some phone interviews may come without warning, so you’ll want to be sure that your job search records are organized and you can get to them when a call comes in.

The telephone interview may be short and may seem more like a business conversation. However, don’t forget that the employer is using this information to decide whether or not to grant a personal interview. To increase your chances for success take care to prepare for the telephone interview as thoroughly as you would an in-person interview. (See other sections of this tip sheet)

Make sure that during the telephone interview, you are not engaging in other activities that could distract you from the interview. Take the call in a quiet room free from household noises.

- Be sure to smile when you are speaking – the interviewer will “hear” your confidence and enthusiasm.
- Sit up straight in a chair or stand during the telephone interview so that your voice projects.
- Remember, the interviewer is either taking notes by hand or keying information into a computer, so don’t be concerned about periods of silence.
- DO have your resume in front of you for reference, but don’t read off of it word for word. You should sound natural and confident. Also, be careful not to rustle paper.

The Second Interview:

The second interview can come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. It may consist of an interview with one person, such as the Human Resources or hiring manager, be part of a series of interviews, or take the form of a panel or team interview. Regardless of the specific type of interview, the following stages of preparation apply:

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Do a self-assessment.

Determine your short- and long-range career goals. Identify your skills, abilities, personal qualities, strengths, weaknesses, values and interests. Determine how they fit in with the position for which you are applying. Be able to cite concrete examples of how you have demonstrated all those qualities. Use your experiences in classes, internships, extracurricular activities, volunteer experiences and work experiences to build those examples. Focus on your accomplishments whenever possible. Be prepared to explain the rewards and satisfactions of your career field that caused you to choose it. Recruiters tend to shy away from candidates who have merely stumbled into their profession without much thought. Know your resume *cold* and be prepared to answer questions about any item on it.

Obtain pertinent information

Clarify location, place to park, length of interview(s), etc. If not provided, obtain the name and title(s) of the interviewer(s). It's also a good idea to get contact information in case an emergency arises on the day of the interview.

Research

Just like class, you need to do your homework before an interview. Employers expect you to demonstrate knowledge of the organization. It is a critical factor in their overall evaluation of applicants.

You should research the organization's history, mission, products and services, target markets, competitors, business strategies, culture, current events, press releases and industry trends. You can obtain this information through the Internet, libraries, Chambers of Commerce, directories, each individual organization's literature, and friends and family in business or the community (your "network").

Another tip – visit the website just before you go on the interview and before subsequent interviews. Be sure to check the "news" section for the latest information. You do not want to be caught off guard in an interview being unaware of breaking news.

In addition to preparing you for the interview, research provides an excellent opportunity to start a dialog with the employer to learn more about the company culture, etc. (See Questions to Ask During the Interview)

Common Interview Questions

You can reduce pre-interview jitters by identifying potential questions and how you might respond. Although it is almost impossible to anticipate every question that you will be asked in an interview, you should be prepared to respond to the typical questions that arise during most interviews. Consider how you would respond to frequently asked questions by writing down answers to each one. Even if these particular questions do not come up, planning will help you speak fluently about yourself and your achievements.

For a list of common interview questions see link

Behavioral Interview Questions

Many organizations now include questions about your behavior and experience when they conduct interviews. They ask these types of questions because it is believed that past behavior predicts future success.

How can you tell if the interview is behavioral? Listen for key phrases such as "Give me an example of a time when..." or "Tell me about a situation in which you..." To respond successfully you will need to give specific examples of when you have demonstrated the desired behaviors. In designing behavior interview questions, the company typically determines the skills required for the position, such as: problem solving, flexibility, teamwork, leadership, interpersonal skills, etc.

The organization determines the skills by doing a detailed analysis of the position they are seeking to fill. As a candidate you need to go through this same process. What are the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies to do this job? You can find this information in the job ad or position description. You can also find information from the corporate website, annual report, or through networking.

For a list of behavior based interview questions see link

Practice! Practice! Practice!

All job-seekers can benefit from practicing interview skills. A Mock Interview is one of the very best ways to prepare for an actual employment interview. The Mock Interview will help you to learn what is expected in a real interview, and how you can improve the way you present yourself. In addition to rehearsing your responses to real interview questions, practice your facial expression, eye contact, handshake and body language.

Schedule a video recorded mock interview with Employment and Career Services or ask friends or family members to role play potential interview questions. As you practice, pay close attention to your facial expression, eye contact, handshake and

body language. Allow ample time for your research and rehearsal before the interview. You want to avoid cramming the night before. Take time to wind down and get a good night's sleep.

THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Dress for Success



Take time to look your best. That first impression is so critical. Your grooming and clothing are important to putting your best foot forward during the interview.

In today's business casual environment, choosing the appropriate interview attire can be stressful. Before you decide what to wear for your job interview, consider the following: the dress code of the company, the job duties required of the job you are applying for, the way the rest of the employees dress during a normal work day, and the current season and temperature outside.

To get a better sense of what is appropriate, drive by the organization at the start or end of the business day, or during lunch time. If you are a student or recent graduate you can also ask the interviewer for suggestions. **A word of caution - even in casual environments, most interviewers consider it a sign of respect if the interviewee dresses up.** Always remember that the clothing you wear should identify you as someone the employer would want as a representative of their company or organization.

A few other helpful hints:

- Be sure that clothing is cleaned and pressed and shoes are polished.
- Nails should be clean, short and well-groomed.
- Don't be a trend-driven fashion victim
- Keep hair out of your eyes
- Women should avoid wearing excessive jewelry, make-up, or loud nail polish.
- Men should remove all visible piercings. Women should remove all visible piercings except for one set of earrings. Tattoos should be covered. *Remember, less is more.*
- Women should avoid clothing that too short, low cut, or see through.

Other Tips

It is the little things that make a difference. Take extra care to cover all of the details to ensure a successful interview.

- Be sure you have the exact location of your interview. Consider doing a practice drive. Allow for extra time for traffic, construction delays, and finding a parking space.
- Drive in a safe and courteous manner as you approach the location of the interview. You do not want to cut off the interviewer as you pull into the parking lot!
- Arrive 10 to 15 minutes before the interview.
- Go alone. Do not bring friends or family with you to an interview.
- Do not smoke or drink an alcoholic beverage before the interview. Do not chew gum.
- Bring along breath mints and tissues.
- Remember, the interview starts once you step foot on the property. Be pleasant and professional with everyone you meet.
- Bring a list of references.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not make calls from the reception area or lobby!
- Bring copies of your resume; have your own copy available with your notes.
- Bring a pen and notepad – it is perfectly acceptable to jot down notes during your interview. It will help for questions you might have and for sending a thank you letter. It also tells the interviewer that you are serious about the position.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Be aware of your non-verbal communication.** Always start with a smile and a firm handshake. Stand and greet the interviewer by name, using Mr. or Ms. until invited to use a first name. Those simple gestures convey your level of self-confidence and are indicators of how strong your interpersonal skills may be. Relax, maintain good eye contact, and keep your posture controlled. Deliver your answers with a sense of energy and enthusiasm.

- **Speak in a clear, articulate, specific manner.** Take your time and think about your answers before communicating them. Be able to briefly describe how you fit in with the position and the organization’s climate. Give specific examples that demonstrate how your strengths fit the characteristics that are required of the position.
- **Remain positive.** Show motivation and enthusiasm by explaining why you want the position. Avoid speaking negatively about a past work experience.

QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

Near the end of the interview expect to be asked if you have any questions. As a candidate it is important that you are always prepared with questions to ask. It’s best to have about 10 questions prepared since some of your questions may be answered during the course of the interview. Do not ask questions that are clearly answered on the employer's web site and/or in any literature provided by the employer to you in advance. This could be interpreted that you did not prepare for the interview.

Never ask about salary and benefits issues until those subjects are raised by the employer. The employer will divulge these eventually, although maybe not until after an offer is made. Asking about salary conveys that you are more interested in the money than you are in the opportunity.

For a list of Questions to Ask the Interviewer see link

Convey Your Interest

At the end of the interview, restate your interest in the organization and the position. If the interviewer has not already shared the process, ask about the next steps in the selection process. Ask for a business card so you can send the interviewer(s) a thank you letter.

“THANK YOU” IS IMPORTANT



Effective job hunting demands that you send you a thank you letter 24 to 48 hours following your interview. Sending a “thank you” to the interviewer is viewed as evidence to your attention to detail and that you are interested in the job.

Each thank you letter should be unique to the interview. Before you write the letter take a few minutes to replay the interview for yourself, mentally. Mention the skills and qualities that you bring to the organization that make you the ideal candidate for the position. This is also an opportunity to clarify anything you feel might have been misunderstood or to add something you may have forgotten. End your letter by restating your interest in the position.

For a sample Thank You letter see link

Because of the amount of content, you can see a handwritten note is not an option. Also, if there is any length to your message it may be difficult to read your handwriting.

There is debate on whether to mail a business letter or to send email correspondence. Email gets there instantaneously of course and will be in the hands of the interviewer even if he or she is jetting off to a conference or meeting.

Note: Many organizations now prefer e-mail correspondence. You might get a sense about this during the interview. Another option is to follow up your email with a hard copy of the same via standard U.S. Mail. In this case, make sure that your thank you letter uses the same heading as your resume and initial cover letter, as this maintains consistency. Also, remember to take the time to ensure that your thank you letter is absolutely error free and grammatically correct.

INTERVIEW POST ANALYSIS

Following your interview it is important to take a step back to reflect on your need for further practice or training. In your post-analysis ask yourself: What went well? What would you do differently in a future interview?