

Interviewing Essentials

The most crucial part of the job search process is the formal interview. The secret of good interviewing is preparation and skilled communication. You do not get a second chance to make a first impression in an interview. From the moment you greet the interviewer until your departure, the impressions you create are irreversible. Making a formal, personal presentation of your knowledge, skills, and abilities requires research and practice. Prepare as you would for a class presentation or public speech.

A skilled interviewer evaluates your subjective qualities that may not be apparent in the resume. These include how you behave, what motivates you, personality, strengths and weaknesses, leadership potential, ambition, communication skills, knowledge of business etiquette, professionalism, and your career plans. The interview tests your preparation and ability to communicate these variables.

Savvy candidates realize that achieving peak performance in interviews requires planning and practice. Well-prepared applicants exhibit higher confidence levels and are more spontaneous in their responses than the poorly prepared. Good preparation demonstrates an interest and enthusiasm for the present opportunity.

Image management is as much a factor in interviews as any other variable. Candidates who exhibit professionalism send a positive signal to employers. Those who fail to project a polished, professional appearance negate all other favorable aspects of their candidacy.

Detailed recommendations for appropriate attire for individuals in the job search are available in this guide. Consult Career Services staff members if you have specific questions or concerns regarding how you will master the “look of success” in your approach to employers.

Researching Organizations

The more information you have about a prospective employer, the better your impression in the interview. Knowledge of the organization’s services, products, trends, and employment requirements is vital to interviewing preparation.

General Knowledge

- Name of organization
- Age of organization
- Services or products
- Growth history and future expansion projections
- Current size within industry
- Major competitors
- Location and number of offices, stores, plants, satellites
- Parent organization and subsidiaries
- Job Position description
- Geographical location of the position

- Recent related news items and trends
- Salary range

Candidates should **not** initiate questions about salary unless the employer first introduces this topic. This will usually occur in the second interview that is often a site visit. Obtain salary information for new graduates entering most career fields in the *National Association of Colleges and Employers Salary Survey* available in Career Services.

Interview Content

The structure of a job interview may vary, but most interviews consist of several stages:

- Rapport Building
- Background Analysis of the Candidate
- Matching the Candidate to the Position
- Closing

Rapport Building

In this initial stage, the interviewer and candidate usually engage in small talk to adjust to each other and to establish rapport. Topics might include the weather, current events, or the setting.

Remember you are being evaluated from the moment the recruiter sees or hears you. Although this first stage is often informal, do not underestimate its importance. It is human nature for people to form a first impression. If the first impression is negative, it will be very difficult to change the recruiter's mind in 30 minutes.

During this stage the recruiter may discuss the organization, career opportunities and, possibly, benefits. Ask appropriate questions to assess how well the organization suits your career needs.

Background Analysis of the Candidate

After establishing rapport, the recruiter normally directs the conversation to questions about your background, often using the resume as a reference. The purpose is to gain more information about your skills and qualifications, work experience, and interests or activities. Also, the interviewer will continue to assess your attitude, self-confidence, ability to communicate, and how you handle yourself. Assist the recruiter in obtaining the information needed by offering responses readily. Keep your answers brief and to the point, but avoid "yes" and "no" answers. If the recruiter seems to want more information at certain intervals, elaborate briefly.

Matching the Candidate to the Position

At some point in the interview the recruiter will begin to assess the match between your qualifications and the job. Employers evaluate your fit to the organization or team through the knowledge, skills, and abilities you exhibit.

Many interviewers use structured questions to provide consistency and fairness in their encounters with candidates. Lists of commonly asked interview questions are available in libraries and bookstores as well as in this packet.

Candidates should rehearse to be sure to convey the best possible responses. Career Services offers opportunities throughout the year for candidates to participate in mock interviews. Selections of videotapes produced by top recruiters designed to improve interviewing skills are available for viewing at the Career Center. Role-playing with a friend or advisor prior to the actual interview is also recommended.

Closing

Candidates have an opportunity to ask questions or comment near the end of the interview. Prepare relevant, insightful questions and comments in advance to improve your standing as a candidate.

End the interview on a positive note and inquire about the next step in the hiring process. Who will contact you? Are you to contact the employer? When? Generally, the greater the interviewer's interest in you, the more he or she will explain the next step. The recruiter may indicate the interview's conclusion through verbal or non-verbal reactions. Be aware of closing cues to prepare to end the conversation.

It is important to maintain peak performance during the last moments of an interview. Summarize key points and the procedures to follow. This will give the recruiter an opportunity to verify or correct your assessment of the interview.

On-site Interviews

Employers contact candidates for on-site interviews following a pre-screening on-campus interview, a resume referral by Career Services, or direct contact by the candidate.

Arrangements

Identify clearly with whom you will interview, and where and when you are to report.

Clarify tactfully who is to pay expenses if the location is distant. Large organizations may offer reimbursement of travel expenses. If this is the case, ask whether to expect pre-paid arrangements or reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenditures.

Often the organization will designate the arrangements. If you make your own travel plans, use sound judgment in selecting accommodations, menu items, or car rentals. Choose reasonably priced menu items rather than the most expensive. Select down-sized economy cars over luxury models. Reserve a moderately priced hotel. Your

frugal consideration of the organization's budget will send a positive signal of your use of resources on the job.

Travel Expenses

If the employer agrees to pay travel expenses, partially or totally, candidates must keep careful records - receipts - of expenditures.

Items commonly reimbursed include:

- Airline tickets (coach)
- Airport limousine or shuttle
- Taxi or bus from hotel to interview site
- Baggage service tip at airport or hotel
- Lodging (the night before the interview)
- Meals
- Automobile mileage if you drive rather than fly
- Parking at the hotel

Items **not** included in business expenses:

Entertainment, tours, cigarettes, magazines, newspapers, personal telephone calls, flight insurance, snacks and refreshments, and excessive tips.

In some instances, organizations may forward pre-paid airline tickets to you. In other cases, candidates must have funds available to pay all expenses until reimbursed. This may take as long as four weeks.

Interview Follow-Up

Always write a letter of appreciation immediately following an interview. Do not delay in responding with this important step as it might have some bearing on the hiring decision. Develop and mail the letter within 24 hours of the interview or site visit.

Content of Follow Up Letters

Letters should contain information that further convinces the employer of your suitability for the job. The purpose of follow-up letters is

- To remind the employer of the interview and the significant qualifications you possess
- To emphasize a well received, specific point during the interview
- To supply important information omitted in the interview

Interview Questions

(Be prepared to answer)

1. What are your long-range career goals, when and why did you establish these goals, and how are you preparing to achieve them?
2. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
3. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
4. How would you describe yourself?
5. How would a colleague describe you?
6. How has your college experience prepared you for a career?
7. Why should I hire you?
8. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful?
9. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
10. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates.
11. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
12. What led you to choose your major field of study?
13. What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
14. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
15. Describe your part-time or summer jobs and explain what you learned from them.
16. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
17. What do you know about our organization?
18. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
19. What criteria are you using to evaluate prospective employers?
20. Do you have a geographical preference? and Why?
21. Will you relocate?
22. Describe a major problem you encountered and how you dealt with it.

Questions you may want to ask

1. Identify typical career paths based on past records.
2. Please explain the evaluation and promotion process.
3. What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
4. Describe the typical first year assignments.
5. Tell me about your initial and future training programs.
6. What are the challenging facets of the job?
7. What are the organization's plans for the future?
8. What industry trends will occur in the company?
9. What makes your firm different from its competitors?
10. What are the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
11. How would you describe your organization's personality and management style?
12. What are your expectations for new hires?
13. Describe the position in the overall structure of the department.
14. What characteristics does a successful person have at your organization?

Illegal Questions

Inquiry Area	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
National Origin/Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you a U.S. Citizen? • Where were you/your parents born? • What is your "native Tongue"? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you authorized to work in the United States? • What language do you read/speak/write fluently? (This question is okay only if this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.)
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How old are you? • When did you graduate? • What's your birth date? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you over the age of 18?
Marital/Family Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's your marital status? • With whom do you live? • Do you plan to have a family? When? • What are your child-care arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you be willing to relocate if necessary • Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? (This question is okay if it is asked of all applicants for the job) • Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? (This question is okay if it is asked of all applicants for the job)
Affiliations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What clubs or social organizations do you belong to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List any professional or trade groups of other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job?
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How tall are you? How much do you weigh? (Questions about height and weight are not acceptable <i>unless</i> minimum standards are essential for the safe performance of the job) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as this is part of the job?
Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any disabilities • Please complete the following medical history. • Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list them and give dates when these occurred. • What was the date of your last physical exam? • How is your family health? • When did you lose your eyesight? • Do you need accommodations to perform the job? (This questions can only be asked after a job offer has been made.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? (This question is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.) • Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions? • As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on exam results.)
Arrest Record	Have you never been arrested?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you even been convicted of _____? (The crime named should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)
Military	If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what branch of the armed forces did you serve? • What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

Interview Tips

Before the Interview

- **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.

Hint: Dwell on strengths. Downplay weaknesses. You might cite your weakness as perfectionism, and have it perceived as a strength.

- **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.

- **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, correct pronunciation, and his or her title.

During the Interview

- **Sell Yourself**

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

- **Be Positive**

You will create a better impression by being honest and candid. If the recruiter asks about shortcomings, explain circumstances rather than giving excuses or blaming.

- **Non-verbal Communication**

Sitting up straight will make you appear poised and confident throughout the interview. What you wear communicates a message. Think conservative. Nervous hands and feet are distracting.

- **Ask Meaningful Questions**

What are the responsibilities of the job? Is training provided? Is advancement possible? Does the job involve travel? What individuals will I work with most? How is job performance measured?

After the Interview

- **Follow - Up**

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

Seven Evaluation Categories

1. Assertiveness and Enthusiasm

- your energy level and commitment to the task at hand
- ability to convey a sense of excitement and willingness to go an extra mile
- willingness to apply skills and talents in an assertive, hard driving way
- enthusiasm for the organization and products and services is unbridled

2. Communication Skills

- teams, customers, clients
- crucial to the successful job seeker
- presentations, teaching, training – the more you do it the better you get
- strongly encourage you to practice your responses

3. Record of Success

- effectively conveying yourself as a person with an impressive track record
- your record of success is your most important credential for gaining
- past performance best predictor of future performance

4. Rational Thought Process

- clear, organized presentation of details
- in an interview – score well in this category
- translates to a higher level of productivity and fewer mistakes on the job

5. Maturity

- ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty
- anyone with major responsibility faces at work
- "see the whole picture and makes sound judgments"

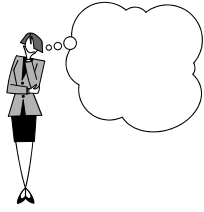
6. Planning and Organization

- tolerate change and flow – need ability to plan and organize
- plan – review past and current experience to create plans for future
- organize – sense of order, sequence, ability to see whole picture

7. Reaction to Pressure

- respond effectively to pressure
- do you react positively - become motivated
- or negatively – become paralyzed or choke.

Analyze your Interviewing Skills



Communication Skills

Can you express your thoughts clearly when speaking and writing?

Examples:

Flexibility

How do you handle change? Are you receptive to new ideas and situations?

Examples:

Leadership

Can you guide and motivate others to accomplish a recognized objective?

Examples:

Intelligence

How well do you retain new information, and how often do you look at different methods of solving problems?

Examples:

Initiative

Do you have the ability to identify purposeful work and take action?

Examples:

Credibility

Are you competent, reliable, trustworthy?

Examples:

Ability to Handle Conflict

What evidence do you have that demonstrates your ability to handle stressful situations and antagonism?

Examples:

Self-confidence

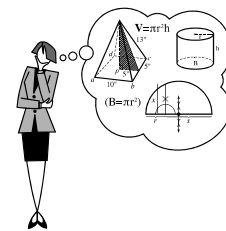
Provide examples of maturity and direction that enable you to deal positively and effectively with situations and people.

Examples:

Accepting Responsibility

Examine your background and identify whether you take the initiative or wait for others to tell you what to do.

Examples:



Creativity

Are you innovative in developing new ideas and approaches to problem solving, or in finding different ways to reach goals?

Examples:

Interview Preparation Worksheet #1

Self-Awareness

Transferable Skills

1. List transferable or functional skills you offer such as organizational, communication, and analyzing skills. Functional or transferable skills are acquired through experience and apply to performing activities. These commonly involve people, data and things.

Job Skills

2. Name specific job skills you offer. Specific job and technical skills are bodies of knowledge learned through work, school, hobbies, and extracurricular involvement. Examples include: accounting, technical writing, acting, photography, computer programming, and drafting skills.

Adaptive Skills

3. Have in mind adaptive skills you possess. Adaptive or personal skills or traits help people adjust to the environment or situation. Examples include: personality traits, creativity, dependability, energy, and enthusiasm.

Weaknesses

4. List weaknesses, which could be perceived as strengths and viewed as advantages by the employer. Examples include: perfectionism, anticipating other's needs, requiring verification, or a tendency to arrive early.

Relevant Experiences

5. List your relevant work experience. How do your work experiences apply to this position? Do not forget to include volunteer work, special training, special study, or class projects.

Learned Capabilities

6. Prepare to mention any special interests or activities that indicate your capability to perform this job. Include overall career goals, as well as professional associations and club memberships.

Interview Preparation

Worksheet #2

Company and Position

Knowing the employer and understanding clearly the duties of the position is critical in communicating your desire to work for the organization. You should research the employer's written literature, web sites, videos, and CD-ROMs available in the USA Career Library.

Know the Organization

1. List points about the organization that you want to mention in your interview.

Know the Job

2. Keep in mind points that you may want to mention about the specific job.

Project Enthusiasm

3. Project your enthusiasm and your desire to join the organization. List reasons why you want to work for this organization. Enthusiasm is contagious. Employers respond.

4. Know what you want to do in the future. Prepare some realistic long-term career goals; know how employment opportunities relate to those goals.

Prepare Questions

5. Remember, an interview is a two-way process. You are interviewing the employer as you are being interviewed. Spend time thinking about what additional information you need about the organization and the position. Formulate written questions to take to the interview. Listen carefully as the interviewer answers your inquiries. Avoid asking irrelevant questions.

Interject questions at appropriate places during the interview. The interviewer may signal the interview is nearing an end by asking, "Do you have any questions?" Have some concluding questions not addressed during the interview. Use this opportunity to give a brief summary about how you would fit the job. Stress your potential value to the organization, and express your interest in working for them. Never leave the interview without knowing when the next contact will occur. If the interviewer does not tell you, ask, "When may I expect to hear from you?"

Know Your Goals

Do

- Research the organization before the interview through web sites, written literature and videos
- Examine the employer's reputation
- Think of your potential service to the employer
- Be prompt, neat, and courteous
- Follow procedures
- Act naturally
- Ask relevant questions
- Listen to the other person
- Allow the employer time to speak
- Evaluate objectively
- Make yourself understood
- Present informative credentials
- Carry out promises



Women

Dressing for the Interview

- Suit or tailored dress in navy or dark gray; no extreme slits
- Polished, closed-toe shoes, basic pumps with medium or low heels, no scuffs
- Nails subtle, clean and medium to short
- Makeup should be minimal
- Avoid lace and low-cut blouses
- Choose between a briefcase or handbag
- Simple and basic jewelry, one ring
- Always wear hosiery and match to shoes and skirt for continuity
- No perfume
- High-quality pen

Do Not

- Arrive late for an interview
- Come unprepared or frazzled
- Freeze or become tense
- Present an extreme appearance
- Wear heavy fragrance
- Become impatient
- Become emotional
- Talk too much or too little
- Oversell yourself
- Extend the interview unnecessarily
- Make elaborate promises
- Try to be funny
- Unduly emphasize starting salary
- Forget to thank employer for their time



Men

Dressing for the Interview

- Navy, dark gray, or pinstripe suit
- Polished shoes with leather soles, no scuffed heels
- Black or navy knee-high socks
- Clean nails
- Fresh haircut
- Conservative tie
- Solid white shirt
- Avoid flashy cuff links, rings or neck chains, no earrings
- One ring
- No cologne
- Briefcase or portfolio and high-quality pen

Sample Follow-Up Letter

Your Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Individual's Name, Title

Organization or Company Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear _____:

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you at the (location of interview). The information you shared about (company name) was valuable, and the possibility of applying my education and experience to the position greatly interests me.

If I can provide any additional information to enhance my candidacy, please let me know.
I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Hand Written Signature
Your typed name

Sample Decline Letter

Your Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Individual's Name, Title
Organization or Company Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear _____:

I genuinely appreciate your offer of employment with (company name). The opportunity sounds very appealing, however, I have decided to accept a position elsewhere.

Thank you for your time and attention. I wish you success in finding a suitable individual to take advantage of all your organization has to offer.

Sincerely,
Hand Written Signature
Your typed name

Sample Acceptance Letter

Your Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Individual's Name, Title

Organization or Company Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear _____:

Thank you for your (date) offer of employment with (company name). I am pleased to accept the position of (position title) and will begin work on (date).

I appreciate your confidence in my abilities and look forward to the challenges ahead and to making a contribution to your company.

Sincerely,
Hand Written Signature
Your typed name

Sample Withdrawal Letter

Your Address
City, State, Zip
Date

Individual's Name, Title
Organization or Company Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear _____:

This is to notify you of my withdrawal as an applicant for the position of (title). This decision was made after considering other career paths that will better match my background and skills.

Thank you for the opportunity to learn more about your company. I wish you success in finding a candidate that meets your staffing needs.

Sincerely,
Hand Written Signature
Your typed name