



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
CAREER SERVICES



THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Development Guide



EXPLORE | EXPERIENCE | ENGAGE

CAREER SERVICES

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Engage: Job Search Tools and Strategies

Professional Business Attire

How you choose to dress for a professional job interview can have a substantial impact on the employer's impression of you. Often, employers form a lasting opinion of candidates within the first 30 seconds of a meeting. Therefore, how you present yourself is at least as important as how you answer interview questions.

The first consideration in developing your professional image is creating an appropriate wardrobe. Following are guidelines for professional dress.



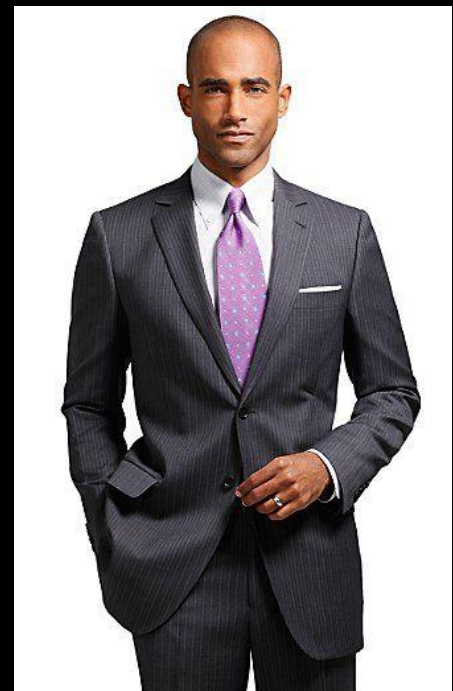
Women

- Suit in black, dark gray or navy
- Skirts must be knee-length with no extreme slits
- White, off-white or pastel blouse
- Avoid low-cut, sheer, shiny or lacy blouse
- Wear polished, closed-toe shoes (such as basic pumps) to match suit color with medium or low heels
- Nails subtle, clean and medium to short length
- Makeup and hair should be simple; do not wear perfume
- Simple and basic jewelry; do not wear more than one ring
- Always wear hosiery; match to shoes and skirt for continuity
- Choose between a briefcase or handbag
- High-quality pen



Men

- Suit in navy, dark gray or pinstripe
- White, long sleeve cotton dress shirt with white undershirt
- Conservative tie that coordinates with suit
- Wear polished shoes with leather soles (no scuffed heels) in black, brown or burgundy
- Wear knee-high socks in black or navy
- Nails clean and short
- Fresh haircut
- No cologne
- Avoid flashy jewelry, such as cuff links, chains or earrings; do not wear more than one ring
- Briefcase or portfolio and high-quality pen



Engage: Interview Skills and Techniques

Interviewing and the Job Offer Process

The employer's primary goal in the interview is to become acquainted with the candidates and to determine if you are the best fit for the position.

You should also determine if this job is the best fit for you. Consider the job description, corporate philosophy and the company environment.

During the interview, you will be assessed on professional behavior, skills, abilities, work experience and education.

Preparing for Interviews

To succeed in job interviews, preparation is key. During each aspect of the interview, you must present your absolute best. The process begins with a re-evaluation of your strengths and skills, particularly in relation to specific career fields.

During the interview, you must articulate to employers your unique skills set. Consider how to demonstrate that your skills meet their needs.

Because practice is critical, we recommend meeting with Career Services to discuss the interview process and conduct a mock interview.

Coordinate your interview wardrobe early. Employers require professional dress at the interview, regardless of the company's general office attire. See p. 12 for details on professional dress.

Before the Interview

Prior to each job interview, research the company's goals and objectives. Information can be gathered online, but also consult with Career Services and others in your professional network who may be familiar with the company.

Review the job description and application materials. Focus on how your resume supports your application for the position.

Prior to your interview, confirm the date, time and location. Verify the address and ensure that you have accurate directions. Visit the site beforehand to determine how long it will take you to arrive.

On the day of the interview, be sure to add extra time for traffic and delays. Arrive 10-15 minutes early. DO NOT be late!

During the Interview

Employers often begin assessing you when you enter the building. Treat everyone you meet with respect and courtesy.

Practice professional etiquette:

- Be enthusiastic, confident, courteous and honest
- Shake hands, maintain eye contact and smile
- Stand until invited to sit; follow the interviewers' lead
- Address interviewers by name and title (only use first names if invited by the interviewer)
- Avoid negative body language and signs of nervousness
- Show interest in the company and knowledge of the position
- Remember that the employers' intent is not to interrogate you, but rather to get to know you. Respond as if you are engaged in a conversation

Types of Interviews

- **Individual:** This one-on-one meeting is the most traditional type of interview. For example, you might begin the interview process by meeting with a human resource representative
- **Panel:** You will meet with multiple interviewers. Address your answers to each member of the panel and make eye contact with everyone
- **Telephone:** Phone interviews can be used as a screening tool to narrow the applicant pool. Call from a quiet location with no distractions. Have a copy of your resume, the job description and your company research. Treat the phone interview with the same professionalism as you would a face-to-face meeting
- **Case/Testing:** The purpose of this interview is to demonstrate your thought processes by responding to complex problems and reaching conclusions in a short period of time. Evaluation is focused on your approach to situations rather than specific answers. You may complete personality assessments or be asked to demonstrate knowledge of a particular subject
- **Behavioral:** Employers utilize this type of interview to evaluate how you reacted to specific scenarios in the past to determine how you might perform in the future. For example, interviewers may say, 'Give an example of a time you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem.' Using specific details, discuss an instance in which you used these skills. By using this approach, interviewers gain insight into your work ethic and may be able to predict how you will approach poten-

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Interviewing and the Job Offer Process

Sample Interview Questions

During the interview, listen carefully to each question. If you do not understand, you can rephrase the question or ask them to repeat. Be honest and positive in your responses. Never criticize professors or previous employers.

Sample questions

- Tell me about yourself
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you know about this company?
- Tell me about a specific time you had to reach a decision in a short period of time
- Give me a specific example of a time you tried something and it failed
- Describe a situation in which you handled a conflict/difficult situation

- Why should we hire you?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What qualifications/skills do you have for this job?
- What are your goals?
- What did you like least/most about previous positions?
- Do you have any questions?

Sample questions to ask

Prior to the interview, always prepare a list of questions to ask, such as information about the job and department.

- Can you describe a typical day in this position?
- What training opportunities are available?
- What is the career track for this position?
- What do you consider to be the most important qualities for this position?
- When will you be making your decision?

Hiring Guidelines/Legality

Federal guidelines strictly prohibit employers from asking questions that might violate candidates' rights. The Equal Employment Opportunity laws strictly forbid employers from discriminating against any applicant due to color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, national origin, disability or genetic information.

Applicants are not obligated to answer any questions that violate fair hiring practices.

For additional information about the legality of specific interview questions, please contact Career Services or visit the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's website at www.eeoc.gov/.



After the Interview

Send a thank you letter via US mail to each interviewer within 24 hours of the meeting.

Your goal with the thank you letter is to demonstrate that you are professional and pay attention to details. The time it takes to craft and mail a thoughtful letter will pay off. See p. 22 for a sample thank you letter.

Follow up with the company within a week after the interview to see if they have made a hiring decision.

Periodically check in with the employer, no more than once per week, until a decision is made.



Remind employers that you are interested, but do not become a nuisance. Send any requested information as soon as possible.

After each interview, be sure to take time to objectively reflect on your performance. Think about what you did well and what you may need to improve prior to your next interview. In your assessment, consider the responses provided, your nonverbal cues, and the professional behaviors you exhibited to employers.

Engage: Interview Skills and Techniques

Interviewing and the Job Offer Process

The Job Offer

Employers typically make job offers via postal mail. If a verbal offer is made, request it in writing so that you can review the offer. Once an official offer is extended, determine if you will enter into salary negotiation (p. 23).

Once a final offer is made, ask the employer for time to consider the opportunity even if you feel certain you want to accept. This gives you appropriate time to carefully evaluate the pros and cons of the position.

Prior to making a final decision, obtain all information about the job, such as :

- Salary and benefits
- Work schedule
- Required dress code
- Travel expectations
- Anticipated start date



When you accept an offer of employment, notify the employer verbally and via letter (p. 24). The employer will coordinate details with you, including start date, any required screening tests, etc.

If you have a job at the time you accept an offer, notify your current employer immediately. Inform them verbally, but also submit a letter of resignation, offering to work out a two-week notice if requested.

If you choose to decline an offer, notify the company verbally and via a formal letter of declination. See p. 24 for a sample letter.

The Thank You Letter

Lucy Johnson
147 Mockingbird Lane
Mobile, AL 35547

Date

Kathryn Thomas, CEO
ABC Corporation
487 Riverbend Road
Mobile, AL 36659

Dear Ms. Thomas:

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you regarding the position of Account Manager with ABC Corporation. I am excited about the opportunity and believe that I would be an excellent choice for your company.

As I mentioned during our meeting, I have more than six years experience in account management and have had the opportunity to lead a team of twenty-seven individuals. These skills will be particularly useful in developing the Account Manager position.

Again, thank you for taking the time to meet with me. If you need additional information, please contact me at (251) 555-5555 or lucy.johnson@gmail.com. I will contact you in one week to follow up regarding the position.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE

Lucy Johnson

Send an individualized thank you letter to each interviewer. Follow these guidelines:

- Follow standard business correspondence formatting
- Mail within 24 hours of the interview
- Send a typed letter on standard size paper

Letters are typically comprised of three to four paragraphs:

First paragraph

Thank the interviewer for meeting with you and reiterate your interest in the position.

Middle paragraph/s

Based on topics discussed in the meeting, restate why you are the best candidate.

Closing paragraph

Provide contact information and give a specific date that you will follow up regarding their decision.

Engage: Interview Skills and Techniques

Salary Negotiation

Many new graduates do not have enough professional work experience to warrant extensive salary negotiation. In fact, many entry-level salaries are often non-negotiable.

However, experiences such as prior employment, leadership opportunities, and Co-op/ Internship assignments may impact your potential worth.

As you gain work experience, salary negotiation will become increasingly more important. Understanding this process is invaluable to your career goals.

Salary negotiation can be difficult, so prepare yourself prior to job interviews. Practice negotiation strategies to ensure that you are professional, friendly and knowledgeable.

- Communicate your value to employers

Accept an offer

After discussing salary, know when you should end negotiation and make a decision. Be realistic when a final offer is made: do not prolong negotiations.

When you receive a final offer, request a written offer with details agreed upon in discussion.

Take up to two business days to evaluate. This allows you to review and finalize your decision to accept or decline the offer.

Notify the employer with your decision via phone. Follow up with a formal letter indicating your acceptance, starting date and any negotiated items.

Tips and Strategies

- Effectively communicate your value to employers
- Evaluate what is most important to you. No employer can meet all requests, so decide which areas require negotiation and what areas you can accept
- Stay positive throughout the entire negotiation process. Employers are constantly evaluating your attitude and worth to their organization

The Salary Negotiation Process

Know your value

- Meet with Career Services to evaluate how your skills and abilities (education, work history, leadership skills, etc) match specific jobs in your field
- Conduct salary research in your specific field of interest. You can find detailed salary information, as well as a salary calculator, at www.jobsweb.com. Additional information, such as salary/benefits wizards, job search advice and a cost-of-living calculator, is available at www.salary.com

When assessing salary ranges in your field, consider the impact of economic factors. Employment trends, the company's size, and geographic location can influence a company's initial salary offers.

Also, there is more to an offer than just salary. Additional benefits may include: bonuses; insurance; retirement; personal leave; tuition reimbursement and stock options.

Negotiate Salary

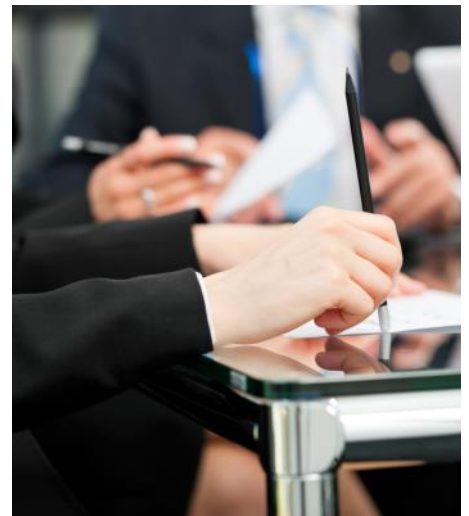
Salary negotiation begins only after a job offer has been made. Do not inquire about salary/benefits before an official offer is extended. Your focus during the interview process is to make the best impression to the employer.

When salary is approached by the employer, clarify that you are open to negotiation and that a mutual salary agreement can be reached. If an employer asks you to provide a salary range during the interview, we recommend stating 'open' or 'negotiable.'

Providing salary options higher than the range for your field could screen you out of consideration. If your requested salary is too low, the offer will not reflect your actual value. Understand salary ranges for your field and position so that you can negotiate fairly and accurately.

When an employer asks your salary requirements, consider the following replies:

- What do you typically offer to someone with my education and/or experience level?
- Recent graduates in my field have reported salaries of \$___K. Is this consistent with your range?
- I am a graduate of USA with Co-op experience. Based on my research, I request a salary between \$38 and \$42k. Does this salary fall within your range?
- Be honest about your salary history and expectations
- Remain objective, positive and professional



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The Acceptance Letter

Marcus Reynolds
492 Cedar Lane
Mobile, AL 36627

Date

Barbara Wright, Human Resource Manager
Clements Media Group
789 Corporate Boulevard
Mobile, AL 36627

Dear Ms. Wright:

Thank you for your offer of employment with Clements Media Group. I am pleased to accept the position of Account Manager and will begin work on (date).

I appreciate your confidence in my abilities and am excited about joining the Clements Media Group. Please contact me at (251) 555-5555 if you need additional information prior to my report-to-work date.

Sincerely,
SIGNATURE
Marcus Reynolds

A formal letter should be sent to the employer when you accept a job offer.

Use the acceptance letter to express your enthusiasm and reiterate to the employer they have made the best choice.

Do not notify the employer via email. This document will be kept in your employee file and must be professional.

Include the following:

- Thank the employer
- Restate the position title
- Verify the start date given in the formal offer
- Express eagerness about working with the company

The Declination and Withdrawal Letters

Providing employers with professional correspondence is necessary even if you choose to decline or withdraw from consideration for a job.

Send a letter via US mail to the employer informing them of your decision. Be respectful and courteous, thanking the employer for their time.

Also thank the interviewer for considering your application or for offering you a position. Keep the possibility of future employment open.

Lucy Johnson
147 Mockingbird Lane
Mobile, AL 35547

Date

Kathryn Thomas, CEO
ABC Corporation
487 Riverbend Road
Mobile, AL 36659

Dear Ms. Thomas:

Thank you for the offer of employment with ABC Corporation. The opportunity sounds very appealing, but I have accepted another position.

I wish you success in filling the position. I hope we might have the opportunity to work together in the future.

Sincerely,
SIGNATURE
Lucy Johnson

Lucy Johnson
147 Mockingbird Lane
Mobile, AL 35547

Date

Kathryn Thomas, CEO
ABC Corporation
487 Riverbend Road
Mobile, AL 36659

Dear Ms. Thomas:

I must withdraw my application with ABC Corporation. This decision was made after considering other career paths that will better match my background and skills.

Thank you for your consideration. I wish you success in finding a candidate that meets your staffing needs.

Sincerely,
SIGNATURE
Lucy Johnson