

Interviewing



Tame Your Interview Fears

Most people see the interviewer as the one with all the power. Remember, though, that you have something the interviewer wants too, or you wouldn't be at the interview in the first place. Think of the interview not as an interrogation, but as a two-way conversation during which you and the employer determine whether you meet each other's needs.

Prepare to be Your Best

Employers are impressed by candidates who have researched the organization, analyzed the job description and show energy and enthusiasm for the job. Take the following steps to increase your interview IQ:

Research the organization

Learn as much as you can before the interview. Visit their website to understand their products/services, volume of business, competitors, culture, and other information. Search for news articles or other publications about the organization. Use Google News, LexisNexis and Vault as resources.

Research the job

In addition to researching the company, you need to understand as much as you can about the job itself. Analyze the job description and match your experiences, skills and interests to the job.

It is important to have a good idea of a salary range for the position so that you can better negotiate when the time comes. Professional trade associations, the Department of Labor and www.salary.com are some sources of salary statistics. Speaking to professionals in the field is the best way to find accurate salary information (see *Informational Interviewing* handout).

Know yourself

Now that you have completed your company, job, and salary research, you need to focus on yourself. How do your experience and qualifications fit the requirements of the job? Be able to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, your educational and work experiences, and your goals and values. Write down your accomplishments and prepare concrete examples as evidence.

Know the interview format ahead of time

It is completely appropriate to ask "with whom will I be meeting?" and "how long should I plan to be at your office?" so you can prepare appropriately and pace yourself once you are there.

Practice, practice, practice

Read the job description thoroughly. Prepare answers to potential questions in advance. Be sure to connect your skills with their specific requirements. Practice your answers with a friend or a Career Services counselor. Videotaped mock interviews are also available, after a practice session with a counselor.

interview



stream

Take advantage of "Interview Stream," an online interview-practice tool that can be used from home if you have a webcam on your computer, or from the designated computer in Career Services.

Prepare to be Your Best

Make a list of questions to ask

The questions you ask indicate your level of interest in the organization and your preparation for the interview. If you don't have any questions to ask, most employers will think you're not really interested in the job. Don't ask questions that could easily be answered through your own research. Instead, ask questions which demonstrate a genuine interest in and understanding of the organization and the position.

Examples:

- What are some of the qualities that will make the person in this position successful?
- Can you describe a typical day or week for the person in this position?
- What will the biggest challenges be for the person in this job?
- What are some of the possible career paths that this position may lead to?
- Could you tell me about the people with whom I will be working directly?
- What are the challenges currently facing the department/organization?
- When may I expect to hear from you regarding my candidacy?

First impressions count

As soon as you enter the office, you are being assessed based on your appearance and behavior. Don't risk being late. If you arrive very early, don't ask for your interviewer until 10 minutes before the appointment. Be courteous to the receptionist and every other person you meet. Turn off your phone; don't smoke or chew gum. Smile and offer a firm handshake, maintain good eye contact and control nervous mannerisms.

Check your outfit and shoes well in advance to be sure everything is clean and pressed, and still fits. Dress professionally. If you're unsure what to wear, err on the side of being too conservative.

References

Bring a list of three to four people who can attest to your professional abilities. Your references might include former managers, co-workers, professors, clients or others who know your work well. Include a brief description of how each reference knows you and how they can be contacted.

After the interview

Write a brief thank-you letter or email right after the interview. Reiterate your interest in the position and briefly state why you are the best candidate.



Common Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in this position?
3. How does this position fit into your long-term goals?
4. Can you describe one or two of your most important accomplishments?
5. Describe a time on the job when old solutions didn't work and you had to come up with new ones.
6. What is a high pressure/stressful situation you've experienced recently? How did you handle it?
7. Give me an example of a conflict you encountered and how you handled it.
8. Describe a situation in which you worked as a member of a team/acted as a leader.
9. What qualities do you look for in a supervisor/co-worker/employer?
10. List three things your former supervisor/co-workers would say about you.

Behavioral Interview Questions

Many employers use an approach called “behavioral interviewing.” This consists of the employer asking you to describe your skills and experience by telling brief stories about tasks, responsibilities, successes or failures.

Examples of behavioral questions include:

- Give me an example of a time when you had to juggle multiple tasks.
- Tell me about a situation in which you solved a problem as a member of a group or team.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. What was the result?

Answering Behavioral Questions

Answers to behavioral questions should describe specific situations where your actions are the focus. (see *S.T.A.R. Strategy*) Often, behavioral questions are used to assess skills required by the position, such as time management, team work, initiative, organizational and communication skills.

Difficult Questions

Be prepared for the questions you hope no one asks. For example, if you have a gap in your resume, you should expect to be asked about it. Your explanation should emphasize the positive, such as what you learned from the experience:

“That’s correct, I didn’t work in 2006. I had been a part-time student, and decided to go full time to finish sooner, so I wasn’t working.”

Perhaps you were laid off. Frame your explanation in a matter-of-fact way that does not refer to your job performance:

“I was one of 180 people laid off last September when XYZ Inc. went through a major downsizing.”

What if you were fired for some reason?

“I just didn’t fit into the organization. Finally, my supervisor and I decided it was best for me to leave. This was difficult, but it showed me the importance of finding a good match for my next position.”

These examples show straightforward answers that reflect well on you, demonstrate that you are resilient and that you have learned from any mistakes or setbacks.

S.T.A.R. Strategy

One strategy for answering behavior-based questions is to use the **S.T.A.R. formula:** (Situation, Task, Action, and Result.)

Here’s an example:

“Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. What was the result?”

Situation: While working as a salesperson for Deluxe Caterers, I managed an account that had been mishandled in the past. When this customer came in to place a large, new order, she was angry. She expressed dissatisfaction with past service and asked us to guarantee superior work this time.

Task: I wanted to maintain this customer relationship, but also to not promise service we could not deliver. I expressed regret to her about past service problems and said I would review her order in detail with my supervisor and get back to her.

Action: I worked with my supervisor and we identified potential pitfalls and then adjusted the services we could provide. I called the customer back and negotiated a new contract.

Result: While the customer was disappointed that we could not provide everything she wanted, she appreciated my honesty and in the end both parties were happy.

Answering Some Common Questions

“What are your strengths and weaknesses?”

Used to assess how well you know yourself, and how open and honest you are. Give behavioral examples of your work-related strengths and describe a minor weakness you are working to improve. For example, you might say, “My Access computer experience is somewhat limited. However, I just took a workshop on advanced Microsoft Office and I’m looking forward to building on my new skills.”

“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Used to assess your ambition and motivation. It isn’t necessary to respond with a specific plan; in fact, it’s more realistic to have a few options in mind: “I can see myself as a programmer analyst in two years. Five years from now, I might be a software developer or a systems analyst. I’ll know better when I’ve been in the field a while.”

“Why should I hire you?”

Used to find out how well you understand the employer’s needs and how confident you are of your qualifications. For example: “You should hire me because I have all the skills you need for this position. My technical skills are an exact match since I’ve been using your software in my co-op job. And my negotiation and persuasive skills are strong as a result of my student government experience.”

Responding to The Job Offer

Your first step after being given a verbal job offer is to thank the employer for the offer, ask when you can expect to receive the offer, and ask when they need to hear back from you regarding your answer.

It is not advised to accept the offer on the spot, as that will not leave you even the possibility for negotiating your salary or other elements within the offer.

After receiving the offer letter with salary and benefits information, you can now ask any questions, negotiate, and/or accept the offer.

Salary Negotiation

To prepare for a salary conversation, research ranges for the position, keeping in mind that size and status of company, geographic region, and your specific skill set will influence it. Some web resources are salary.com, payscale.com and salaryexpert.com.

If salary comes up during an interview, try to postpone the discussion. For example, you could say, “I would be happy to discuss my salary expectations, but I feel I need to know more about the position first.”

Stating your salary requirements in terms of a wide range is a fair response, as is a general statement like “I’ve researched ranges for a position like this, and I’m sure we can come to an agreement on salary within that range.”

In a tight job market, candidates might or might not be able to negotiate salary. Sometimes an employer will agree to additional benefits or a signing bonus in lieu of a higher salary.

When negotiating, be prepared to articulate why you should receive additional compensation, based on industry research and your specific skill sets. It is always appropriate to ask, but critical to keep in mind that negotiation with a potential employer is not an adversarial process; ideally, all parties will emerge feeling they have achieved their goals.

See *Salary Negotiation* handout for more details.

