

Effective Interviewing



NO ONE is a “born” interviewee – it takes practice and preparation to perform well in an interview setting. Check out the information below on tips for what to do before, during, and after the interview to help market yourself in the best possible way.

Interviewing is a focused dialogue with an immediate goal – to convince the employer that you are the best candidate for the position. The interviewer may be asking the questions, but it is you who is setting the tone and establishing the relationship that will lead to your success. Remember that you have a great deal more control in the interview than you may think. Preparation is the key! Let’s break the interview down into its three distinct components.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Learn as much as you can about the type of position you are pursuing.

- Read the job description if it is available. Sometimes job descriptions write about the ideal candidate’s skills. Don’t be discouraged if you don’t have capabilities in every area, but think about your transferable skills or experiences.
- Conduct informational interviews with alumni who are in this type of position.
- Go on-line or use career library resources to read about this type of position, typical duties, and skills that are utilized

Prepare some general background information on your particular career field.

- What have been some of the major news items in the business or other trade publications in the past year or six months?
- What are some of the current trends in this particular career field?

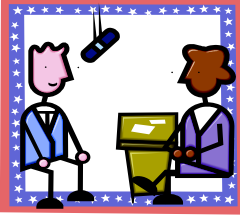
Research the organization.

- Besides going to the employer’s web site, read their annual report (call and ask for one).
- Know what products or services the employer produces or performs.
- Find out about the employer’s reputation within the industry.
- Research the employer’s competitors. What are they doing in the field? What new advances are being made?

Keep calm through preparation.

- Attend an interview workshop and/or schedule a mock interview through the Center for Career Development. Practice the “tough” questions with a career counselor so you won’t be caught off guard in the interview.
- Think about your strengths and work skills and be able to demonstrate these through an example or story.
- Practice talking about your skills and accomplishments as they relate to the types of skills that are required for the job.
- Do a “dry run” before the interview. If possible, go to the location a few days before your interview to see how long it takes, to learn where parking is available, and to see the building. This will take one less thing off your mind before the interview.
- Practice the “Tell me about yourself” question. Develop a 1-2 minute speech that introduces you, briefly tells about your background and education, and makes 2-3 points that you’ll want to re-visit during the rest of the interview. For example, if you had a relevant internship, make sure to introduce it during your 2-minute drill.
- Write down, in advance, questions you would like to ask the interviewer





DURING THE INTERVIEW

First impressions matter.

- Arrive 10-15 minutes ahead of time. This gives you time to go to the restroom one last time to check your hair and clothes and to get to the waiting area in advance. When you enter the building where you will be interviewed, consider that the interview has begun. Be pleasant and polite to everyone you see. You never know who you may be meeting.
- Smile and introduce yourself to the receptionist. That person can be a true ally to you.
- Stand when the interviewer comes to greet you. Smile and show enthusiasm. Establish good eye contact and greet the interviewer with a firm handshake.
- Have the interviewer indicate where you should sit. Keep your hands and your portfolio in your lap.

It's show time!

- The interviewer will probably ask some kind of introductory question or will ask you to “kick off” the interview. This is where your practice on “tell me about yourself” will pay off.
- Really listen to the question, reflect first on your response and then answer the question. If you do not understand the question, politely ask for clarification.
- Keep your responses short – no longer than 2 minutes.
- Be specific about your skills and experiences and how they can be of benefit to the employer. This is where many interviewees get in trouble. They are too general or vague. Examples help to emphasize the points you want to make.
- If you are in a group interview, make eye contact with everyone as you speak. Start and end with the person who asked the question.

Wrapping it up.

- Raise questions throughout the interview if appropriate, be ready at the end to ask your questions that you wrote down earlier.
- It is generally not appropriate for you to bring up salary and benefits in a first interview, but be prepared to talk about this if the interviewer introduces it.
- Sum up your interest and enthusiasm for the position. Let the interviewer know that you want the job.
- Ask the interviewer about the timeline for making decisions and follow-up.
- Make sure to get each interviewer's business card, and thank the person for the opportunity to interview.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Reflect on your experience.

- What parts of the interview went well for you? What went poorly?
- Pat yourself on the back that you have learned from the experience and will use it to improve future interviews.

Thank the interviewer.

- Write a thank-you note to each interviewer within 24-48 hours of the interview. It may be typed or hand-written. Use the same paper you used for your resume and cover letter or use conservative note cards.
- Make sure to briefly include things that you might want the interviewer to know about you that you missed in the interview. Keep it personal, mentioning specific things you discussed.
- Check the samples of thank-you letters in the Center for Career Development if you need ideas.



**Being prepared for the interview is the key!
Make sure that you have done your
homework well in advance!**



SECOND INTERVIEWS

After completing the initial interview, you may be asked to come for a second interview, which is intended to go into more depth about the job position and your qualifications. While you may feel more pressure attending a second interview, it is important to relax and be as prepared as you were for the first interview. You have made a good first impression on the organization, so it is important to follow up by being decisive about what you want. You also need to be even more descriptive about your skills and abilities and how they relate to the position.

To prepare, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ Re-assess your qualifications. Why are you the best candidate for the job?
- ✓ What specifically can you offer this organization?
- ✓ Which past experiences of yours relate well to this job?

The second interview will most likely involve meeting with several different people from the organization. You must represent yourself with facts and clear illustrations of your abilities and how they will help your employer. Give concrete examples of past performances to show how qualified you are for this position. Remain focused and remember that your most important goal is to give examples of how your knowledge and abilities will benefit their organization. While the employer will continue to assess your fit for the job, remember that the second interview is an opportunity for you to explore and learn more about the organization. Ask questions about specifics concerning your prospective job and the overall organization.

What employers are looking for in the second interview:

- ✓ Clear examples of how you can benefit their organization.
- ✓ Emotional maturity, self-esteem, and responsibility.
- ✓ The ability to get along with others.
- ✓ Organizational and time management skills.
- ✓ Enthusiasm and confidence - in yourself and for the job.

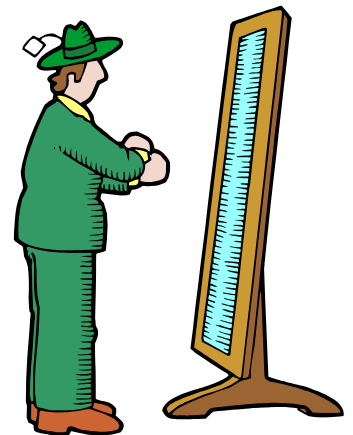
Remember that the same rules of etiquette apply to the second interview. Make sure you record the names and titles of the people who interviewed you, and follow up your visit with a thank-you letter to each.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS!

Dressing correctly for an interview means wearing appropriate attire for the field in which you are interviewing. This shows the interviewer that you understand the position and take it seriously. In the business world, suits are the norm - usually in dark colors. The education and non-profit worlds are less demanding in attire of their professionals. Either way, it can be helpful to check with professionals that you know in the field you are interested in to ensure that you are complying with the dress that is appropriate. If you have any questions, call the Center for Career Development.

Business Casual

The term "business casual" is interpreted very differently in different environments. The best way to dress casually for an interview is to ask the interviewer before coming in for the interview what that means for that company.



General Tips on Any Kind of Interview Attire

- ✓ Clothes should be well tailored and fit correctly. You can get away with a less expensive suit if it fits impeccably.
- ✓ Clothes should be cleaned and ironed.
- ✓ Shoes should be shined.
- ✓ Jewelry, accessories, and fragrances should be kept to a minimum. Prominent piercings should be less noticeable for the interview.
- ✓ Hair should be clean and neatly trimmed.

THE PHONE INTERVIEW

Are YOU Ready to be Interviewed by Phone? More hiring managers rely on telephone contact to determine whether a meeting is needed.



Rick Boyd didn't have to wait long after mailing his resume to the CFO of a fast-growing specialty foods company located just 15 miles from his Oregon home. He got a call from the CFO a week later, who said he was impressed with Mr. Boyd's work experience. Eager to schedule an interview, Mr. Boyd quickly suggested several dates and times he could be available to meet. Much to his surprise, the CFO jumped in with, "I appreciate your eagerness, Rick, but if you've got about 30 minutes right now, Frank Merrill, our chief information officer, and I would like to interview you over the phone in a conference call. We want to see if it's mutually beneficial for us to meet some time soon, OK?" Taken aback by the suggestion and feeling a bit uncomfortable, Mr. Boyd agreed. He didn't have his resume in front of him or a copy of the cover letter he'd sent to the CFO. He was nervous, felt unprepared and literally drew a blank at the CFO's first question, "What prompted you to apply to our company?" After flubbing the answer, he stumbled his way through the rest of his interview that went steadily downhill. The entire conversation lasted only 10 minutes and ended by the CFO's signing off with, "Thanks for your time, Rick. We'll be in touch."

Too often, job seekers aren't prepared to conduct a full-blown job interview by telephone. Yet employers increasingly are relying on telephone interviews to screen applicants more thoroughly to determine if there's a fit. Mr. Boyd might have fared a lot better had he adhered to the following four tips on telephone interviewing:

1. **Always be prepared for a full-blown interview, not just a quick screening.** Have copies of your resume and cover letter stored somewhere near your phone to use as a guide.
2. **Be ready to answer why, when and how regarding your educational background and work experience.** Telephone interviewers favor these types of questions because they help screen applicants faster. Typical queries include: "Why did you stay at XYZ company for so many years?" "Why did you choose BC University?" "How did you move from section supervisor to branch manager in such a short time?" and "When did you encounter the greatest challenge of your career to date?"
3. **Take charge of the phone interview after the first five minutes or so, but not before.** Telephone interviewers usually are practiced at taking control and need to impose their agenda right away. At this point, they're bent on doing more talking than listening, so listen carefully before you speak.
4. **Be ready to give a 60-second commercial to interviewers that outlines the highlights of your background, skills and knowledge.** This description should qualify you and justify your reason for wanting to work for the company.

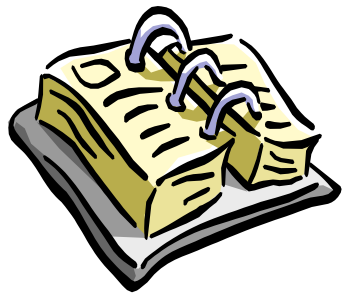
The Sound Image

Of course, one disadvantage of a telephone interview is that the interviewer isn't aware of your physical appearance. It's no secret that projecting an impressive image and using positive body language can significantly improve your chances of gaining an offer. However, you can compensate for not being visible by projecting a powerful sound image that allows hiring managers to "see" your personality and behavioral style via your voice. The key to retaining listener's attention is to use clear, concise, fact-filled sentences and phrases when you speak. Also, interject short responses intermittently to acknowledge the interviewer's statements ("Yes, I see," "I agree," "That's interesting," "smart idea", etc.) and show that you're closely engaged in the conversation.

If you project a strong sound image, the interviewer is likely to make positive assumptions about you, such as:

- You're someone who's savvy about the industry and the impact you can make on the company
- You're self-confident.
- You're experienced at selling over the phone. This is a plus, especially if the job requires client development and relationship management.

What's interesting about sound is that it grabs an interviewer's attention faster and more consistently than a visual image in a face-to-face meeting. That's because the interviewer is concentrating his or her auditory senses on your voice in an attempt to formulate a picture of you. The more positive points you relay in your message, the better the picture.



There are several main “areas” of questions found in the interview, and targeting the type of question that is being asked can help you in determining and preparing how to answer it. Some of these can include “stress” questions, behavioral questions, and frequently asked questions (both by the employer and you)

Types of Interview Questions

“STRESS” QUESTIONS:

These questions are intended to put you on the spot. Interviewers want to see how you can handle stress or a sticky situation so that they know you are reliable under pressure. Simply be calm and specific.

EXAMPLE: What makes you think you are qualified for this position?

BEHAVIOR- BASED QUESTIONS:

These questions are another example of how you can use your experience and solid examples of what you have done to show an interviewer that your background and past practices will enhance their organization.

EXAMPLE: Describe a time on any jobs which you’ve held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills. What did you do?

WHY SHOULD I HIRE YOU? FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

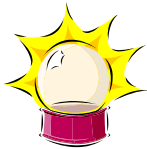
Although you will never be able to know exactly what the interviewer will ask, it may help to review these questions so that you can begin to think of what type of question could be asked.

GOAL RELATED QUESTIONS:

What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives?

Why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing to achieve them?

Are there personal goals that you have set for yourself in the next ten years?



FUTURE RELATED QUESTIONS:

What do you see yourself doing in the next five years?

What do you expect to be earning in five years?

What do you really want to do with your life?

PERSONALITY RELATED QUESTIONS:

How would you describe yourself?

What do you consider your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

What motivates you to give your best effort?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

How do you work under pressure?

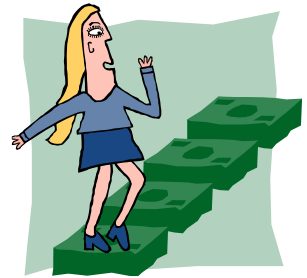
What have you learned from your mistakes?

How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?

Can you take criticism without feeling upset?

If I gave you \$10,000,000 right now, what would you do with it?

What do you want me to know about you that is not on your resume?



CAREER RELATED QUESTIONS:

Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?

What qualities should a successful manager possess?

Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him/her.

How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?

What two or three things are the most important to you in your work?

Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?

What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?

Do you have a geographical preference? Why?

Are you willing to relocate or travel?

What are your salary requirements?

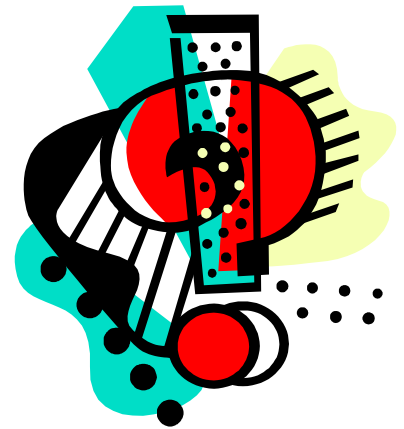
Give me some examples of times that you have been criticized at work. How did you react and why?

EXPERIENCE RELATED QUESTIONS:

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
What major problems have you encountered and how did you deal with them?
What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?
What have you learned from your past work experience that would help in the position you are applying for?

ORGANIZATION RELATED QUESTIONS:

What qualifications do you have that makes you think that you will be successful in an organization like ours?
In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
If you were hiring someone for this position, what would you look for?
Why did you decide to seek a position with the company?



It would be helpful if you practiced these questions with a friend so that you get a better feel for what information you want to convey, and how you will feel when presented with challenging questions.

NOTE ON UNETHICAL QUESTIONS

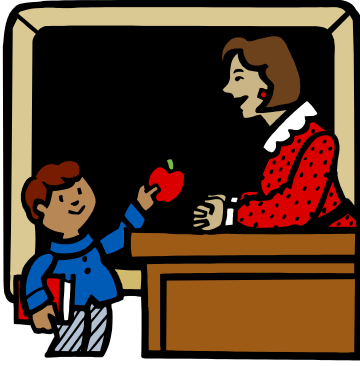
It is illegal for a prospective employer to ask questions that relate to race, gender, religion, marital status, or other personal areas that do not have any bearing on your ability to do the job. While employers might require certain personal information after hiring, there is no legal reason that those questions should be asked of a prospective employee if they have no bearing on that person's ability to do the job. An interviewer may not intend to break the law with certain questions---he or she may not have the experience to know what subjects to avoid. If you feel that an inappropriate question has been asked, you can consider that the interviewer is either uninformed, trying to put you on the spot, or may actually be unethical. Examine whether or not this question was intentional and then decide how you should handle it; either by sidestepping the question, or, in a severe case, by confronting the interviewer about the question.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

Not only do you want to appear interested in the interview and the organization, but also that there are probably questions that you have that you will want to have answered. The questions below may be helpful, but remember that you should be sure to resolve any questions that you personally have about the organization, or the position that you are inquiring about. Some of these questions may not apply, depending on the type of organization. You will give the interviewer a sense of who you are by the questions you are asking, so be honest and professional.

- What type of personality/traits does it take to succeed in this company?
- What is it like working here in terms of job pressures?
- What is the organization's competitive strategy?
- What skills do you find most valuable in an employee?
- What percent of the employees pursue advanced degrees/training in this industry or organization?
- How does this organization make use of a person's experience and ideas?
- What would a typical first assignment be in this company?
- What qualities do you believe I lack for this position?
- Where do you see the company going in the next four years?
- What is your typical day like in this position?
- What are the main rules that everyone has to follow in this company?
- What is the management style of this organization?
- What is your staff turnover rate like compared to the rest of the company?
- How are important decisions made in this organization?





SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES

The questions below will give you a sample of the types of questions that are frequently asked at interviews for positions in the field of education.

Motivation and Personality:

- ⇒ Why have you selected education as a profession?
- ⇒ What do you enjoy most about teaching?
- ⇒ What do you feel would be the most significant contribution you could make to our school system?
- ⇒ Why did you decide to teach your subject area in particular?
- ⇒ What is there about you that would cause a district to hire you over others?

Academic Preparation:

- ⇒ Describe your student teaching experience.
- ⇒ Tell me about your most difficult/enjoyable experience during your student teaching?
- ⇒ What was the highlight?
- ⇒ What was the worst problem you had? How did you handle it?
- ⇒ Describe one activity or lesson that you were particularly proud of that you accomplished during your student teaching experience.
- ⇒ Describe how you deal with discipline issues.
- ⇒ Please tell me about your other work experience with children.
- ⇒ What evidence can you cite of rapport building in your teaching experiences?

Teaching Techniques and Style:

- ⇒ Explain your style of teaching - strategies, methodologies, techniques.
- ⇒ What is your grading philosophy?
- ⇒ How do you plan for a year? A week? A day?
- ⇒ What are some examples of “rules” you would have in your classroom?
- ⇒ Describe what I would see if I walked into your classroom while school was in session.
- ⇒ What area would you like to strengthen?
- ⇒ What steps would you take to improve a student’s self-concept?

Knowledge of the Employer:

- ⇒ What do you know about our school district?
- ⇒ Why do you want to be a teacher in our district?

Hypothetical Questions:

- ⇒ What would you do if:
 - You caught a student cheating?
 - A student never had his/her homework completed?
 - A student seemed to be an outcast in the class?
 - You knew a student had a serious personal problem?
- ⇒ How would you communicate with parents?
- ⇒ How will you go about meeting the needs of exceptional students

