

# **EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING SKILLS**



## **A Guide to Getting a Grip on Successful Interviewing Strategies**

### **This Guide Includes Information On:**

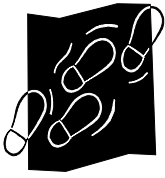
- **Interview Formats**
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- **Making a Positive First Impression**
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- **Typical Interview Questions**
- **Interview Techniques**
- **Dressing for Success**
- **Negotiating Salary**

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## FIVE STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

### STEP ONE: Preparing For The Interview

Before you can persuade the interviewer that you are right for the job, you have to believe it yourself! If you tend to underrate your abilities, see page 12 for some valuable confidence builders. If you possess the needed confidence but lack ideas for how to showcase your abilities and talents, then consider using some of the techniques described below.

**The Show and Tell Technique\*** - Select samples of course assignments that demonstrate your various work-related skills. For instance, position papers, technical reports, and promotional flyers all provide evidence of writing skills. Be selective when choosing work samples. If the job you're applying for requires technical writing skills, you wouldn't want to share a paper from a creative writing class. Be prepared to leave a copy of your sample with the interviewer, as there usually won't be enough time for him/her to properly review it during the actual interview.

**The Sneak Preview Technique\*** - While the Show and Tell Technique looks backward in time at material you've developed in the past, the Sneak Preview Technique focuses on the future by providing the interviewer with a demonstration of what you can do for their organization. For instance, if you are applying for a training position you could develop presentation slides on a topic of interest to the employer.

Timing is everything when it comes to using the above techniques. Most interviewers will give you an entrée by asking a question like, *"How do your skills fit with the demands of this position?"* Once such a question is asked, then the ball is in your court. You can respond by saying something like, *"Rather than just telling you about my skills, I'd like to show you some examples of how I've used my skills. From my understanding of the job, writing skills are key to successful performance and I believe my writing skills are very strong. I've brought a brochure that I prepared for my sorority, and think it gives a good example of my writing abilities."* (This example of course applies to someone who is interviewing for a writing position.)

In addition to thinking about how to use the above techniques when preparing for an interview, you should also practice responding to some of the typical interview questions that are listed on page 13. Most interview questions are intended to assess three factors: Can you do the job? Will you do the job? How well will you get along with others? Rather than developing a response to each of the questions listed on page 13, it will be

\* Terms taken from Krueger, B.D. (1997). *College Grad Job Hunter*. Milwaukee, WI: Quantum Leap Publishing.

easier to develop three general responses: one to explain how your skills and/or experiences match the job requirements, a second to describe why you're interested in the job that conveys a "can do" attitude, and a third to give the interviewer a sense for your work style.

A considerable portion of your preparation time should be spent on strategizing how you will showcase your talents, but you can't neglect the other components of a successful interview. Use the pre-interview checklist provided on page 16 to make sure you cover all the bases.

## **STEP TWO: Making a Positive First Impression**

Chances are you won't be offered the job unless you make a personal connection with the interviewer. Regardless of how well you respond to the interview questions, you will lose points if the interviewer senses that your personality may rub others the wrong way. From the interviewer's perspective, the best gauge for how you'll get along with others in the organization is how you come across during the interview. The following techniques and guidelines are recommended for establishing a personal connection with the interviewer:

- During introductions, look directly into the interviewer's eyes and give him/her a warm smile.
- Use a firm handshake and say something like, "It's great to meet you."
- Mental connections lead to physical connections - if you believe you are blessed to be in the presence of the interviewer, you will radiate a positive, friendly energy.
- Remember that small talk is really big talk, since the employer will make judgments about you based on your articulation, vocabulary, and what you choose to talk about. Although there are no "safe" small talk topics, you'll generally be okay if you stick to topics that people usually aren't divided about (e.g., sports, local attractions, weather). Avoid making small talk about religion, politics, or social issues.
- Follow the "2-Minute Rule," which specifies that your initial responses to questions shouldn't exceed two minutes. If you are too chatty, the interviewer may view you as being self-absorbed or overly anxious. The 2-Minute Rule applies to the beginning of the interview, when the interviewer is asking questions to "break the ice." Eventually the interviewer will ask serious interview questions, like the ones listed on page 13. Don't limit yourself to two minutes when responding to these questions. It usually takes more than two minutes to impress an interviewer with your skills and experiences! At the same time, though, you don't want to over do it and bore the interviewer. Therefore, it's wise to test the waters to make sure you're not being too windy. This can be done by pausing as you are relating an experience, etc. If the interviewer continues eye contact during the pause, take it as a cue to go on with what you want to say.
- Stick with positives. Complaining or speaking negatively about others is the "kiss of death" in an interview.

In addition to doing the above, you need to be aware of your nonverbal communication: What you say is not nearly as important as how you say it. The nonverbals that have the most impact on an interviewer are described below.

**Eye Contact** - Many claim that the eyes are the “windows to one’s soul.” Make sure to avoid:

- *looking away while listening*; this can be interpreted as boredom or a short attention span
- *failing to maintain eye contact while speaking*; this can be viewed as a lack of confidence or, at worst, an indication that you are lying

**Facial Expressions** - In preparation for the interview process, take a long, hard look at yourself in the mirror while you rehearse responses to the typical interview questions listed on page 13. Work on modifying any negative facial expressions (e.g., scowls, lip-biting, pursed lips, etc.) and make sure to practice smiling. Identify someone who you regard as having a warm smile and work on developing a similar smile. Hint: Don’t use Bart Simpson as a role model unless you want to develop a wisecracking grin!

**Posture** - When standing, stand up straight. When seated, sit at the front of the chair and lean slightly forward. This demonstrates that you are focused on what’s being said. Slouching is often interpreted as a lack of confidence.

**Body Space** - You need to be conscientious about the interviewer’s personal space. For most Americans this ranges from 30 to 36 inches. When interviewing with someone from another country, be prepared for him/her to encroach upon your personal space. Avoid moving away as it could be interpreted as a form of rejection. If you have smaller than average personal space requirements, make sure to keep your distance or else you could be viewed as aggressive.

### **STEP THREE: Demonstrating Your Stuff**

Employers select people to interview who they consider to have the basic requirements for the job, and view the interview primarily as a means of assessing how the top candidates compare with one another. Therefore, when you interview you need to demonstrate why you should be considered over the other candidates. Sharing information from your resume, which the interviewer is already familiar with, will not cut it! You will win points if you:

#### **Demonstrate a “Can Do” Attitude**

Impress upon the interviewer that you are someone who can be counted on to get the job done. This is best done by clearly describing how your skills and experiences match with the demands of the position. If you are unclear about what the job actually entails, you’ll obviously have a hard time accomplishing this. Instead of hoping that your answers magically hit the mark, consider asking a question like the following as early as possible during the interview process: *“Can you tell me about the position and the type of person you are seeking?”*

The answers provided will help you to identify the employer's specific needs, which you should then address whenever possible during the rest of the interview. The strategy is really quite simple: Find out what the employer needs and then frame your answers around what they are seeking. If they need someone who can explain statistical reports to assembly line workers with remedial math skills, tell them about your experiences that relate to interpreting statistics to others. If you lack experience in this area, don't let it derail you. Instead, describe an experience where you were successful at explaining another complicated topic. Or, explain that although you don't have these experiences you trust your ability to develop skills in this area.

Keep in mind that if you can learn about the employer's specific needs prior to the interview, you'll be one step ahead of the process. At a minimum, you should always try to get a job description in advance.

### **Speak in Specifics Rather than Generalities**

One of the worst mistakes a candidate can make is to share generalities rather than specifics. It is not enough to say, "I value learning new skills." You have to support such a statement with specifics. For example: "I value learning new skills. This year alone I have taken two seminars on HTML and Authorware and undertook the challenge of creating a web page for a local bicycling group. And, I'm registered to take a course next month on time-management."

### **Behavioral Interviewing:**

Many companies are now using a behavioral approach to interviewing. It is an approach that assumes that your past performance predicts your future work performance. The key to answering behavioral interview questions is to use plenty of examples to support your answers. The STAR technique is an easy way to describe your successful past performances. STAR covers the areas you want to address in a good interview answer: Situation, Task, Action, and Result. When you use an example to answer a behavioral question, explain the situation or context of your example, the task (s) or your responsibility for action, the action you took, and finally the outcomes or results of your behavior.

(e.g.) "Give me an example of a time when you were a leader"

**Situation:** My service organization was in danger of losing its charter at the university. Membership was down and funds were quite low.

**Task** As fundraising chairperson, I was charged with the responsibility of increasing donations by 25% percent.

**Action:** In order to accomplish my goal, I initiated a door-to-door campaign off-campus. All members were involved in the fundraising effort.

**Result:** Thanks to our membership's dedication and participation, we increased donations by 30%.

## Case Study Interviewing:

If you are interviewing with management consulting firms, investment banks, or other companies that are looking for people with very strong analytical skills, expect a case study interview. Listen to the case, it may be formatted as a: calculation/estimation/guess estimate/numerical/market sizing case, Problem case, Probing case, Business operations case, Business strategy case, Resume case (case based on a company at which you worked), Brainteaser/logical puzzle/IQ question. Regardless of the type of case, the employer is interested in knowing how you analyze information to deduce an answer. It is important that you talk your way through the case study, ask questions, and construct a logical framework to reach reasonable assumptions.

Two techniques that may help you to get started are the *Start Big Approach* and the *Start Small Approach*. The Start Big Approach assumes that you will start with a general approach or basic assumption and then logically make inferences and conclusions. While the Start Small Approach assumes that you will start with a conclusion and then logically will infer a general assumption. Remember that rarely is there one "right" answer for analyzing a case. Your process for reaching your conclusions is equally important to the interviewer as is the conclusion itself. Use your creativity and don't be afraid of thinking outside the box.

## Exhibit the Key Qualities that Employers Desire

A few years back, the College Placement Council identified sixteen traits employers most often look for in candidates. Demonstrating some of the traits listed below during the interview is very important, and will go a long way in setting you apart from the average candidate.

Ability to Communicate Do you have the ability to organize your thoughts and ideas effectively? Can you express them clearly when speaking or writing? Can you present your ideas in a persuasive way?

Intelligence Do you have the ability to understand work assignments? Contribute original ideas?

Self-Confidence Do you demonstrate a sense of maturity that enables you to deal positively and effectively with situations and people?

Willingness to Accept Responsibility Are you someone who recognizes what needs to be done and is willing to do it?

Initiative Do you have the ability to identify the purpose for work and to take action?

Leadership Can you guide and direct others to obtain established objectives?

Energy Level Do you demonstrate a forcefulness and capacity to make things move ahead? Can you maintain your work effort at an above-average rate?

Imagination Can you confront and deal with problems that may not have standard solutions?

Flexibility Are you capable of changing and being receptive to new ideas?

Interpersonal Skills Can you bring out the best efforts of individuals so they become effective, enthusiastic members of a team?

Self-Knowledge Can you realistically assess your own capabilities? See yourself as others see you? Clearly recognize your strengths and weaknesses?

Ability to Handle Conflict Can you successfully contend with stressful situations and antagonism?

Competitiveness Do you have the capacity to compete with others and the willingness to be measured by your performance in relation to that of others?

Goal Achievement Do you have the ability to identify and work toward specific goals? Do such goals challenge your abilities?

Vocational Skills Do you possess the combination of education and skills required for the position you are seeking?

Direction Have you defined what type of position will satisfy your knowledge, skills, and goals?

### **Manage Interviewing Jitters Effectively**

Wouldn't it be nice if interviewing went as smoothly as a well-rehearsed role play? Interviews are obviously more challenging because they are the real thing - you are in the spotlight and all eyes are upon you. It's natural to feel anxiety during an interview! If your anxiety results in more than sweaty palms and you find yourself having difficulty concentrating, the following techniques will allow you to buy some time while you formulate answers to those tough questions.

The Parrot Technique Useful for when asked a question that you know you have a good answer to, but cannot think of it immediately. Works as follows: Repeat back the question using your own words. Interviewer: *"If you could change your life, what would you do differently?"* You: *"Hmm. How would I live my life differently? That requires a bit of thought...I would..."*

The Delay Technique Useful when you are really stuck. First, repeat back the question using the Parrot Technique. If you still can't think of what to say, comment on the

importance or relevance of the question: *“I would ask the same question if I were doing the interview.”* or *“I understand the importance of this in regard to...”* If you still haven’t formulated your answer, you might be able to reflect the question back to the interviewer in some instances. For example, if the original question was *“How would you respond if a co-worker became hostile toward you or another co-worker?”* you could query with, *“Has this organization had problems with workplace violence?”*

## **STEP FOUR: Closing with Finesse**

In most situations, you will know how long the interview is scheduled for. Most organizations will indicate this when the interview is first scheduled, and the interviewer will usually also state the end time at the beginning of the interview. Additionally, you will be able to determine when the interviewer is getting ready to conclude the interview by looking for one of the tell tale signals: the interviewer starts glancing at his/her watch or the interviewer asks you, *“Do you have any other questions for me?”*

If you are truly interested in the job, you need to use the remaining time to re-state why you feel you are the best candidate for the job and to re-state your interest in the position. This is best accomplished by restating the two or three strongest qualifications that you shared at the beginning of the interview and by leaving no doubt in the interviewer’s mind that you are interested in the job. Consider the following closings - which sounds better to you?

*“I’m very interested in this job and believe my experiences fit what you are looking for. Is there any area of my experiences that you’d like to know more about in relation to your needs?”*

*“I realize our time is running out so I’d like to use the remaining minutes to quickly highlight why I think you should hire me. You need someone who can design creative marketing pieces, evaluate the effectiveness of marketing strategies, and forecast customer needs. I can do all of those things, but then you probably determined that when you first reviewed my resume. What’s most important is that I’m really interested in working for this organization. I value the organization’s goals and will work hard to help you and the organization succeed.”*

*“It’s in your best interests to hire me. I’m sure my skills and experiences surpass those of the other candidates. When I first found out that you need someone who can design creative marketing pieces, evaluate the effectiveness of marketing strategies, and forecast customer needs, I said, ‘That’s the job for me!’”*

After you’ve made the final pitch for why you’re a good candidate for the job, there are several do’s and don’ts to keep in mind during the final minutes of the interview:

- Thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you while you maintain good eye contact. Say good-bye with a firm handshake.



- Don't ask the interviewer how you did as this will raise doubts about your confidence.
- In the unlikely event that you're offered the job without having met the person you would report to, request the opportunity to meet with him/her. It's important that you get a sense for what it would be like to work for such an individual.
- If you're offered the job and it's your first interview with the organization, don't accept or reject the offer until you've had time to think about it. A good response in such a situation is, *"I appreciate your offer and am excited about the opportunity to work for this organization. I would like to have a day or two to think this over. When would be a good time for me to call you with my decision?"*
- If you are interviewing with a Human Resources staff member, close by asking to move forward to the next step in the process, which will likely involve meeting with the hiring manager.
- Ask the following questions as needed. Be careful not to ask about something that has already been shared by the interviewer because you'll lose points for listening skills!
  1. What are the next steps in the selection process? Do you plan on conducting second interviews?
  2. How would you prefer for me to contact you should I think of more questions about what you shared? Via phone? Via e-mail?
  3. When can I expect to be contacted about the hiring decision?
  4. Who can I contact in Human Resources about my benefits questions?

## **STEP FIVE: Important Post-Interview Tasks**

### **Keep a Record of the Interview**

Even if you feel you're not interested in the job, there are several reasons why record keeping will work to your advantage. First, a written record makes it a lot easier to keep track of the people you've met with and the information they shared with you. Second, you could get a call from an organization several weeks after the initial interview. Detailed records are a big help in these instances. Third, after you've had a number of interviews, a review of your observations may generate useful insights for how you can improve your interviewing skills. A record-keeping form is provided on page 19 for your use.

### **Send a Thank-You Letter that Reaffirms Your Interest in the Job**

This should be done immediately! Because letters sent via the postal service can take as long as a week to arrive, you are advised to fax, hand deliver, or e-mail your letter. The simple gesture of sending a letter can make a big difference in separating you from the competition. If you interviewed with multiple individuals, send the letter to the hiring supervisor and copy the letter to the others. See page 20 for an example of a thank-you letter.

### ***What about an e-mailed thank you?***

Career experts are not in total agreement about the propriety of e-mailing a thank you, but again, the company's culture should guide you. If people in the company use e-mail heavily, your e-mailed thank you will seem right in step. It's also a fast solution if you know the company will be making its hiring decision quickly. Even if e-mail fits in with the company culture, however, it's a good idea to follow up your e-mailed thank you with a hard-copy version.

### **Anticipate a Second Interview**

If the interview went well, you will likely be invited back for a second round. It's best to plan ahead to make sure you have a second outfit ready to wear and to give yourself adequate preparation time. What questions do you have that weren't answered during the first interview? Now that you have a better sense about what the job entails, what Show and Tell or Sneak Preview techniques could you use to demonstrate your value to the organization?

Consider going to a second interview even if you have doubts about working for the organization. By going back you will have the chance to meet more people and find out more about the organization.

### **Prepare to Respond to an Offer**

Carefully review the things you've learned about the job, the company, and the city you'd be working in if re-location is required. Think about each of the people you met and the information they shared. Are you interested in doing the kind of work the job requires? Will you acquire new skills or sharpen existing ones? Are there opportunities for promotion? Do the people you'd work with seem friendly, fair, and capable? Does the organization seem like a good one? What is the minimum salary you're willing to accept? What factors can you use to negotiate for a higher salary should the organization make an offer at or below your minimum requirement? (See the listing of salary negotiation tips provided on page 21.)

(The post-interview tasks described above are adapted from Kalt, N.C. (1996). *Career Power! A Blueprint for Getting the Job You Want*. Pound Ridge, NY: Career Power Books.)



## THE TICKET TO CONFIDENT INTERVIEWING

In developing confidence, you must recognize the things that tend to make you lack it. Listed below are some of the more common reasons for why people lack confidence about employment interviews.

### **Fear of the Unknown**

To overcome this fear, you need to recognize that the interviewer actually faces more unknowns than you do! An interview is centered on the subject you know best: yourself. The interviewer is the one who is at a disadvantage - all she/he knows about you is what she/he has read on your resume.

If you do your homework, you will have a sound knowledge base from which you can tap into during the interview. You will know about the organization. You might even know something about the interviewer if you were diligent in your research. You can assume that the interviewer is probably getting tired with the process. She/he has interviewed many people and gone through the routine time and again, asking the same questions and getting the same responses. She/he doesn't know what you are going to say, but you know what you want to say. Remember, preparation is key...the more you know the more confident you will feel.

### **Fear of Losing**

People are often nervous going into the interview because they fear that they will not get an offer or be invited back for a second interview. But before the interview they don't have an offer. If after the interview they still don't have an offer, they are no worse off. So why worry? Go into the interview and exude self-confidence. Take a chance. If you recognize that not getting what you hope for is no disaster, you will be much more relaxed during the interview.

### **Rejection Shock**

Within many fields, there is a surplus of qualified candidates. This makes the odds in interviewing long. If you receive favorable attention in one interview out of five, you are doing well. That means that you must come to grips with rejection for those other four times. You've got to keep your head high and find ways to compensate for the beating your ego will take.

## Negative Self-Talk

Do you evaluate yourself negatively? Have you caught yourself thinking berating thoughts like the following: *I'll probably say something stupid and turn the interviewer*

*off.*" or *"I'll freeze up and forget everything I plan on saying."* If you find yourself thinking thoughts like the above, you need to STOP! Negative self-talk is the primary culprit behind a lack of confidence. Replace these thoughts with the statements that follow and work on developing other positive statements to build yourself up: *"It's stupid to sabotage myself like this! I'm going to do great and the interviewer will like what I have to say."* and *"A little nervousness is to be expected. I've worked hard at preparing and trust that I'll be able to recall my key selling points."*

Adapted from Medley, H.A. (1978). *Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed*. Belmont, CA: Lifetime Learning Publications.



## TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

If an individual is going to do something well, it is often necessary for him/her to spend much more time preparing for the activity compared to the time spent doing the activity. Preparing for an interview is no different! Think about how you would respond to the questions listed below. Then practice verbalizing your responses. You may want to do a practice interview with a friend whose feedback you trust, or with a Career Connection staff member who can video tape your practice session.

### **Questions for assessing skills/experiences:**

- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- How does your previous experience relate to this position?
- What are some of your special abilities?
- What do you feel are some of your weaknesses?
- What were some of your best classes? Why?
- What were some of your worst classes? Why?

### **Tips for preparing effective responses:**

1. Develop a list of your top five skills and support these with examples of ways in which you have used each skill.
2. Review performance evaluations you've received from past employers.
3. Research the organization and position as thoroughly as possible.
4. Make a list of the courses you've taken that relate to the work you would be doing for the employer.
5. Review your resume and cover letter.

### **Questions for assessing motivation:**

- Where do you see yourself in five years? In ten years?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What did you do besides go to classes, write papers, and take exams?
- In which one of your jobs have you been most interested? Why?
- What motivates you?
- If you could change your life, what would you do differently?
- What do you know about our organization?

### **Tips for preparing effective responses:**

1. Think about what you want to have accomplished in your career five years and ten years from now. (Note: Saying you would like to advance to a managerial position won't impress the interviewer! You'll be more likely to earn points if you can list managerial skills you would like to have developed.)
2. Make sure you have a career objective and identify how the position you're applying for supports your desired career path.
3. Let your interviewer know that you have researched their organization and refer to information about the job or organization that makes it particularly appealing to you

### **Questions for assessing work style/personality:**

- Do you work better alone or as part of a team?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Describe a problem you've had with a supervisor or co-worker and how you dealt with it.
- How would you describe yourself?
- Give me an example of a good decision you made recently. What were the alternatives you considered?
- What types of people do you prefer working with?

### **Tips for preparing effective responses:**

1. Consider taking the *Myers-Briggs Type Inventory*, which is available through Career Connection for a small fee. This assessment can be used to help you understand some of your work-related preferences.
2. Identify ways in which your weaknesses could be turned into positives (e.g., "I'm a bit of a perfectionist so it usually takes me more time to complete a project. But, I always turn out quality projects which are done right the first time.")

### **OFF The WALL Questions:**

Welcome to the world of the off-the-wall interview questions -- weird, wacky, gimmicky, and offbeat "wild card" questions that seem to have nothing to do with your ability to handle a job. If they're irrelevant to job performance, why do employers ask them?

They want to see how well you can think on your feet. They want to see if you'll get rattled. They may want to test your creativity or sense of humor. They want to challenge you. Employers who ask these goofy questions no doubt may feel the questions *do* relate to job performance. In creating stress by asking you a weird question, the interviewer may be testing how well you'll respond to the stress of the workplace. Once you review the list below, you'll be able to understand why these questions are becoming popular among interviewers.

- If you could be any part of a bicycle, which part would you be and why?
- Other variations of this question include:
- If you could be any part of a computer keyboard, which part would you be and why?
  - If you could be an animal, what would you be and why?
  - If you could be a piece of furniture, what would you be and why?
  - If you could be a candy bar, what would you be and why?
  - What is the one question that you were afraid that I would ask but didn't? What is your answer to that question?
  - How many jellybeans could fit into a Boeing 747?
  - If Hollywood made a movie about your life, whom would you like to see play the lead role as you?
  - If it rained music, what would grow?
  - What would you add to the water supply to improve humans?
  - If you were a superhero, what would you want your super powers to be?
  - Why are manhole covers round?

### **Handling Illegal Questions**

Improper interview questions are those that do not pertain to the nature of the job, the applicant's ability to perform that job, or are not asked of every candidate. They are illegal only if the information is used to make a hiring decision. Due to Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity legislation, most recruiters now know what they can ask candidates and what they cannot. If you are asked an illegal question, you have three options:

You can answer the question. However, if you choose to answer an illegal question, remember that you are giving information that is not related to the job description. You may be giving the "wrong" answer which, in turn, could harm your chances of getting the job.

1. You can refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. However, depending on your tone of voice or on how you phrase your refusal, unfortunately you may be perceived by being defensive and/or confrontational. Instead you could ask: What's the relationship between my \_\_\_\_\_ and the job description? Can you explain why you need to know that information?
2. You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, Are you a U.S. citizen? Or what country are you from? You've been asked an illegal question, but you could respond by saying "I am authorized to work in the U.S." Similarly, if you were asked "Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job? You can answer, "I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires". If asked, "Do you live with someone?" You may respond, "You mean, you would like to know who can you contact in case of emergencies?"

**The following questions should not be asked because they are considered non-job related inquiries (I.e. there are no proper phrasing alternatives)**

- **What is your race/sex/religion**

### **Key Points About Interview Preparation:**

Don't try to memorize your answers! If you try to memorize the "perfect" response, you'll lock yourself into one way of telling someone about yourself and will come to depend upon those words. This will cause problems if the interviewer asks a question that calls for an answer that's a bit different from the one you've memorized or if your mind goes blank for a moment.

You can rehearse all you want, but there's no substitute for the real thing. The best way to develop interviewing skills is to get your feet wet interviewing for jobs that you could take or leave. It usually only takes a few interviews to get a sense for what works and what doesn't.

When preparing for an on-campus interview, keep in mind that it will be shorter in duration than interviews at the company because the goal is to screen as many applicants as possible. This means that you will have less time to sell yourself to the interviewer. Therefore, be prepared to focus on your strongest points, on the most persuasive reasons you have for why the company should hire you.

## **PRE-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST**

     **I have researched the organization and know the following:**

- Primary products or services provided by the organization
- Organizational structure and likelihood for advancement opportunities
- Salary range for the position for which I am applying
- Organization's record of performance, recent news items
- Organizational vision and strategic plan

     **I have prepared questions to ask the interviewer.**

Remember that interviewing is a two-way street. You are also interviewing the interviewer to determine if your needs would be met and if you would like working for the organization. Try not to ask questions about information easily obtained from the organization's web site. Questions to consider asking include:



- Where does the position fit within the organization?
- Who are the primary people with whom I would be working?
- How many people have held this job in the last five years? Why did the previous person leave?
- What are some examples of the best results produced by people in this job?
- What are the opportunities for growth?.
- What areas need the immediate attention of the person you hire?
- What skills are most valuable in this job?
- What are your plans for new products or services?
- How would you define your organization's management philosophy?
- What are you looking for in the person who will fill this job?
- Describe a typical day.
- What kind of training would I receive?
- How much input will I have in requesting certain assignments or projects?
- What activities could I engage in now that might help me on the job if I'm hired?
- How is one evaluated both formally and informally?
- Will a graduate degree be required in order to enhance my promotional opportunities after several years?
- What is the retention rate for people who have been in this training program after one year? After two years?
- Has the organization had difficulty filling the position due to a lack of qualified applicants?
- What's the criticalness of filling the position?
- What is included in the benefits package?

**\_\_\_ I've determined the minimum salary I'm willing to accept and am prepared to discuss negotiable factors should the interview want to discuss salary**

Salary negotiation usually occurs during a second interview or when an offer is made, but general inquiries are often made during the first interview. When asked about starting salary, it's best to respond with the salary *range* in which you are interested and then indicate that you can be more specific once you learn about the other benefits that are available. In order to prepare for the actual negotiations, ask questions to get a sense for the following:

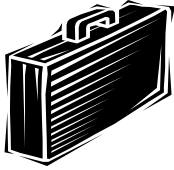
**\_\_\_ I know what I will wear**

**\_\_\_ I know where the interview is and how long it takes to get there**

**\_\_\_ I know the interviewer's name**

**\_\_\_ I have typed a list of references to take along with extra copies of my resume**

Unless you are interviewing for an artistic (e.g., photographer, musician, actor/actress) or skilled-trades position (e.g., carpenter, plumber), conservative clothing is strongly recommended.



## GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEW DRESS

### Men and Women

- Conservative two-piece business suit (dark blue or gray is best, but tan is also acceptable)
- Long-sleeved shirt/blouse (white is best)
- Well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Empty pockets - no tinkling coins, keys, etc.
- No gum, candy or cigarettes
- No visible body piercing (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.)
- No more than one ring on each hand
- No cell phones or beepers
- An attaché or briefcase conveys a sense of professionalism

### Men

- Necktie should be silk or an acrylic blend with a conservative pattern
- Dark, clean, polished shoes (black lace-ups are best)
- Over-the-calf socks that either match your suit or are black
- Mustaches and beards are possible negatives, but if you must, make sure they are neatly trimmed
- No earrings (if you normally wear one, take it out)

### Women

- Always wear a suit with a jacket;
- No high heels
- Hosiery at or near skin color
- If you wear nail polish (not required), use clear or a conservative color
- Minimal use of make-up
- One set of earrings
- Don't wear more than 13 accessories!

## Sample Record-Keeping Form

Date of Interview:      Location of Interview:

Name(s) and Job Title(s) of Interviewer(s):

Impressions About the Interviewer(s) and Organization:

How would the position be a good fit in terms of my interests, skills, and career objective?

What are some potential problems associated with the position or organization?

Information Gathered About the Selection Process:

- Are they doing second interviews?
- When do they expect to make a decision?
- How many positions are they wanting to fill?

Information Shared About Salary and Benefits:

Review of My Performance:

- Was I as informed about the organization as I should have been?
- Was I relaxed?
- Did I answer the questions in a way that stressed the three key factors: my skills, my motivation, my suitable work style?
- Did I steer questions toward the points I wanted to stress?
- Did the interviewer get interested and involved in what I was saying?
- Did I present an accurate and favorable picture of myself?
- Did I practice good listening skills?
- Did I thank the interviewer?

If I'm not selected, how could I improve my candidacy for future openings?

## Sample Thank-You Letter

May 29, 2002

413 Violet Way  
Encino, CA 91316

Mrs. Paulette Load  
Fund Manager  
Toro Investments  
300 Oak Street  
Los Angeles, CA 91320

Dear Mrs. Load:

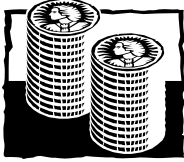
Thank you for your courtesy and the generous amount of time you gave to our meeting yesterday. Your explanation of the roles played by Financial Analysts in your company was very informative. As the interview progressed, I became more and more energized discussing the challenges faced by Toro Investments and relating how my experiences would enable me to meet those challenges.

After meeting with you, I noticed in speaking with the receptionist that Microsoft Office is your standard company software. I am fully proficient in each of the tools in the Office suite and thought you would want to know this.

Again, thank you for the pleasant and informative interview. Please advise if there is any further information you require regarding my application materials. I look forward to hearing from you. It would be a pleasure to work for you and Toro Investments.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Hardy  
(818) 386-1414



## SALARY NEGOTIATING TIPS

### Preparing for Negotiations

Before you actually begin the negotiation process, you need to do your homework and collect information about salary ranges, the organization's compensation practices and nonmonetary benefits, and the felt need to fill the position. Answering the following questions will provide you with good insight about the amount the employer is likely to offer:

- What is the salary range or pay band for the position?\*
- What is the starting salary range for the position?\*
- Does the organization ever pay higher than the starting salary range? If so, for what reasons?\*
- What is the average salary increase for the position? How often are increases given?\*
- How does the salary range compare to market value (i.e., what do other organizations pay)?
- How long has the position been open?\*
- What is the reputation of the organization with respect to salaries in general?
- What is included in the benefits package?

\* Appropriate questions for a first interview as long as the interviewer initiates a discussion about salary. Otherwise, save these questions for when you talk with a Human Resources staff member.

Once you have an idea for how much the organization is likely to offer, you need to determine the other side of the equation - the minimum amount you are willing to accept. This is obviously a subjective process as financial need will vary from individual to individual.

Consider using the following resources as you prepare for the salary negotiation process:  
*Relocation Salary Calculator* (<http://www.jobweb.org/catapult/cities.htm>) - Good tool for considering offers that involve moving to another state or country; calculates the cost of living differentials

*College Career Services Office* - Many of these offices compile information about employers, especially those that participate in on-campus interviews. Additionally, some offices collect statistics about their graduates' starting salaries.

*Library Reference Materials* - Many libraries subscribe to the salary surveys that are published annually. These include America Salaries & Wages Survey published by Gale Research, Inc. and Area Wage Surveys published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### Responding During Negotiations

If you are put in the position of starting off the process by being asked to indicate the amount you want, respond with a figure slightly in excess of the minimum amount you believe will be offered. This will leave room for negotiating. When stating your salary request, provide a couple of reasons for why you believe you deserve that amount. These reasons might include:

- the amount of experience you would bring to the position
- specialized skills that you possess
- another employer is recruiting you and they have offered that amount

If the employer counters with an offer that is below the level of your request, ask for the rationale. You could say something like, *“That’s less than I was hoping for. Can you share with me some of your thinking behind this amount.”* When the rationale for the lower offer seems somewhat weak, and the employer’s tone doesn’t suggest a strong resolve, assume there is further room for negotiations. Either stick with your original request, if it’s not much higher than the counter offer, or suggest a compromise figure. The general guideline is to offer a compromise figure that is half way between the two amounts. For instance, if you asked for \$30,000 and they countered with \$28,000, the compromise figure would be \$29,000.

When the rationale provided by the employer seems fairly solid and the tone suggests a strong resolve to go no higher than the counter offer amount, it is probably unwise to attempt to negotiate for a higher salary if you truly want the position. Keep in mind that a few companies have rigid “first offer is last offer” policies, and most companies have tighter entry level salary policies since the skill sets at this level are easier to define and the candidate pool is usually large. If you find yourself in this situation, though, you may want to try and negotiate the non-monetaries as employers usually have more flexibility in this area. For instance, you may ask for 10 days of vacation if 7 days is the standard for the first year of employment.

If the employer starts off the process by stating an offer that is truly unacceptable, you must communicate this while keeping your outlook for resolution positive. For instance, you could say something like, *“I am very interested in working for this company; however, at this point I am not able to accept the offer because \_\_\_\_.* (State specifically what is lacking in the offer, but be succinct. Is it the amount? Insurance coverage? Business travel requirements?) *If you were able to \_\_\_\_ (Give a proposed solution), I would be happy to accept the position. Are you in the position to meet my request? One needs to tread carefully when using this strategy as such negotiation could put the offer at risk.*

# INTERVIEW FORMATS

## On Site Interviews

The on site interview is usually an entire day, and you will interview with several different people. The employer, through the multiple interviews that occur during your visit, gains a greater understanding of who you are and how you interact with numerous potential co-workers and supervisors. You get firsthand exposure to company's work environment and corporate culture -- and prospective co-workers. The company/organization may also use this as an opportunity to show you the city in order to help you decide if you would like to live there. Always confirm travel and hotel arrangement with the employer before the interview and clearly understand who is paying for what. Generally, the recruiter will make the arrangement and cover travel expenses connected with the interview. Save all your receipts and submit them to the employer promptly with your thank-you letter (if the employer agreed to pay the costs of the interview).

As you prepare for on site interview, expect longer, more in-depth interviews with many people. You will have more time to ask questions, so come prepared. You now need to become even more of an expert about the company. Spend time researching the company by examining the company's annual reports, company Websites, and external sources of information. Expect to interview with your possible supervisor, the interview will be centered around job responsibilities. The interview with the vice presidents will be more company oriented and focused on your long-term career goals. Finally, you may also interview with recent graduates, this interview may be more casual over a meal. Remember this is still an interview. Many job offers have been lost because candidates were too relaxed with their peers. Remember to thank each of them for their time at the end of the interview and write each a thank you letter.

## Panel Interview

This type of interview is becoming very popular, especially if the organization has a strong team approach, group decision-making, and wants to involve several key executives in the hiring process. Questions will be asked continuously from all different angles, which may make it more difficult to concentrate on the interviewers and read their reactions to responses, as opposed to a one-on-one interview. When you are talking to the panel, remember that you are talking to all of them and not just the person who posed a particular question.

Panel interviews, if properly conducted, tend to be more reliable and job-related because panel members are accountable to each other. They are aware that they

are being observed by other panel members and questions, therefore, tend to be more to the point with personal biases reduced

- Most interviews follow a similar format, although they will vary depending on the selection panel.
- The interview usually lasts somewhere between 30 and 45 minutes.
- The panel will have prepared questions to ask you. For public sector positions they are based on the selection criteria for the position. They are required to ask similar questions of each applicant they interview to ensure that all applicants have a similar opportunity to present themselves.
- Panel members will usually take it in turns to ask questions.
- Generally the panel will ask you questions first and then give you an opportunity to ask questions at the end.
- Usually the panel members will take notes to help them recall details about you when making their decision. Don't be put off by this and do not try to read what they are writing. It will not assist you in the interview and can distract you.

### **Group interview**

A group interview is usually designed to uncover the leadership potential of prospective managers and employees who will be dealing with the public. The front-runner candidates are gathered together in an informal, discussion-type interview. A subject is introduced and the interviewer will start off the discussion. The goal of the group interview is to see how you interact with others and how you use your knowledge and reasoning to empower others. If you do well in the group interview, you can expect to be asked back for a more extensive interview.

### **On-Campus Interviews (Indiana University)**

On-campus interviews are conducted through an on-campus recruiting program of a career services office. Most on-campus interviews are screening interviews. The scheduling of on-campus interviews continues to serve as one preferred method of recruitment for many organizations; however, not all organizations find it worthwhile to recruit in this manner. Organizations that do not hire large quantities of college graduates, that have limited financial resources to support such endeavors, or that have evolved recruiting capabilities typically do not schedule on-campus interviews. Usually, government, media, and social service organizations fit into this category.

Organizations that do a lot of hiring or look for trainable employees with broad skill sets are more likely to conduct on-campus interviews. Such opportunities are generally in the areas of technology, sales, consulting, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, service, and management.

Numerous organizations view on-campus interviewing as an efficient way to gain access to talented candidates. This efficiency of recruiting is attractive to organizations, which often have a hard time finding qualified candidates through traditional advertising.

As a job seeker participating in on-campus interviews, the best thing to remember is that the recruiters have come to campus for the sole purpose of finding you. Therefore, if your



career services office offers an on-campus recruiting program, you should take advantage of this service while in school. This approach is convenient, inexpensive, and less nerve-racking because it is on your "home turf."

### **Job Fair Interviews (Indiana University)**

Job fairs are designed to create connections between employers and job seekers. While the design and focus of such events varies, the basic approach is usually the same. Recruiters staff tables or booths, provide information about their organizations, and accept resumes. Some recruiters may even choose to conduct screening interviews during a job fair.

When attending a job fair, be ready to explain why you are interested in the organization and what you hope to achieve at the event. This suggests that, prior to the job fair, you will want to identify participating employers and research organizations of interest to you. To make the most of the opportunity, rank order those organizations with whom you want most to interact; then, make sure you speak to the corresponding recruiters prior to leaving the job fair. Remember to bring plenty of copies of your resume to the event as well.

As with on-campus interviews, recruiters who attend job fairs made the decision to attend because they want to interact with students and identify qualified candidates. You will want to develop an "approach" when attending job fairs. When contemplating your approach, consider the following suggestions:

- Approach each booth confidently. Start with a firm handshake, a smile, and an introduction.
- Make a few inquiries about the organization. Be ready to make connections between the recruiters' answers and your skills, knowledge, and experience.
- Collect literature on the organization and position descriptions as well as ask for the recruiter's business card.
- The key to job fair success includes readiness to connect with employers of interest, quality interactions with recruiters, and follow up after the job fair.

Because each recruiter will interact with scores of students during the day, it is important for you to make a good impression; then, put yourself back in front of the recruiter after the job fair is over. Do this by securing an interview, by sending a letter reiterating your interest, or by calling the recruiter to request a meeting.

### **Videoconference Interview:**

Videoconference enabled interviews are becoming increasingly common as companies try to reduce costs associated with recruitment. Videoconferencing is often used as a preliminary pre-employment interview whereby professional recruiters meet with a group of candidates to better match the position to the candidates. Basically

- Anyone anywhere in the world can perform videoconferencing with the use of a microphone, camera, and compatible software. This type of interviewing is gaining in popularity as technology improves. It will only be a matter of time before you sit in your own home or office and interview around the world. The future of interviewing is here. Be prepared.

Preparation played a major role:

- Look at the camera full-face, as though you were presenting the news. Talk to the camera as you would any person interviewing you -- be conversational, maintain eye contact and smile.
- Speak naturally, the microphones will pick up your audio without you having to raise your voice
- Speak up if you're experiencing any difficulty with sound, delays or picture. This is not a time to suffer in silence. It will not be held against you if the technology is not working in your favor.
- Dress conservatively in solid colors. Keep distractions like jewelry to a minimum. Choose soft, neutral shades rather than black and white, which are too extreme on camera. Various shades of blue work well. Watch TV presenters and newscasters for other ideas about camera-ready clothes.
- Keep your movements limited. Hand gestures will be magnified on the screen. While arms waving about can be distracting, you don't want to look stiff either. Use small, smooth movements when gesturing.
- At the same time, forget about the camera and the technology. Focus on your purpose and presentation. You want the attention and concentration to be on you and what you are saying. Image and voice is all you have to make yourself interesting and stand out.

There are some disadvantages to interviewing via videoconference.

- For one, there is a lag as the data is compressed and sent from one location to another. This means there is a silence while you sit and wait for a response from the other end. You can take this to your advantage, because you could actually watch the interviewers while their answers were received. The trick, which will become obvious, is not to step on the other person's words. Allow for the delay.
- Videoconferencing is not a substitute for a face-to-face interview, and a personal meeting would always be the first preference. But the advantages sometimes outweigh the disadvantages. This technology saves time, money and allows several locations to connect at once, in spite of major time differences.