

For most people, interviewing is the biggest challenge in the job search process. There is no way to predict exactly what will happen throughout the course of the interview, but you can do several things to prepare and make the most out of the opportunity to interview!

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Employers use a variety of different interviewing methods, and human resources policies typically dictate the interview process for each job opening. This can be confusing if you have several interviews at different companies and each uses a different process. Here are two types of interviews you may encounter:

SCREENING INTERVIEWS: The main goal of the screening interview is to narrow the pool of candidates for a position. These interviews may be done over the phone, by teleconference, at a career fair, or during on-campus interviews. They are typically 30 minutes or less. Recruiters generally just want to get to know the basics about you and why you are interested in that company and position. Even though these are not as long as selection interviews, they still require preparation (if possible) in order to sell your skills effectively.

SELECTION INTERVIEWS: Selection interviews are usually longer and more thorough. These will most likely take place on site. They can vary in length from a few hours to a full day or two and often incorporate more than one person. A meal may be included as well. Your interview starts from the time you arrive on site or get picked up at the airport and does not end until you are on your way back home. Remember to be courteous and pleasant to everyone you encounter no matter what their position is at the company.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

To ace an interview, preparation is key. Preparation not only includes practicing your responses to typical interview questions but also figuring out the details of the day.

- Start by reviewing information on the company. What makes them different from other companies? What are they proud of?
- Review the job description. Print it off to take with you to the interview.
- If you have a list of the interviewers, try to read their biographies or learn more about what they do in order to prepare specific questions for each person.
- Prepare a list of questions for the interviewers. They will ask if you have any questions for them and you do not want to say “no”! Avoid asking about salary or benefits at the time of the first interview.
- Pack several clean copies of your résumé on résumé paper.
- Bring along a folder, notepad, or padfolio in case you want to take notes.
- Write down the name of your contact person and his or her phone number in case of emergency.
- Map your route to the interview location, and, if possible, practice driving there. Allow plenty of travel time in case of road construction or traffic congestion. Ask ahead of time where you should park, and take some cash in case you need to pay for parking.

PRACTICE INTERVIEWING

The Career Center offers mock interviews for those who would like to practice their interviewing skills. Students have the option of recording the interview using a webcam and keeping a copy of their mock interview to review their mannerisms, tone of voice, and initial answers. To make the interview as realistic as possible, the Career Center staff will attempt to ask you general questions as well as questions related to the type of job you are applying for. Please plan on bringing a job description and your résumé with you to your mock interview.

If you prefer to practice on your own, you might try a few strategies to find what works for you best. You can write out answers to interview questions to give you an idea of what you will say. Please do not memorize these answers. You still want to be able to talk naturally during the interview and do not want to sound too rehearsed. You could practice with a friend or family member. You could videotape yourself. Sometimes answering questions in front of a mirror helps as well.

Remember that body language is important also. A strong handshake is part of that vital first impression. Practice making eye contact and altering your mannerisms if those are common problems for you. You may need to practice smiling if you're not a big smiler or get really nervous in interviews.

INTERVIEW ATTIRE

Select a professional, appropriate outfit such as a tailored suit or pressed pants/skirt with a collared, button-down shirt. Depending on your industry and interview location, something less formal may be appropriate, but remember to look your best. It is better to be over-dressed than under-dressed for this occasion. Accessorize appropriately and keep accessories simple. You should not look like you are ready for a night out on the town. Avoid strong perfumes and colognes. Your scent should leave the room with you. Also, cover any visible tattoos.

Make sure your shoes are comfortable. Consider packing another pair of shoes if an extensive walking tour is involved. If you are having an interview on site at a construction zone or lab, make sure you wear close-toed shoes.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Be prepared to start the interview by answering the question "Tell me about yourself" or something similar. This can be a great opportunity to use your 30-second commercial. You can refer to the Career Center's handout on the 30-second commercial for more information. Answer the questions thoroughly but don't be excessive. Ask for clarification if you are not sure what was asked. It is better to answer the question that was asked than to talk in circles trying to come up with something.

Give examples from your résumé and past experience whenever possible, as long as they are work-related. You can pull examples from class projects, volunteer work, or campus involvement in addition to workplace examples. It is better not to reference family and friends during the interview. The following questions are a sampling of standard interview questions that you may be asked regardless of your industry. Keep in mind that they may be phrased differently depending on the organization and interviewer.

- Why did you choose to major in _____?
- What interests you about this type of position? Why did you decide to pursue this career?
- Why do you want to work here/attend school here? What do you know about our company/university?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years? **Focus on employment, not personal goals (family).**
- What would your former supervisors say about you? **Ask them for feedback before your interview.**
- What are three of your strengths and three of your weaknesses? **Have at least three prepared for each. Give examples of how you have shown the strengths and how you can improve upon your weaknesses.**

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

When employers use behavioral interviewing, they are looking for you to provide them with examples from the past that you can apply to the future. They will often phrase these as "tell me about a time when" or "give me an example of." It is important to formulate a well-rounded answer to these questions by telling the employer about the situation, task, action, and result (STAR). What was the situation (class project, conflict)? What tasks were you asked to perform or how did you delegate? What action did you take to resolve or improve it? What was the result? Brainstorm how you might answer some of the questions on the next page.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when you worked with someone who was different from you.
- Give me an example of how you handle conflict.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation and had to demonstrate your coping skills.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work with a group in order to complete a project.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use a lot of patience when working with others.
- Tell me about a work or volunteer experience that you think had the most positive influence on you.
- Tell me about a time when the directions from a supervisor or instructor were unclear and how you handled it.
- Give me an example of something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of a time when you showed initiative and took the lead on something.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Arrive ten minutes early and treat everyone you interact with respectfully. If there is time, go to the restroom, check your appearance, and take a few deep breaths. Then review your materials while you wait. Smile and greet everyone with a firm handshake. Make eye contact when you are introduced.

Be yourself! Employers want to get to know the best of you and your abilities. Make good eye contact. Focus on the responses you prepared without sounding rehearsed. Allow the conversation to flow, and be prepared for a few moments of awkward silence. Ask questions and listen actively. Learn what you can about the position and the company. You are interviewing them as well. Collect business cards from everyone you meet or write down their names for follow-up. After the interview is complete, ask about the timeline for following up. This is not the time to bring up salary negotiations or benefits.

After the interview is finished, take some time to reflect on what went well and what you can improve upon. Do not beat yourself up if the interview did not go perfectly. Learn from the experience and take those lessons to the next interview. Just getting an interview is a compliment in itself!

INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

THANK YOU LETTERS

Always send a thank you letter to everyone you meet the day of the interview. Collect business cards or record the names of the people you meet on a sheet of paper. Thank-you letters can be e-mails, business letters, or handwritten notes but should be composed using proper headings and letter format. They should be sent within 24 hours of the interview. If you choose to handwrite a thank you letter, make sure it is on a professional looking note card. In this letter, express appreciation for the opportunity, reiterate your interest in the position, and restate something interesting that you learned from each person. This is an opportunity to highlight your skills and further sell yourself one last time. Also, if there is something you did not have the opportunity to talk about during the interview, this is a good time to share it.

“Thank you for talking with me last Friday about the possibility of a laboratory assistant position with 123 Company. I was excited about the interview but became even more enthusiastic about the position when you mentioned that research about the H1N1 flu would be part of the responsibilities of the position. As you may recall, I enjoy conducting experiments and finding alternative solutions to problems as I have done previously at my position with the Chemistry department at Missouri State University. I have had additional experience at St. John’s Hospital where I had the opportunity to apply the laboratory testing methods and research skills in a medical setting. I look forward to hearing from you by May 1, as you mentioned. Please let me know if you have any additional questions in the meantime. Thank you again for your time and consideration.”

POST-INTERVIEW CONTACT

What do you do if employers don't contact you by the date they say they will in order to let you know if you have received another interview or the position? Take a deep breath and follow up appropriately. If they say they will contact you by Friday and you don't hear anything, give them a few more days. You never know what has happened on their end that may have held up the process. If several days pass, then it is appropriate to call them and *politely* state your name, the position you applied for, and when you interviewed and request to know where they are in their decision regarding that position. One phone call or e-mail is sufficient.

"Hello, Mr. Jones. This is Anita Job calling. I interviewed for the laboratory assistant position with your lab on Thursday, April 4. At this time I was told that I would hear a decision regarding the position by May 1. Because I have not received any information since the date of the interview I was hoping you could give me an idea of where you are in your decision-making process. I would like to express my continued interest in the position, and I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you."
