



INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Although these suggestions are general and widely applicable, there are exceptions to every rule. Whether you are new to interviewing or are an experienced interviewee, we highly recommend and welcome you to visit the Career Center for a consultation and critique with one of our staff members.

The purpose of an interview is to convince the employer/interviewer that you can make a contribution to their organization. The interview gives you a chance to prove to a potential employer that you are capable, competent and qualified. In order to most effectively market your skills, it is important that you learn as much as you can about interviewing. There are three key steps to planning for the interview including understanding what's involved in **preparation** (before the interview), **presentation** (during the interview) and **protocol** (after the interview).

PREPARATION – BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Know Yourself – Are you ready to communicate who you are to an employer? Do you know your strengths, values, interests, skills, accomplishments, and goals? Utilize the Career Center's self assessment resources to help in organizing your thoughts. You can meet one-on-one with a counselor for an interpretation of The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and/or STRONG Interest Inventory. FOCUS (a computerized career guidance system) located at <http://www.unca.edu/career/focus.html> is another helpful self-assessment resource.

Rehearse Your Lines – Practice sample questions. SHOW, don't tell. Think of "success stories" to ILLUSTRATE qualities such as leadership, initiative, group accomplishments, integrity, etc. Come up with a 30 second commercial for yourself and make it relevant to the job.

Prepare Your Materials – Fine tune your resume, be sure your references are up-to-date and be sure to take other relevant materials such as transcripts or a portfolio with work samples.

Research the Employer – Do you know the company's product/service? number of employees? new goals/initiatives? headquarters location? competitors? international operations? Resources for finding the answers include: website information (mission, company profile, etc.), annual report/newsletter, networking, talk with faculty, alumni and other employees.

Prepare Your Attire – Dress professionally and conservatively. Wear a business suit – black, gray, navy or other neutral tones. Avoid distracting jewelry and fragrances. Keep hair out of your face. Use a portfolio to carry extra copies of your resume, etc.

PRESENTATION – DURING THE INTERVIEW

Be assertive. Show energy and enthusiasm for the position; this is your sales pitch.

Answer the questions. Listen carefully and answer the question asked; it is better to pause to gather your thoughts than to ramble. Use the S-T-A-R formula for formulating your answers to behavioral-based questions.

S-T-A-R (Situation – Task – Action – Result)

- Know 3-5 skills, 1-2 accomplishments
- Provide specific examples of how your past experiences relate to this position.

SAMPLE QUESTION: Describe a work-related problem and how you resolved it.

SITUATION: Advertising revenue for school newspaper was falling.

TASK: I was assigned the task of increasing revenues.

ACTION: I designed a new promotional packet to send with our basic rate information comparing the cost-effectiveness of advertising in our paper versus other available media outlets. I also developed a training program to help the account representatives develop competitive sales strategies.

RESULT: We signed contracts with 15 new clients in 3 weeks and increased overall revenue by 20%.

Ask questions. The best interviews should feel conversational in nature; always have questions prepared to ask the employer.

Sample Questions to ask the Employer

- In what directions do you see your organization going in the near future?
- What are some current challenges here?
- What do you like most about your work here?
- What makes a successful employee in your organization?
- What's a normal work week like?
- Is there other information I can provide you?
- Please tell me about your experiences with this organization.
- How would I be evaluated? Are there training or professional development opportunities?
- When will your hiring decisions and offers be made?

PROTOCOL – AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Send a thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview. The ideal method of sending your thanks is a handwritten thank you on a professional card or stationary. If you are not comfortable with your handwriting, choosing to type a professional letter is also a preferred method. Only choose to e-mail your thanks to an employer if you know they are making a very quick decision. If you choose to email the thank you, be sure to send the letter as an attachment to the email. In addition, follow up with a hard copy immediately. Visit the Career Center for sample thank you letters.

Evaluate and learn from your experience. Write down key information that was said during the interview. This can be helpful in your evaluation and also in writing your thank you letter.

COMMON INTERVIEW MISTAKES

- Limp handshake, no eye contact.
- Lack of supporting examples.
- Unwillingness or inability to discuss weaknesses (Be honest – if the interviewer asks, answer, but put a positive spin on the negative).
- Condemnation of past employers.
- Overemphasis on money (let the interviewer bring up the issue of salary).
- Poor personal appearance.
- Fidgeting or nervous habits.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Interview questions must all be job and experience related. If questions come up that are illegal or improper, such as questions about your family plans then you need to consider your options:

- *Refuse to answer* - this can indicate to the interviewer that you believe the question is improper.
- *Answer the question* - you decide to swallow your pride and privacy.
- Answer the legitimate question and ignore the illegal or improper questions.
- *Ask a question* instead of answering the improper question. Ask for clarification.

There are many resources on the internet with sample illegal questions. You can search on sites such as www.careerexplorer.net, www.collegegrad.com and www.jobweb.com for more ideas on how to handle illegal questions.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Openers: Assessing Interest

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- What is important to you in a company?
- Tell me about your ideal job.
- What attracts you to this position/company?
- What do you know about our organization?

Assessing Experience and Qualifications

- What experiences do you have that will help you be successful in this position?
- Which college subjects did you like most/least? Why?
- Describe your most significant accomplishment and how it will relate to your future work in this position.
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What do you think are the most important characteristics and abilities for a person to be successful? How would you rate yourself on these?
- What was the last major problem you were confronted with? What action did you take to resolve it?
- If I were to contact your previous supervisors, what would they say are your strengths and weaknesses? Abilities as a leader?
- How do you work under pressure?
- What things frustrate you the most and how do you cope with them?

Behavioral Interview Questions: Assessing Work Style

- Give me an example of a task that required you to use research / fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments, based on examples from your previous experience.
- Give an example of a time when you had to come to a quick decision.
- Tell me about a job that required you to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get it done.
- Describe the most difficult decision you've had to make and how you arrived at your decision.
- When was the last time you broke the rules / thought outside the box and how did you do it?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

Closers: Assessing Motivation

- Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years?
- What are your plans for continued study/degrees?
- What kind of salary do you expect if you are hired? In 3-5 years?
- What questions do you have for us? (*Lack of questions implies lack of interest.*)
- Why should we hire you? What can you do for us that someone else can't?