

HOW TO INTERVIEW

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THE BEGINNING OF YOUR INTERVIEW STORY:

- You saw a great job or internship advertised.
- You made sure that you had a professional voice mail message on your phone.
- You sent your resume with a cover letter that directly responded to the job advertisement.

NEXT, you received a phone call inviting you to an interview.

- Before you answered the call from this unknown number, you made sure that you were in a good place for a phone interview (or else you let the call go to voice mail).
- You had been keeping track of all the jobs you applied to, so it was easy to remember the job they were talking about, even though it was two months since you applied.
- After confirming your interest and writing down the details (time, location, contact information), you ASKED THESE QUESTIONS:

-How much time should I plan for the interviews?

-Can you tell me who I will interview with? (get correct spellings, and ask for titles)

WELL DONE. NOW you're ready to prepare for the interview.

Three parts of the Interview Process

1. Preparation before the Interview
2. The interview itself
3. Follow-up after the interview

Each of these parts is essential.

This can be scary. You've done all the right things so far, but the interview is different. You can be the best person for the job, but if you don't make a good impression in the interview, you can lose your chance at the position.

If you think you're just going to go in there and have a casual conversation with the interviewer, you're likely to fail. You need to prepare for the interview by planning a strategy.

THE INTERVIEW

The introduction

It's helpful if you can know the interviewer's name, and how to pronounce it, prior to the interview. When meeting this person for the first time, make eye contact with the interviewer and say, "Good morning, Ms. Steele", or "Good afternoon, Mr. Brandt".

Shake hands with a firm grip, but not one that crushes bones. You are expected to shake the recruiter's hand upon being introduced; don't be afraid to extend your hand first. Palms sweating? Unobtrusively wipe them first (or apply Drysol to your palms the night before).

Strategy

Two guidelines are (1) Be yourself, and (2) Think of the interview as both a selling *and* a matching process. You and the employer are trying to determine whether you are a good match for each other. You both want to make the best decision. You must know yourself well enough to give the employer a good idea of who you are and what you are like. The employer must know the company and work environment well enough to give you a good idea of what it is like to work there.

Your roles change during the process. In the interviews, you are selling yourself to the employers. When they are ready to make an offer to you (usually not until you've been invited back for a second interview), the tables turn; they are trying to sell the position to you. This is why you should defer discussion of salary and benefits until you are offered the position. It is at this point that you can actually negotiate from a position of strength.

Length of time

Interviews come in all lengths of time. They can range from fifteen minutes to a couple of hours. The most common for you will probably be 30 minute interviews. You may also have several of these interviews in a row, within one day of interviewing. This is especially true if you have Amade it@through the screening interview and have been invited back for more in-depth interviewing.

A typical structure is:

FIVE minutes - Small talk.

FIFTEEN minutes - A discussion of your background and credentials as they relate to the employer's needs. In the screening interview, the employer might go into detail about their organization.

FIVE minutes - You ask questions.

FIVE minutes - Conclusion of interview.

The first few minutes

First impressions ARE the most important, and these first few minutes (or seconds) could be crucial for you. Most interviewers make an immediate judgment about you. Stand up straight, smile, think things through before you say them, and be yourself. Relax if you can, but don't let your guard down.

The interviewer usually wants to put you at ease. He or she will get better information from you if you are not tense. It is during this period of time that the interviewer may ask some simple questions about your background, or comment on a common interest that you have listed on your resume. Even though small talk seems relaxed, it has a definite purpose. They may be judging how well you communicate on an informal basis. This means you must do more than smile and nod.

The time in the middle

This is the time for questions, both from the interviewer and from you. Take a look at the next section for some of the ways in which questions might be asked.

The last few minutes

This is usually an opportunity for you to say anything or ask anything that you were unable to address earlier in the interview. If you think that you screwed up, this is the time to redeem yourself. If the conversation was dominated by the interviewer and you were unable to talk about yourself, or ask some questions, this is a good time to do that.

Before you leave the interview, you must remember to ask: "What is the next step in this process?" If you do not ask this question, you will probably wait a week and then start to call friends and ask for their advice on whether or not you should call the company and inquire about your status. You can avoid all of that by asking the question, and then following up. For instance, if the response is, "We'll call you within two weeks," you can ask, "If I don't hear from you within two weeks, may I call?" Press them *gently* for specific information that will guide the way in which you should act.

If you know that you really want the job, and you feel that you are a great candidate for the position, you can say so! Say something like, "I am very interested in this position, and I'm confident that I would do a great job." [Be specific here...why are you so sure? Briefly name two or three key qualifications] Then say, "I hope that you offer the position to me." [If this seems too bold, you can instead say, "I hope that you strongly consider me."] Shake the recruiter's hand and thank him or her for considering you.

If you *clearly* have *no* interest in the position, thank the interviewer, and explain that after learning more about the job, you realize that it isn't a good match. Interviewers will appreciate that you're not going to waste their time by pretending to be interested in the position.

Never leave the interview without knowing the recruiter's name (including correct spelling), title and address. *Ask for a business card!* This information will be invaluable when you begin your correspondence with the organization.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are a number of different interview styles, and you should be prepared for any of them, even though some are rare. Never be caught off-guard.

The structured interview

The interviewer asks questions from a sheet of paper, and writes responses in spaces provided on the sheet.

If the interviewer is taking questions from a sheet of paper, chances are you will have prepared for similar questions. It is important that your answers are complete, yet concise; no more than one or two minutes each. This interviewer needs to complete a series of specific questions, and you should try to make that as easy as possible.

Another kind of structured interview is *The Behavioral Interview*. In this type, the interviewer asks for specific situations in which a desired characteristic or behavior was exhibited. He or she is using past behaviors to predict future behavior/performance on the job. For example, if the job for which you are interviewing requires that you work without supervision, you may be asked to relate an experience in which you were given a project or task to complete without any direct guidance from a supervisor. If the interviewer wants to know how you handle adversity, you may be asked for an experience in which you had to explain something to someone and failed in your first attempt.

The non-structured interview

This occurs when the interviewer knows what information is needed, in general, and lets your responses take them in the direction of the questions that they need to ask. Many interviewers conduct these because they can learn much more about you from the way that you respond in a more informal interviewing situation than from your responses to overused interview questions.

You can prepare for this type of interview by carefully thinking through what kind of person you are, how you react in different circumstances, what kinds of qualities you are looking for in a job, and what you think they are looking for in an employee. If you don't know what *specific* qualities you are hoping to find in the perfect job match, it's okay to say that you are looking for a job in which you can grow and learn about a particular field while contributing to the organization. Be honest without disqualifying yourself.

The stress interviews

There are many kinds of stress questions and interviews. I've provided two examples here. For a comprehensive list of stress questions, see [Knock 'Em Dead](#), by Martin Yate.

Example 1: You have 30 minutes. Tell me why I should hire you.

The purpose of this type of question is to see how you react to stress, not whether you can talk about yourself for 30 minutes. You should tell briefly (less than five minutes) why you are appropriate for the job. After this, change the focus of the interview. "There are a few questions that I'd like to ask you" is a good way to change it. Refer to your sheet of questions, and begin a dialogue with the interviewer.

ASKING QUESTIONS DURING INTERVIEW

When you're asked "what questions do you have for me?", don't say "I don't have any questions", and don't say, "you've answered all my questions."

MAKE SURE that you have questions to ask. The best questions are developed from your own interest and curiosity about the organization, and from research you have conducted (see page 2).

Always be prepared to ask the interviewer questions.
It tells them that you are genuinely interested.

Questions you may want to ask:

What are the specific responsibilities of the job?

Who would I report to, and what is his/her title?

How does the department fit into the company structure--its purpose, its budget, the other departments with which it works?

What type of formal or informal training is given?

Would I be working on my own or as a member of a team?

Will I have an opportunity to meet current employees?

Would skills I learn on this job prepare me for higher-level positions within the company/organization?

How does this division/unit/department contribute to the vision of the company/organization?

Does the company/organization/department have specific goals for the upcoming year? *[If yes]:* What aspects of this position contribute to the accomplishment of those goals?

How much travel, if any, is involved?

Have there been any recent organizational changes?

How long has the position been open?

What have the predecessors in this job moved on to?

What does a successful employee "look like" here?

How is job performance measured?

Do you have a policy/procedure manual, and would it be possible for me to review it?

What type of support do you provide for professional development?

FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Within **one day**, send a thank you letter or email to the person who interviewed you (79% of employers in our recent survey indicated that an email thank-you is okay). If two people interviewed you, send two *different* letters/emails. (see examples on next two pages). If you send an email, you don't need to use the business letter format. Also, the text should be in the body of the email (not an attachment).

If several people interviewed you, you can generally send one thank-you to the main person who is supervising the selection process. Thank this person for the interview and for the other interviews, and ask him/her to extend your appreciation to the other interviewers.

This is a good format:

Your Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Interviewer's Name
Title
Company
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

Thank him/her for the interview. Mention the position for which you interviewed and the date of the interview.

Reinforce your interest in the position if you are still interested or inform them that you are no longer interested, if that is the case. It is a good idea to respond in either situation. If possible, mention something significant that you learned or discussed in the interview. You may add any additional information you wish in order to clarify pertinent aspects of your resume.

Let the interviewer know that if they need any additional information, they can contact you by phone or email. (List your contact information).

Sincerely,

(Your signed name)

Your typed name

INTERVIEW PREPARATION SUMMARY

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Practice responses

- Prepare yourself for specific questions

Check your appearance

- Do you need a suit?
- Are your accessories and perfume/cologne distracting?
- Have you polished your shoes (or are they new?)
- Are you going to remove/cover any body piercing or tattoos?

Know how to act

- Use a firm handshake
- Use their name, if you can
- Maintain eye contact
- Eliminate nervous habits
- Sit up straight

Understand the different interview styles (reviewed in the booklet)

- Structured
- Unstructured
- Behavioral vs. Hypothetical
- Windbag
- Stress
- Other specific formats

Be aware of illegal questions

- Know how to respond:
 - What is the question they are really asking?
 - Can they explain how their question relates to the position?

Research the employer and the position

- Learn about them (check your needs/wants list) and compare to other employers
- Know why you are interested in this job and employer

INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES SUMMARY

AT THE INTERVIEW

Articulate your goals

- Know yourself & your professional goals, and why you want this job

Make a good verbal impression

- Sound like you care
- Speak clearly, confidently, and at a reasonable pace
- Train yourself out of using lazy language (e.g., “like”, “you know”)
- Don’t end statements as if they are questions; watch your intonation

Use examples to illustrate your points

- Showing is more powerful than telling (it creates mental pictures)
- Examples substantiate your claims

Know how to answer questions that you need to think about

- Repeat the question, or the core of the question, in order to buy extra time while you think silently about your response. You can also modify the question so you can answer it.
- Think through to the END of your response so you don’t “trail off” when you get there

Remain positive in all interview responses

- Previous employers/supervisors (never say anything negative about them)
- Failures (focus on what you *learned* from failures)
- Tell the *best* things about you

Know how to work with silence in the interview

- Be comfortable with *your* silence (see above)
- Learn strategies for responding to *their* silence (in a stress interview)

Ask questions

- Be ready with questions when they ask “what questions do *you* have?”
 - What are the two things you should NOT say?
- Ask about next steps in the process, and a timeline

Keep a list of points that you want to emphasize

- Refer to this at the end of the interview
- Summarize your degree of “fit” for the position, and if you’re really interested, tell them!

Understand negotiation power

- Know when you have power (have they offered you the position?), and when you do not. Don’t ask about salary or extra perks until you have an offer, or at least until you’ve established a mutual interest. This is probably after a second interview.

INTERVIEWING FOLLOW-UP SUMMARY

Take notes after the interview

- You are expected to remember what you discussed. Information from this interview might come up in a second interview with the organization. Do not trust your memory.

Send a thank you letter

- Do this within 24 hours
- Know what to do if you interview with more than one person!

Accepting an offer

- When you get the phone call (or return the call after listening to their message), say something positive, like, "I'm so glad to hear from you", or "This sounds like a great opportunity".
- Then ask for some time to think about it. You can say something like, "As you might imagine, I'd like to think about this for a couple of days. Can I call you back on Friday?"
- If an employer expects for you to accept right then on the phone, there might be cause for concern. Any reasonable employer will give you time.
- Ask questions about anything that you're unsure of. This is your time to negotiate; it's the time when you have influence!
- This is the one opportunity you will have to ask for more money. Do you want to ask? Talk with us about this if you have questions.

What if you're waiting for another offer?

- If you've already interviewed with another organization and you're waiting for a response (and you'd rather get an offer from **them**), it's okay to call your contact there. You would say something like, "I need your advice; I've received an offer from another organization, but I think that you're a better fit for me. Can you give me a sense of my candidacy for the Public Relations Assistant position?"
- Please do NOT accept an offer and then continue to interview with other organizations. For many reasons, this is a bad idea. Instead, if you have questions about how to proceed, please talk with one of the professional staff members in Career Services.

FIFTY-FIVE FAVORITE EMPLOYER QUESTIONS

1. What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives, when and why did you establish these goals, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next ten years?
3. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
4. What do you **really** want to do in life?
5. What are your long-range career objectives?
6. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
7. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
8. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
9. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
10. Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
11. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
12. How would you describe yourself?
13. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you would describe you?
14. What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
15. How has your college experience prepared you for a career?
16. Why should I hire you?
17. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful?
18. How do you determine or evaluate success?
19. What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
20. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
21. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
22. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
23. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
24. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
25. If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
26. Why did you select your college or university?
27. What led you to choose your field of major study?
28. What college subjects did you like most? Why?
29. What college subjects did you like least? Why?
30. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
31. What changes would you make in your college or university? Why?
32. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
33. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
34. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
35. In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
36. How do you work under pressure?
37. In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
38. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
39. Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
40. What do you know about our company?
41. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
42. Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
43. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
44. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
45. Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
46. Are you willing to travel?
47. Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
48. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our company is located?
49. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
50. What have you learned from your mistakes?
51. Tell me about yourself.
52. Why do you want to work in this field?
53. Give me an example of a problem you have solved.
54. Think of a time when you had to contact a stranger and persuade him/her to do something. What was the situation? What did you do? What happened?
55. Think of when someone was angry with you or there was conflict. What was the situation? What did you do? What were the results?

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