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CAREERS OFFICE



ACING THE INTERVIEW

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

An interview is a conversation between an employer and a candidate for both parties to learn more about each other for the purpose of filling a position within a company or organisation. You and the interviewer each have a need: you seek a job and the interviewer seeks the right person to fill the job.

If you are invited to an interview, chances are you have already been “prescreened” and meet all or most of the requirements the employer is looking for in a candidate. Typically, this prescreening has been done through an application process and/or resume review.

The interview is an opportunity for further screening. Through an interview both parties start to form impressions of whether a “fit” exists between your qualifications/personality and the organisation/position.



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RESUME

INTERVIEW

GET THE JOB!

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEWER SEEKING?

Three main areas employers typically look at in the selection process:

What can you do for us?

If hired, how can you contribute to the department and/or organisation differently from other interview candidates? This can be demonstrated through your educational background, prior experience, special skills and knowledge.

Why do you want to work with us?

An employer wants to make sure the candidate chosen has a solid understanding of the organisation, department and position. If not, chances are the individual will not be a good hire, which can lead to ineffectiveness, resignation or termination. All scenarios cost the employer resources, time and money.

As a candidate you need to state why you want to work in a particular industry, for a particular organisation and/or department. Also, you need to convey to that employer that you have a realistic picture of the job and how this industry/position fits within your short and long term goals.

What are you like once we've gotten to know you?

Employers are looking at areas such as your motivation, initiative, creativity, problem-solving abilities and team-work skills, and how these skills will continue once you are hired and become part of the organisation and department.

Also, an employer is looking for a good personality fit within the organisation and department.

Job Application

I am interested in applying for the sales representative position recently advertised in THE. The skills I have developed from my work experience and academic background support my candidacy for the announced position.

As you can see from my resume, the internship I had with QFB Corporation provided an opportunity for me to gain practical experience with account maintenance and cold-calling new accounts. In addition, I have worked as a waiter for the past four years, learning firsthand how to effectively deal with customers and their demands. I have been formally commended by management several times, being named "Employee of the Month."

I would very much like an opportunity to discuss your specific needs and my overall abilities regarding the announced position. You can reach me at (658)123-4567. Thank you for considering me for this position.

Sincerely,



TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF INTERVIEWING

Interviews are typically thought of as one of the most stressful aspects of the job search. It is natural, and expected, that you will be a little nervous for an interview. In fact, having some adrenaline is good: it means that you care, and it will keep you on your toes. The key, however, is not to reach a level of such anxiety and tension that it begins to have a negative impact on the interview.

The key to maintaining your nerves is preparedness. It is common to hear students say: "Interviews are hard because I don't know what they are going to ask me," or "I have no way to prepare." How many times have you gone into an interview and left thinking: "Why did I say that?", or "Why didn't I say that?".

The idea that you can't prepare for an interview is completely false! There is a great deal of work you can do prior to an interview that will make you much more competent in your answers and much more comfortable in your demeanour.

The saying "knowledge is power" rings particularly true for interviewing. The more you know about the interview process, the more comfortable you will feel, which will be reflected in your eloquence and professional demeanour.



TIME FOR

ACTION

GETTING STARTED – HOW TO PREPARE

Research How to Interview

Get assistance through the Careers Office. Attend an interview workshop, meet with a Career Consultant, and read material (such as this handout) on interview skills and preparation. Schedule a mock interview through the Careers Office and practice with friends, family and even in the mirror.

Self-Assessment

Conduct a careful self-assessment of yourself. Review your resume with a particular focus on experience related to the position at hand. Objectively evaluate your qualifications, skills, goals, interests and abilities, both inside and outside of the classroom, and think about how they contribute to the position for which you are being interviewed. Anticipate your weaknesses and decide how you will respond to any questions that arise in this territory.

Research the field and Employer

Learn all you can about the company and position for which you will be interviewed through the company's website and literature. Pay particular attention to annual reports and mission statements, as this can provide a direct "window" into the organisation. If you are finding it difficult to find information on the specific position, you can still be interviewed successfully if you have realistic and confident knowledge of your strengths and a thorough knowledge of the field. Informational interviews with alumni or professionals in the field are a great way to acquire information from on similar organisations.

Develop an Interview Strategy

Based on your self-assessment and research, identify the qualifications and criteria the company will look for in an “ideal” candidate. Develop a list of five “success stories;” instances in which you’ve been particularly effective and proud of your performance. You have no way of knowing exactly what questions you will be asked, but if you have five strong examples prepared, you’ll have them immediately available to draw upon in your answers. Additionally, find out who you will be interviewing with, for how long, and the anticipated format. This information will help you prepare by giving you a sense of the “flavour” of the interview.

A 30-minute interview with a human resources representative will have a completely different feel than a half-day interview with a departmental hiring manager, and requires different preparation.

Practice Commonly Asked Interview Questions

You have no way of knowing what specific questions you will be asked during an interview. However, there are certain questions that are asked in nearly every interview, such as:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in working with us?
- What do you know about us?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your short term/long term goals?
- Why are you the best candidate for the position?
- What questions do you have for us?

Prepare Your Interview Questions

Prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer, avoiding those that could be answered by your initial research. Demonstrate that you have done your homework on the company and the position (asking when the company was founded when it is clearly stated on its website is not a good question). You want to acquire information that will facilitate your own decision-making and demonstrate you can ask relevant and thoughtful questions.

Monday

Job interview!



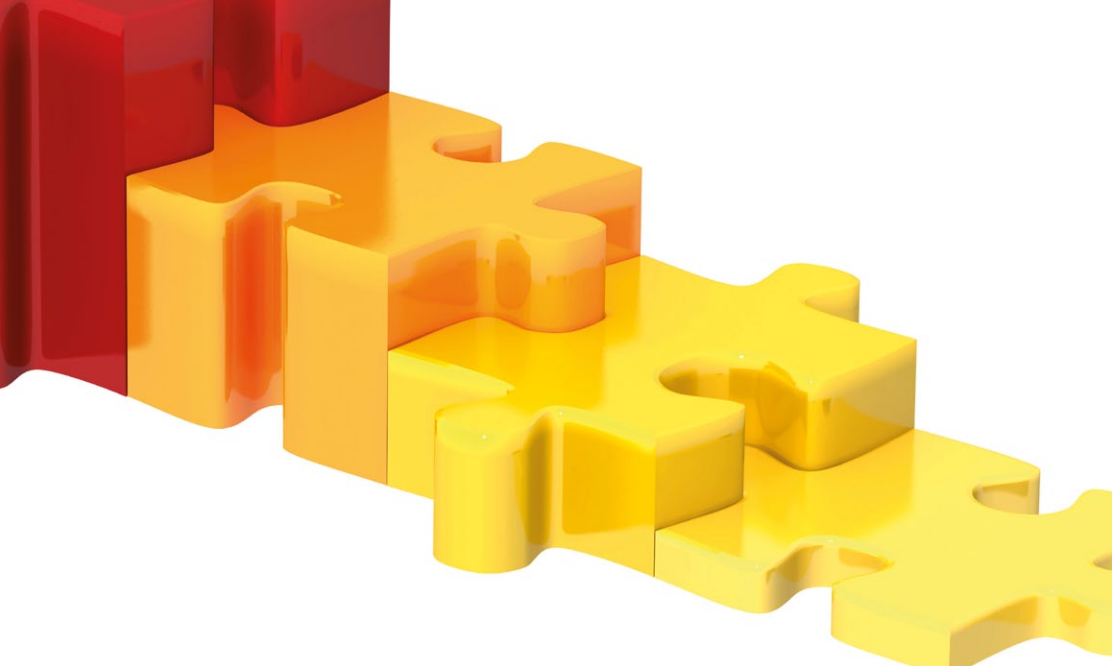
DAY OF INTERVIEW

Arrive about 15-20 minutes prior to your interview. You want to be prompt, but not too early. Camping out in the lobby for an hour doesn't make you look professional but instead shows a lack of scheduling ability. There is no excuse for being late to an interview; in fact, this is one of the most damaging things a candidate can do.

If you are unfamiliar with the interview location, locate the company, the building and specific office prior to the interview. Keep in mind traffic time, particularly if you are interviewing in a larger urban center. For example, if you checked out the location at 10 p.m. chances are it is going to take you much longer to reach your destination at 8 a.m. Also, keep in mind how long it will take to find appropriate parking and any parking details in advance (i.e., if you need a parking pass or special entrance to the facility).

Sometimes there are just "flukes" that happen that will make you late. A flat tire or accidents on the road are things you just can't plan for. If you are running late for a legitimate reason, immediately call to let the employer know the situation. Find out if he or she can wait for you, or if it is simply better to reschedule. It also bears mentioning that you should never cancel an interview, unless in the case of an extreme emergency. You may never get a second opportunity to interview, and certainly not get a second chance to make a first impression.

Have your clothing figured out in advance of the interview. Also, bring an extra copy of your resume and references in a professional portfolio; a notepad and pen/pencil; your list of questions to ask the interviewer; and any information you might need to fill out a job application. You may not need any of these "tools," but it's better to be over prepared.



STAGES OF A TYPICAL INTERVIEW

Each interview is unique; however, there is a general format that is commonly used, particularly for the first, formal interview.

Introduction

Typically, an interviewer will come to you, introduce her\himself, and walk you back to the interview room. First impressions will be made at this time. While only lasting a few seconds, your dress, eye contact and handshake will set the tone for the interview. Make good eye contact and have a firm handshake. An employer may ask you how parking was or comment on the weather. Engage in small talk during this period, but keep comments short; don't start a long and drawn out story.

Once you get into the interview room the interviewer will show you where to sit. If there are other people in the room, the interviewer will typically introduce them at this time. Say hello to everyone and, if possible, try to shake each one's hand depending on the seating arrangement.

The interviewer will then make a quick introduction of the interview process. If you have any questions, feel free to ask. For example, if you were not given any time duration, you can ask how long the interview is and approximately how many questions there are in order to gauge the amount of time you need to respond to each question.

Discussion of your Background, Education, Work Experience, Activities, Interests and Goals

This is the stage when a standard list of questions will be used for you to answer the interviewer(s). This is typically the longest stage of an interview.

Listen carefully to each question and answer directly. Don't be tempted to answer if you don't fully understand the question; it is always evident when a candidate doesn't understand the question and tries to make something up. Do not be afraid to ask for a restatement or clarification. If your mind blanks at that moment, politely ask if you can go back to that question later in the interview, or if you may have a few moments to think about the question. It is perfectly acceptable to pause for a moment before "launching" into a response.

Give concise answers. Provide specific and concrete examples rather than generalities. Don't be afraid of pauses. The silence of a pause can be very positive and powerful. Avoid filling what you may feel is an uncomfortable silence with "you know" or "uh."

Stay positive and emphasize your strengths. Interviews, by their very nature, should have a positive focus, even when you're asked to venture into "negative territory" (e.g., "What is your greatest weakness?"). Always strive to highlight the positive in a situation, or to communicate what you learned from a negative experience. Keep answers to "negative questions" brief, and elaborate on your answers to "positive questions" that ask you to talk about your skills and strengths.

Eye contact is important. However, avoid extreme behaviour like never looking at the interviewer or never looking away.

Do what feels natural in a professional conversation.

They may ask you for what salary level you are looking at. At this point, please avoid answering this question, but launch your own - what salary is envisaged for this position?

Discussion of the Position and Company

An interviewer might take time to discuss the position and the company in more detail than from the job description you received. This is a great time for you to put your two cents into the conversation and demonstrate your skills, knowledge and personality that demonstrates a "good fit."

Your Questions

At this time an interviewer will typically ask if you have any specific questions. Many times questions arise during earlier stages of the process; particularly in the discussion stage. Feel free to ask questions anytime during the interview; however, know that time has usually been allotted for you to ask questions at the end. A good candidate will ALWAYS have questions to ask. Your questions will show an interviewer you have done some research on the company and the position, and are serious about the job. This is not the time to ask questions about vacation time or benefits - your questions should demonstrate an earnest interest in the position (if offered the position, you will have a chance to discuss those details at that time). Write down your questions ahead of time and bring them into the interview. Always have more questions than needed since an employer will generally answer many of your questions during an interview. If nothing has been mentioned on salary issues, you may venture a question on what has been budgeted for this position.

Next Steps in the Interview Process

At this point the interview process is reaching its end. The interviewer will typically give you some type of time-table in terms of the interview schedule and hiring timeline. Will there be second interviews or will a decision be made from the initial interviews? Is the interview process finishing up or are you the first candidate to be interviewed?

These questions are very important, and if the interviewer does not provide this information, you have every right to ask. Do not leave the interview without an idea of when a decision will be made. Usually, the employer will contact you; however, a good candidate will confirm this or ask if you should call them and at what date.

Thank the interviewer for his or her time and consideration. Briefly reiterate your interest in the position and the company, and concisely summarise your skills and career objectives as they apply to the position. Confirm the interviewer(s) name, title and address. The easiest way to do this is to ask for a business card. Send a thank you letter or an e-mail within 48 hours.

Follow Through

After leaving the interview, you should send a thank you note within 48 hours to every individual you interviewed with.

If you cannot remember the names of everyone you interviewed with (which underscores the importance of getting everyone's business cards), it is appropriate to send a letter to the "lead person" who coordinated your interview day that states, "Please extend my thanks to the interviewing committee on my behalf." Of course, if you only interviewed with one person this will not be a concern. Thank you letters can be typed or handwritten (but only the latter if you have neat penmanship). An e-mailed thank you letter should only be sent if they have indicated to you that a hiring decision will be made within the next 24 hours.

Your thank-you note should, of course, express your thanks. However, it is also an opportunity to reiterate your interest in the position, as well as highlight a few of your key strengths or experiences that were discussed during the interview.

If you haven't done so already, now is the time to notify your references and let them know that they may be receiving a call from your prospective employer. This is most typically the phase where reference calls are placed. You will get a better reference if you provide your references with some information about the position and the organisation.



TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

The following are examples of the most common types of interviews:

One-on-One Interview

An interview with a candidate being questioned by only one person.

Panel/Committee Interview

An interview conducted by a series, or panel, of people.

Screening Interview

Typically a short interview used for the purpose of conducting a brief evaluation of a candidate. An example of this type of interview is a conversation with an employer at a career fair. From this conversation, an employer will decide if he or she wants to talk with the student further in a more formal interview.

Phone Interview

Rather than conduct an interview face-to-face, the interview will be conducted via telephone. A phone interview is often a type of screening interview. Many times this is done when there is travel involved for a face-to-face interview. For example, an employer might interview ten candidates over the phone and then choose three to fly out for an on-site interview.

On-Site Interview

An interview conducted at the location of the specific company/organisation. If the company location is not in the local area, and travel is involved, an on-site interview can be a second-round interview.

Off-Site Interview

An interview that occurs outside of an organisation. An example of this is an interview at a career fair or a career services centre.

Second-Round Interview

An interview conducted after a formal, initial interview. The first interview has confirmed that you may be a good match for the job and the organisation; the second is designed to probe more deeply into your skills and interests, and to allow others in the organisation to meet and evaluate you.

Skype Interview

Nowadays, interviewing people on Skype is becoming a trend. More and more companies use it on an everyday basis, because interviewing applicants this way has many advantages.

A Skype interview saves time and money for both applicants and employers. Nevertheless, the environmental aspect is becoming very trendy and so, at the very least, it is definitely a "greener" way of interviewing people.

When interviewing via Skype you should check your internet connection, microphone settings, web-cam settings and headphone settings at least one hour before the Skype Interview. Make sure that you are in a quiet place, with the right light, you have everything you need you with you (pen, notebook) and of course, you are well dressed. Be prepared- this is a real interview. You need to approach it with all the seriousness and preparation you would give to a live in-person meeting.

QUESTIONS AN INTERVIEWER MAY ASK YOU

While this list does not cover every potential question, it will get you thinking about areas, ideas and concepts you should be familiar with, personally and professionally, in order to provide quality answers in an interview:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you select your college or university?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- What led you to choose your field of study?
- What subjects did you like best in college? Why?
- What subjects did you like least in college? Why?
- Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
- Do you intend to pursue a graduate education? How? When?
- What have you learned from participating in extracurricular activities?
- What part-time or summer jobs have been the most interesting? Why?

- ⦿ Please discuss your strengths and weaknesses.
What is your greatest asset? Liability?
- ⦿ What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- ⦿ What major problems have you encountered and how did you deal with them?
- ⦿ What have you learned from your mistakes?
- ⦿ What types of decisions are most difficult for you?
- ⦿ How do you react to pressure?
- ⦿ When working with a team, would you describe your typical role as a motivator, a thinker, a leader or a worker?
- ⦿ Explain your answer.
- ⦿ When you are given a task or project, how do you organise your time and what are the steps you follow to complete that task or project?
- ⦿ What has been your biggest frustration to date?
- ⦿ Tell me about a time when you had a disagreement with a co-worker or supervisor and how you handled it?
- ⦿ Describe a difficult event or situation in your life. How did you handle it?
- ⦿ What makes you stand out from others applying for this position?
- ⦿ What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

- Why should I hire you?
- How have your education, prior work experiences, and internships prepared you for this job?
- Highlight one thing on your resume that distinguishes you from everyone else.
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this company?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What criteria do you use to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- What do you know about our company and why are you interested in working for us?
- What do you know about this field?
- What challenges does this position present?
- Do you like working with people?
- Would you prefer to work independently or as part of a team? Why?
- Have you ever supervised anyone in a work setting? Have you ever fired or hired anyone?
- What do you do in your spare time?



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER ASKING AN INTERVIEWER

- What organisational goals are being supported by this position?
- What would my initial assignments be?
- I have read about your company and its competitors. What makes your company unique?
- How would you describe your company's culture? Management style?
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?
- How does the organisation define a successful individual?
- What is the method of feedback/evaluation used by the organisation?
- What do you see as your organisation's strengths and weaknesses?
- Can you describe recent projects on which a person in my position has worked?
- What type of person tends to be successful in this position? What type of person are you looking for?
- What qualities do you seek in new hires? What expectations do you have of new graduates?
- How would you describe the work environment in this company?

- Do you have a formal training program? What opportunities exist for continued training and development?
- How does the department in which I would be working relate to other departments within the organisation?
- What are the plans for the future of my potential department and XYZ Corporation?
- To whom would I report? Where would I fit in the organisation?
- What is the typical career path in your company for someone with my background?
- Can you give me a sense of what proportion of my time would be spent doing each of the tasks you've described?
- What is the greatest challenge currently facing the department/organisation? What plans are in place for meeting this challenge?

Interview: Ending Positively

Your interviewer(s) may tell you during the course of the interview when you should expect to receive a decision from the organisation on the outcome of the interview, and what the next stage of the process will be if you are successful. If these points have not already been covered, it is good to ask for this information at the end of the interview. It will not only clarify the next stage for you, but will also indicate to them that you are organised and methodical.

Remember to thank the interviewer(s) and reiterate your enthusiasm for the job for which you have applied. Always end the interview on a positive note.

What next?

Always keep a diary or spreadsheet of interviews you have attended, and make notes of your thoughts about the job and the company. Do this as soon as you get home, while your memory is still fresh.

If you have been told you will be contacted by a certain date, you should not chase them up for information before then. However, if you have not heard anything from the organisation by the date they stipulated, it is good to contact the resourcing or HR team by phone or email to enquire about the status of your application. There may simply be a delay in their procedures and your enquiry will show that you are still enthusiastic and have kept the timeframe in mind.

OPPORTUNITY

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References

- <http://www.slesingermanagement.com/search>
- www.monster.co.uk
- <http://www.spherion.com>
- <http://www.momsbacktowork.com/interview-tips.htm> <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/findajob/a/howtofindajob.htm>

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