

BROOKHAVEN COLLEGE
CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

INTERVIEWING

The job interview is one of the most important parts of your job search. It is your opportunity to sell your strengths and present yourself as a candidate who is uniquely qualified. With preparation and practice you can learn the skills necessary to interview effectively.

The interview is usually divided into three parts: a few minutes of “ice breaking” to allow the candidate to feel comfortable; questions from the employer (which take the majority of the time); and time for the interviewee to ask questions about the organization or position.

PREPARATION

KNOW YOURSELF

What are your skills and accomplishments that qualify you as the best candidate for the job? Be prepared to answer the general question, “tell me about yourself” by preparing a one-minute “personal statement” or bio.

Personal Statement

Prepare a one-minute “personal statement” or bio explaining your background, skills, accomplishments, strengths and goals. Do not include information such as where you grew up or how many siblings you have. Practice this until it rolls off your tongue easily in an unrehearsed fashion.

Keep in mind when answering the interviewer's questions that you want to relate your answers to the job at hand. Therefore, as with preparing your cover letter and resume, find out the skills and requirements of the job.

Skills

If you have prepared a resume, you have already considered what your **job-related** and **transferable** skills are. Refer to the Resume Writing handout for tips.

Accomplishments

Prepare an array of accomplishment statements to use as needed during the interview and practice articulating these. There is a world of difference between thinking how you will say something and actually saying it. Also, take any documentation of accomplishments with you in a folder.

Relate your accomplishments in a story-like format by using **STAR**:

- Think about a **S**ituation or **T**ask you faced. Describe this situation in two or three sentences.
- Next, describe the **A**ction you took. Be very specific. While you want to avoid appearing arrogant, you want to take credit for the role you played.
- Conclude by describing the **R**esult you achieved. Discuss how your work helped an employer (a community service project, your church, child’s school, etc). Whenever possible, discuss the result in measurable or quantifiable terms.

For example:

As an account rep I was expected to implement a new system process for invoices, but did not have the full support of my manager. To convince the manager to support the new process, I proposed an 8 a.m. meeting to discuss the project. Both the presentation and my willingness to meet so early convinced my manager to give approval. The new system process was quickly implemented and as a result decreased the processing time for invoices by 25 percent.

KNOW THE COMPANY

Learn as much as possible about the company and be prepared to answer questions in a relevant manor and ask intelligent questions. Sources of information include: past or current employees, the company's public relations office, the company's Web site, a library or the Career Development Center. Areas to research include:

Corporate culture	Number of employees	Reputation
Age of company	Services or products	Competitors
Organizational structure	Types of positions available	

Finding out this information will not only help you be more articulate in the interview but also will help you be aware of what the employer will be listening for.

PRACTICE

It is imperative you practice interviewing – either alone, with a friend or with a career counselor. Fine-tune your interview style and become more comfortable answering questions about yourself. However, do not memorize answers or practice excessively, as this can adversely decrease your spontaneity during the interview. Above all, employers are listening to see if you have a good attitude, integrity, and would be loyal to the organization.

Remember the 50/50, two minute max rule. According to Richard Bolles (Author of What Color is your Parachute?) and researchers at M.I.T., persons who get hired most frequently follow this conversation mix. Essentially, you talk 50 percent of the time and listen 50 percent of the time during the interview. Talking too much gives the impression you are self-absorbed and oblivious to the needs of the company and speaking too little conveys that you have something to hide or are a poor communicator. When asked a question, try not to speak more than two minutes when delivering the answer. According to Bolles, “People who ramble on and on don’t get hired.”

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Make sure you have a conservative, attractive interview suit or outfit and are properly groomed. Refer to the Dressing for an Interview handout.

INTERVIEW TIPS

- Be on time! Arrive five to 10 minutes early to prepare yourself for the interview.
- Check your appearance, if possible.
- Bring an updated resume and a list of references.
- Make eye contact with the interviewer and give a firm handshake.
- Relax, be confident and optimistic.
- Stress your qualifications for the job opening.
- Indicate your stability, attendance record and experience.
- Recount experiences that relate to the current position (transferable skills).
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the company and its products.
- Answer questions honestly and in a straightforward manner. Be careful not to ramble.
- Indicate your flexibility and readiness to learn.
- Never criticize previous jobs or employers.
- Do not discuss compensation until the final interview, after the employer initiates the conversation.
- Be yourself!

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Be prepared to answer the questions asked by your interviewer. Be honest, focused, enthusiastic and positive. Think of experiences in previous positions that support your answer. The following are sample interview questions.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why should I hire you?
- What is your biggest weakness?
- What are your greatest strengths or assets?
- What is your greatest success or accomplishment?
- What decisions have you most regretted and why?
- Why do you want to work here? What makes you think you will do this job well?
- Where would you like to be in two to five years? / What are your career goals?
- How would your friends/past coworkers/supervisors describe you?
- How important is money to you?
- Tell me about your most recent work experience.
- How are you at working under pressure and deadlines?
- What are some things that are important to you in your job?
- What do you think this job requires and how do you meet the requirements?
- Why did you switch from a different field?
- What have you been doing since your last job?
- How did you get along with your former boss and coworkers?
- What did you like least about your previous supervisor?
- What was your least favorite position that you have ever held and why?
- How do you set and achieve your goals?
- How do you set priorities and manage your time?
- How have you influenced others in your previous jobs?
- Tell me about your most challenging and least challenging jobs?
- What type of supervision do you prefer?

The list can fill a book and does in some cases! Essentially, the employer wants five questions answered. **Just FIVE:** Why are you here? What can you do for us? What kind of person are you? What distinguishes you from the other 20 people who have applied for this job? Can I afford you?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavioral based interviewing is centered on the assumption that past behavior predicts future performance. Interviewers determine what the competencies are for the job and then conduct the interview by probing for examples that demonstrate those skills or characteristics. Your prepared accomplishment statements are especially helpful when answering these types of questions. Sample behavioral questions include:

- Tell me about a time when you ... displayed leadership skills, solved a problem, dealt with a difficult customer, went “above and beyond,” displayed teamwork skills, etc.
- Tell me about a time when you failed. How did you deal with it?
- Describe a time when your workload was heavy. How did you respond?

Be prepared for interviewers to use the “layering” technique to dig deeper into your stories:

- What exactly did you do?
- Why did you respond that way?

- What was your specific role?
- What would you have done differently?
- What problems or successes resulted from your decisions/actions?

QUESTIONS TO ASK INTERVIEWERS

It is important to ask questions since this shows interest and enthusiasm. Questions also will help you further decide if the job is right for you. (Remember, you are interviewing the company as well). Ask those questions you could **not** have found answers to by researching the company.

- Ask about further details of the job.
- What kind of decision making responsibilities will I have?
- Is this a newly created position?
- Will I mostly be working individually or in a team?
- What kind of training would I receive?
- How much client contact will I have?
- How many employees are in this department?
- How much travel is typically required?
- What is the typical career path of someone who starts in this position?
- Do people often move into different departments?
- How would you describe the firm's culture?
- What do you see as the firm's greatest assets/weaknesses?
- What makes this firm different from its competitors?

FOLLOW-UP

At the conclusion of the interview, be sure you understand what is expected of you and what is going to happen next. Always ask for a hiring timeline if the information is not offered to you. Always thank the interviewer for their time and ask for their business card. Be sure to express interest in the job if you feel there is a match.

THANK YOU LETTERS AND NOTES

Always write a thank you letter or note immediately expressing interest in the job and highlighting one or two of your best qualifications. Saying "thank you" can be a powerful statement. Every time you send a thank you letter or note it is an opportunity to sell your qualifications and to leave a fresh impression in the mind of the reader. Send a thank you letter to anyone who has extended themselves in any way on behalf of your job search. Minimally, a written thank you should be sent after all interviews.

Below you will find a sample of what a thank you letter might entail. A handwritten thank you note is also acceptable and even favored in some circumstances. Follow-up with a phone call one to two weeks after the interview regardless of which you choose.

LETTERS

Letters can be appropriate if you interviewed with a panel of interviewers (easily copied to all members) or if the interview was for a scholarship or entrance into a school program (can be placed in your file and weighed in decision-making). Ensure they are in business letter format. Here is a sample of content:

"Thank you again for meeting with me on Tuesday to discuss the Marketing Representative position. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to talk with you, and the information you shared with me about Marketing International, Inc. was excellent.

As we discussed, I am excited about the possibility of applying my education and experience to the position. I am confident that my personality, marketing skills and knowledge of the industry will allow me to achieve success with Marketing International, Inc.

If I can provide you with any additional information, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you soon.”

HANDWRITTEN NOTES

Handwritten notes are appropriate for job interviews with one to three persons or with anyone who has given you personal and individual consideration. Notes should be on nice stationary or card stock, in black or blue ink, and written as neatly as possible. They may be shorter or less formal than the letter version but are a very effective, personal touch. Here is a sample of content:

“Thank you so much for meeting with me on Tuesday regarding the Marketing Management position. I am really looking forward to hearing from you; my education and qualifications make me an excellent candidate for the position. Please contact me if you have questions or would like to schedule a second interview.”

For more assistance with preparing for interviews, contact the Career Development Center. You may meet with a career counselor, have a mock interview and use library resources on interviewing.

Material adapted from What Color is your Parachute by Richard Nelson Bolles and Creative Job Search On Line from the State of Minnesota, Department of Employment and Economic Development.

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IT ALL BEGINS HERE.



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