Preparing for the Interview

You must be able to express your qualifications, strengths, and interest for the position and be knowledgeable regarding the interviewer’s organization. There are two very blunt interview questions which often frustrate students: “What do you have to offer?” and “Why do you want to work for my organization?” Self-assessment and employer research will help you answer these questions.

- **Self:** Anticipate the questions the interviewer will ask about your own life and especially about your work experience, education, extracurricular activities, and about the kind of work you want. Prepare for the interviewing process by asking yourself some of the whys, hows, whens, and wheres. Practice answering sample interview questions.
- **Employer:** Know as much as you can about the organization which the interviewer represents. You need to be familiar with the organization: its products/services, priorities, problems, and how your skills can contribute to its goals. You also need to be able to discuss current issues and trends, salary ranges, entry-level positions, etc., that relate to your career interest.

There comes a time in an interview when it is your turn to ask questions. Your questions will be an indication of your motives, objectives, goals, and interests. So be sure they are meaningful by expressing job-related concerns and interests. Don’t ask questions during the initial interview about salary, benefits, or information that is readily available.

Look and Act Professional

- **Physical Appearance:** Dress appropriately; be neat and well groomed; be as relaxed as possible.
- **Speaking Style:** Be alert and enthusiastic; maintain a comfortable voice level; take the initiative in giving information; project confidence and poise.
- **Content:** Provide clear, logical, direct, and relevant answers; demonstrate your interest in and enthusiasm for the job, the organization, and the profession; substantiate your answers by providing examples from past experience.
- **Non-verbal:** Exhibit good posture; maintain eye contact with the interviewer.

Everyone has some work-related experiences, academic highpoints, or personal qualities that they consider their “real pluses.” Focus on these! Decide beforehand the two or three assets that you would like the interviewer to know about you. Then be sure you’ve conveyed this information before you leave the interview.

Discern whether or not the job will satisfy your professional and personal needs. Remember, the interview is a two-way street. Decide what you want to know about the job and the organization. Get any information that is important to you in deciding whether this job is the one you want.
Day of the Interview

- Dress professionally and comfortably.
- Take to the interview several copies of your resume; a copy of your transcript; a typed list of questions to ask the employer; a typed list of references, addresses, and phone numbers; and, if appropriate, examples of work (e.g., tapes, slides, or portfolios).
- Be early…anticipate parking problems; allow time to check appearance, get organized, and catch your breath.
- Check in with the receptionist…find out the interviewer’s name and how to pronounce it.
- Be ready to shake hands.
- Relax and be yourself!

Structure of the Interview

No two interviews will be exactly alike. There are any number of factors that can influence the content and structure of an interview: the personality of the interviewer, your personality, time limitations, even the physical setting of the interview can play a part. However, most initial interviews seem to consist of three distinct parts: 1) introduction, 2) body, and 3) close.

The introduction is the “ice-breaking” portion of the interview. The interviewer will set the tone in attempting to establish a positive atmosphere and put you at ease. First impressions will be influenced by your appearance and manner. Remember, the overall evaluation of you as a candidate begins the very moment the interviewer greets you.

The portion of the interview referred to as the body deals with a request for specific information. The interviewer, using questions and answers, begins to evaluate your qualifications and suitability for employment.

The interviewer is measuring and evaluating how you handle yourself — your degree of self-confidence, your ability to relate to others, and your motivation. Most interviewers will seek information about your specific skills, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Employers look for well-adjusted candidates who are self-starters, willing to take initiative and assume responsibility, and not afraid to work.

The interviewer will try to determine your qualifications and how to match these with particular job openings. Be prepared to discuss specifics about the organization, such as job responsibilities, operations, and policies. Know your immediate and long-range career objectives and be able to communicate them in an organized fashion. Be prepared to discuss geographical preference and mobility. Discussion of salary and benefits is ideally initiated by the interviewer.

During this part of the interview, you must be prepared to ask intelligent questions that will show that you have done some research on the employer and that you have an interest in this opportunity. These questions frequently set candidates apart from one another.
The last part of the interview is referred to as the close. This is similar to the close of a sales presentation. Exit from the interview as soon as courtesy allows you to do so, but only after expressing a sincere interest in the job. The interviewer will never know of your interest unless you make it clear. Before leaving the interview, be certain you understand what the next step will be. Will the interviewer contact you? Or must you make the next contact?

**Key Points to Remember**

There are certain key points to remember whenever you have an interview:

- Always check your appearance before being greeted by the interviewer.
- Greet the interviewer by his/her last name in a friendly but businesslike manner. Do not address the interviewer by the first name unless specifically asked to do so.
- Introduce yourself in a confident manner.
- Shake hands firmly.
- When you get into the interview room, remain standing until you are offered a seat. After a certain time period, if the interviewer has not offered you a seat, ask, “May I be seated?”
- Once seated, sit erectly but not rigidly. Place your arms and hands on the armrests of the chair or in your lap if there are no armrests. Avoid uncalled-for gestures.
- Avoid a boring presentation. Retain the interviewer’s attention by varying the tempo of your speech and the tone of your voice.
- Remember, this is your sales presentation. Take the opportunity to present yourself in a logical, confident manner.
- Immediately after leaving the interview, take a few moments to jot down key points that you want to be certain to remember.

**Follow Up After the Interview**

Provide credentials/references, application forms, or transcripts requested by the prospective employer. Obtain the name, title, and mailing address of the individual with whom you interviewed, and send a brief letter of appreciation for the interviewing opportunity.