

THE INTERVIEW

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PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interview gives you the opportunity to convey to an employer your interest in a particular position and to present the skills you can bring to the job. The interview is a chance for you and the employer to get to know each other and to assess if this position and company is a suitable fit or match. In addition, the interview allows you to gain insight into the job and the organization, and it enables the employer to determine if you have the skills and abilities needed to be an effective member of his/her organization.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW:

Before going on your first interview, there are several steps to take in order to prepare yourself. Preparing for an interview is critical for a productive and successful interview. Organizations vary, therefore you must prepare for each and every interview. You need to conduct a thorough assessment of both yourself and the employer. Mock interviews are a great way to ensure that you are conveying yourself in a positive and polished manner.

• Know Yourself

- ⇒ Know the information on your resume.
- ⇒ Identify three of your most valuable strengths, along with an example of how you have demonstrated each. Also consider your weaknesses.
- ⇒ Be able to discuss decisions you have made and the thought process behind them.
- ⇒ Identify accomplishments you are proud of and be able to verbalize why.
- ⇒ Identify situations you might have handled differently.
- ⇒ Be able to give concrete examples of your skills and qualifications.
- ⇒ Be able to articulate why you are interested in this field. Think about your long-term goals.

• Know the Employer and the Field

- ⇒ Review the nature and responsibilities of the position and be able to relate your past experiences to the position.
- ⇒ Read current periodicals and trade journals to learn about current trends in the industry.
- ⇒ Research the Employer/Key Facts to gather:
(Review web sites, press releases, mission statements, annual reports, and company literature to find the following information)
 - Company's products/services, technologies and industries.
 - Competitors and customers.
 - Key people in organization.
 - Number of employees.
 - Annual revenue, annual net earnings, # of shareowners, annual assets, NYSE symbol.
 - Facility locations.
 - Organizational structure of company.
 - Company clients, suppliers and competition.
 - Latest news reports on company (local or national).

- **Nonverbal Communication Skills**

Messages are conveyed during the interview by what you say AND by how you say it. Positive nonverbal communication factors will reinforce your verbal message.

- ⇒ Greet the employer with a firm handshake.
- ⇒ Maintain steady eye contact with the interviewer.
- ⇒ Sit attentively to demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm.
- ⇒ Display self-confidence.
- ⇒ Dress in suitable manner to convey a polished, professional image (err on conservative side).
- ⇒ SMILE!

- **Verbal Communication Skills**

- ⇒ Be a good listener; be sure to answer the question that is posed to you. Don't bring up extraneous matters.
- ⇒ Use clear, concise answers.
- ⇒ Be prepared to put a positive – but not dishonest – spin on any negatives in your background.
- ⇒ Don't exaggerate and don't be negative.
- ⇒ Be specific. Refer to concrete experiences.
- ⇒ Use proper grammar.
- ⇒ Don't say: uhm, uh, yeah or yup (instead of yes), y'know, like, okay, I guess, pretty good.

- **Practice for the Interview...*Practice Makes Perfect!***

- ⇒ Review interview questions.
- ⇒ Do not try to dominate the interview, let the interviewer guide the questions.
- ⇒ Consider doing a mock interview with a friend or a member of the CDO staff.
- ⇒ Relax and be yourself, let them get to know you!

- **Pre-Interview Checklist**

- ⇒ Are your interviewing cloths clean, pressed and ready to go?
- ⇒ Do you know where the interview site is and how long it takes to get there so you will arrive at least 15 minutes early?
- ⇒ Have you contacted all your references?
- ⇒ Have you prepared a list of questions to ask the recruiter?
- ⇒ Have you practiced your answers to anticipated questions?
- ⇒ Have you gathered everything you need to bring? (Extra copies of your resume and/or cover letter and your list of references.)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Practice questions are VERY useful because it gets you in the mindset of answering them. Write out answers for the questions below. This will assist you to bring experiences to the forefront of your mind so you will remember them quickly in the interview.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- **Open-ended Questions**

These questions are not as easy to answer as you may think. These questions leave candidates open to the possibility of spewing on-and-on about irrelevant information.

Examples of Open-ended Questions:

- ⇒ Tell me about yourself.
- ⇒ Why should we hire you?
- ⇒ Why did you choose this field?
- ⇒ Why did you choose engineering as your major?
- ⇒ What do you consider to be your major strengths and weaknesses?
- ⇒ What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- ⇒ Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization?

- **Behavioral-Based Interview Questions**

Some employers believe that the best predictor of future success is past success. In behavioral-based interviews, you will be asked to give examples of a specific situation, in order to provide evidence that you have the skills required for the position. The interviewer will not continue until you have provided a specific example.

Success in behavioral-based interviews requires preparation and practice. You must be able to recall many experiences quickly, select the most appropriate one, and then describe it effectively.

Create a list of 15 to 20 main experiences that demonstrate a variety of skills and abilities. Draw upon your college experiences, academic and extracurricular; volunteer and work experiences; and when appropriate, personal experiences.

To answer these questions there is a simple formula. Provide the interviewer with a general (concise) overview of the relevant experience, then go into the step-by-step problem solving sequence you went through to get to a final outcome.



Examples of Behavioral Based Questions:

- ⇒ Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation. How did you cope?
- ⇒ Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were not able to meet or achieve it.
- ⇒ Tell me about a time in which you had to use your oral presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- ⇒ Please discuss an important written document that you were required to complete.
- ⇒ How do you determine what gets priority in scheduling your time?
- ⇒ Tell me about a time when you had to deal with conflict?
- ⇒ Tell me about a difficult decision you have made in the last year.
- ⇒ Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- ⇒ Give me an example of a time when you motivated others in a team environment.
- ⇒ Give me an example of a time when you managed others.
- ⇒ Give me an example of a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or to change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
- ⇒ Give me an example of a time when you went beyond the call of duty to get the job done.
- ⇒ Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- ⇒ When you have been told about, or discovered for yourself, a problem in your job performance, what have you typically done? Give me an example.

- **Technical Questions**

The purpose of a technical question is first, to see if you know what you're talking about, but second is to see if you can even wrap your mind around the problem. You may be asked a general technical question like how many lines of code you've written in the last semester or your technical skills may be tested. In any situation you should be prepared!

When answering interview questions you should always communicate clearly and concisely, trying to be as specific as possible. For example, if you are asked how familiar you are with a certain lab task you should talk about how long you've worked with it, when and how you've used it, etc.

Talk out your answers. Talking out problems allows recruiters to follow your thought process, showing them that you understand the question being posed. If you're unsure where to begin, ask questions. You may not be able to answer the question completely but at least you've shown the recruiter that you understand what was asked, which is better than saying, "I don't know."

Examples of Technical Questions:

- ⇒ You have two switches to control the light in a long corridor. You want to be able to turn the light on entering the corridor and turn it off at the other end. Wire the circuit.
- ⇒ What type of flip-flops do you know?
- ⇒ List Newton's Laws and state the equations.
- ⇒ Interpret a stress vs. strain curve.

- **Logical Problems**

These types of questions assist the recruiter to determine how your mind works. Are you the type of person that asks questions? Do you sit silently until you've come to a conclusion? Do you give up once you've determined you can't figure out a solution? To answer logic problems follow the same instructions as for Technical Questions. Talk out your answers. Ask questions and it is okay to ask if you can write it out on a piece of paper or jot down notes.

Examples of Logic Questions:

- ⇒ You have 2 candles. Every candle lights for 60 minutes. Find a way to measure 45 minutes.
- ⇒ There is a pot full of water. How do you pour out half of it without using a meter?
- ⇒ Why are man hole covers round?
- ⇒ A point is chosen at random from within a circular region. What is the probability that the point is closer to the center of the region than it is to the boundary of the region?
- ⇒ How do you cut a plain circular cake for 8 people with just three straight cuts of the knife?
- ⇒ How many gas stations are in San Francisco?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS¹:

- **Warm-up Questions:**
 - ⇒ What made you apply for this position?
 - ⇒ How did you hear about this opportunity?
- **Work and Academic History:**
 - ⇒ What special aspects of your background have prepared you for this position?
 - ⇒ Describe for me one or two of your most important accomplishments?
 - ⇒ How much supervision have you had in previous positions and how much do you feel you require?
 - ⇒ Describe one or two of the biggest disappointments in your work history.
 - ⇒ What job have you enjoyed the most/least? Why?
 - ⇒ What kind of work environment do you prefer?
 - ⇒ Do you enjoy working independently or in groups?
- **Job Performance:**
 - ⇒ What kind of people do you find it most difficult to work with? Why?
 - ⇒ Tell me about any of your achievements that were recognized by your superiors or Professors.
 - ⇒ What about your previous position that you found most difficult and why?
 - ⇒ What aspects of your previous positions did you like most?
 - ⇒ How do you feel about your previous supervisor?
 - ⇒ If I were to contact a previous supervisor, what would that person say about you?
 - ⇒ What was your reason for leaving this job?
- **Education:**
 - ⇒ What classes do you feel have prepared you best for this position?
 - ⇒ What was your favorite course? Why?
- **Career Goals:**
 - ⇒ What are your long term goals?
 - ⇒ Where do you see yourself in five/ten years?
 - ⇒ Who or what in your life influenced you most with your career objectives?
 - ⇒ What would you most like to accomplish if you get this position?
- **Knowledge of the Company:**
 - ⇒ What do you know about our company?
 - ⇒ Why did you decide to seek a position with this firm/organization?
 - ⇒ In which department would you like most to work?
 - ⇒ What is our ticker symbol?
 - ⇒ Do you know our Company's market share?

¹ Indiana University Bloomington Libraries. Interview Questions.
www.indiana.edu/~libpers/interview.html. 11/20/2003

- **Self-Assessment:**
 - ⇒ What kind of things do you feel most confident in doing?
 - ⇒ How would you describe yourself as a person, your characteristics?
 - ⇒ What do you think are the most important characteristics and abilities a person must possess to become a successful engineer? How do you rate yourself in these areas?
 - ⇒ Do you consider yourself a self-starter? Can you provide examples?
- **Creativity:**
 - ⇒ Either in your past work experiences or in your coursework, what have you done that you considered truly creative?
 - ⇒ Can you think of a problem you have encountered when the old solution didn't work and you had to come up with a new solution?
- **Decisiveness:**
 - ⇒ How do you go about making important decisions about your career path or academics?
 - ⇒ What was the last major problem you were confronted with? What action did you take?
- **Range of Interests:**
 - ⇒ What organizations do you belong to?
- **Leadership:**
 - ⇒ What approach do you take in getting a team to accept your ideas or goals?
 - ⇒ How do you set an example for others to follow?
 - ⇒ When working in a team, how often do you meet as a group?
 - ⇒ How would you describe your basic leadership style?
 - ⇒ Do you feel you work more effectively on a one-to-one basis or in a group situation?
- **Oral Presentation Skills:**
 - ⇒ Have you ever done any public or group speaking? Explain?
 - ⇒ Have you made any individual presentations recently? How did you prepare?
 - ⇒ Written Communication Skills:
 - ⇒ What kind of writing have you done? For a group or individually?
 - ⇒ Have you written any technical documents or papers?
- **Your Role in the Company and Position:**
 - ⇒ What factors are important to you in a job?
 - ⇒ What is important to you in a company or organization?
 - ⇒ What are you looking for in a supervisor?
 - ⇒ Do you have a geographic preference?
 - ⇒ Are you willing to travel?

PROBLEM AREAS

To address these areas effectively, prepare your response in advance. Be honest and positive. Do not make excuses for yourself or attempt to blame someone else. Problem areas include: Low GPA, being over or under qualified, prior terminations, gaps in your work history

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Employers cannot ask about

- ⇒ Race
- ⇒ National Origin
- ⇒ Religion
- ⇒ Marital Status
- ⇒ Age
- ⇒ Arrests
- ⇒ Sexual Orientation (depends on State)

The interviewer may not realize that they have asked an illegal question. Your best bet is to answer in a straightforward and polite manner. You also want to move the conversation to an examination of your skills and abilities, not your status.

A portion of this information is taken from Knock'Em Dead, The Ultimate Job Seeker's Handbook by Martin Yate, published by Adams Media Corporation.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Questions to Ask About The Specific Position**
 - ⇒ To whom would I report if I held the position?
 - ⇒ Which other departments would I interact with?
 - ⇒ What would be my key responsibilities?
 - ⇒ What type of training would I receive?
 - ⇒ What would be my first project?
 - ⇒ Which skills and personal qualities would be needed for success on the job?
 - ⇒ What are the biggest challenges of the job?
 - ⇒ What are some of the more difficult problems facing someone in this position?
How do you think these could best be handled?
 - ⇒ Where could a person go who is successful in this position and within what timeframe?
 - ⇒ What would be a typical career path?
 - ⇒ How is one judged? How is success measured and determined?
 - ⇒ Where is the job located? What are the travel requirements, if any?
 - ⇒ How much contact and exposure is there to clients/customers, etc.?
- **Questions to Ask About the Company/Employer**
 - ⇒ In your eyes, what ways has this organization been most successful?
 - ⇒ What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?
 - ⇒ What are the skills and attributes most needed to get ahead in the company?
 - ⇒ What has been the growth pattern of the company over the last five years? Is it profitable? How profitable? Is the company privately or publicly held?
 - ⇒ What issues or concerns are facing this department/organization/firm now?
 - ⇒ What are the goals for this department/organization/firm for the upcoming year?
 - ⇒ What new projects has this department/organization/firm undertaken recently?

- **Closing Questions** (DO NOT ask questions regarding salary, or benefits of any kind)
 - ⇒ What is your timeframe for making a decision?
 - ⇒ How many other candidates do you expect to interview?
 - ⇒ Is there anything else you need from me to have a complete picture of my qualifications?

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CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

- **Things to Remember**
 - ⇒ At the end of the interview, highlight any of your relevant skills and stress your interest in the position.
 - ⇒ Ask any pertinent questions at this time.
 - ⇒ Provide whatever credentials, references, or employment application that was requested by the employer.
 - ⇒ Be sure to obtain a business card.
 - ⇒ Send a typed thank you within a day or two.
 - In this thank you, you may refer to specific issues that were discussed, express your thanks and restate your interest in the position.
 - ⇒ Thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you.

Reasons People Do Not Get Hired

- In a publisher's survey of 153 companies nationwide, the following are the top ten reasons in order of importance for rejecting job candidates:
 1. Improper appearance. This was the number one reason. To avoid having your appearance used against you, BE NEAT AND CLEAN AND DRESS APPROPRIATELY. This cannot be emphasized enough. In general a suit or sport coat with a necktie and slacks for men and a suit or tailored dress for women are acceptable. Even if a corporation is known for its "casual" dress environment, you are not yet an employee of that organization, and still need to represent yourself in a professional manner.
 2. Overly aggressive presentation, conceited, "Superior Complex"
 3. Poor communication skills (grammar, diction, voice)
 4. Lack of career plans, no purpose or goals
 5. Lack of interest and enthusiasm, passive or indifferent
 6. Lack of confidence or poise, very nervous, or ill-at-ease
 7. Overemphasis on money, interested only in best dollar offer
 8. Poor scholastic record
 9. Expects too much too soon, not willing to start at the bottom
 10. Failure to participate in activities
- **Other Mistakes People Make During Interviews**
 - ⇒ Lack of Preparation
 - ⇒ Arriving Late
 - ⇒ Failing to Listen (what the interviewer wants to hear is more important than what you may want to say)
 - ⇒ Condemnation of past employers
 - ⇒ Not providing specific experiences or explanations for answers
 - ⇒ Disrespect to perceived subordinates

The Interview Checklist

- Have you considered doing a mock interview?
- Is your suit clean and ironed?
- Do you have extra copies of your resume?
- Have you asked three people to be your references (supervisor, professor, advisor, etc)?
- Have you prepared a typed list of your three references?
- Have you prepared questions to ask the interviewer and written them down?
- Did you research the company thoroughly?
- Did you print out directions to the interview and figured out how long the trip takes?
- If you are unfamiliar with the area, did you practice traveling to the interview?
- Is there gas in your car?
- Do you have a cell phone along with the interviewer's phone number, in case of an emergency?
- Did you plan on leaving 30-45 extra minutes for travel (think disabled train, Boston traffic, car accidents on major roads, construction, etc)?