

INTERVIEWING GUIDE

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PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

KNOW THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

The Employer's Purposes: Employers need to know three things about you:

1. *Can you do the work?* They need to know if you possess the *skills and qualifications* as reflected in your experience and education.
2. *Will you do the work?* They need to know if you are *motivated* and *will* do the work based upon your *interests* and *goals* at this stage of your career.
3. *Will you fit in?* They want to determine if you are a good fit with the people you will be working with and if your values are in line with the company's culture and mission. All other factors being equal, many hiring managers base their decisions on *likeability* and *fit*.

The Candidate's Purpose: As a candidate, you need to:

1. Describe your *skills* and *abilities* to show that you *can* do the work.
2. Describe your *interests* and *goals* at this stage of your career to demonstrate that you are *motivated* and *will* do the work.
3. Learn as much as possible about the position and employer to determine if the job and the company's culture are a good *fit* with your skills, values, interests, and goals.

KNOW THYSELF

You might be the most highly qualified candidate for a job, but you are not likely to be hired if you cannot articulate your qualifications and how your values, interests, and goals are in line with the priorities of the business. Appendix A contains a form to help you summarize your skills, values, interests, goals and experience. If you need help assessing these areas, feel free to call Counseling and Career Services at (410) 772-4840 to schedule an appointment with a career counselor.

KNOW THE EMPLOYER

Knowledge of the company's line of business, history, financial status, competitors, mission, and values will set you apart from other candidates who do not take time to do any research before they are interviewed. Knowing about the company will also help you determine if it is the type of place you want to work if you are offered a job. Information can be obtained from the company's web page, annual reports, *The Encyclopedia of Associations*, trade journals, chambers of commerce, current employees, and friends. Numerous Internet sites also contain company information, including:

- <http://www.collegegrad.com/topemployers>
- <http://www.collegegrad.com/employers/search>
- <http://www.wetfeet.com/research/companies.asp>
- www.vault.com
- <http://www.hoovers.com>

KNOW THE POSITION

If possible, obtain a copy of the job description before the interview so that you can anticipate the questions that might be asked and tailor your responses accordingly. General information about job duties can be obtained from the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (available online at <http://stats.bls.gov/oco>), and the *Guide for Occupational Exploration*. In addition, O*NET (the Occupational Information Network), is a comprehensive database of worker attributes and job characteristics, and can be found online at <http://online.onetcenter.org/>.

REHEARSE ANSWERS TO COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Rehearsing answers to common interview questions is an essential part of your preparation. One recommended approach is to write down your answers so that you can focus your thoughts on exactly what you want to say and continually review them beforehand. Other recommended approaches include rehearsing in front of a mirror, recording your answers on a video or audiotape, and doing a mock interview with a friend or career counselor. Appendix B contains a list of common interview questions and guidelines for answering them.

In addition to the guidelines for answering typical questions listed in Appendix B, you need to be prepared to handle two types of questioning formats that are commonly used:

1. Behavioral Interviews focus on how you have handled situations or problems in the past that you can expect to encounter in the new job. For example, if meeting deadlines is required, you might be asked, “Give me an example of a time when you had to meet a tight deadline while handling constant interruptions.” Your response should include specific information about a similar situation or problem you’ve encountered, the action you took, and the outcome of your action. Your examples can come from paid experience, volunteer activities, school projects, or responsibilities at home.
2. Situational Interviews are similar to behavioral interviews, but questions are future-oriented and are framed as “What would you do if . . .” In addition, situational interviews often require completing a task related to the job, such as typing a report, driving in adverse weather, or prioritizing items in an in-box, so that the employer can gauge your performance if you were hired.

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- Directions. Plan on arriving at least 15 minutes early, and to avoid being late, go on a dry run at the same time of day and under the same traffic conditions that you will have to travel to the interview.
 - Full tank of gas
 - Master application. Employment applications ask for information about your work history that might not be on your resume, such as the address and phone number of previous jobs. Fill out a standard employment application from any company and bring it with you so that will have this information in case the employer asks you to complete an application.
 - Extra resumes
 - Reference list (usually three references).
 - Work samples or portfolio if appropriate
 - Pen and notepad
 - Questions to ask the interviewer (see Appendix C)
 - Name, address, and phone number of the person you are meeting with
 - Cell phone
 - Job description if available
 - Comb or brush
 - Other: _____
- _____
- _____

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Men

- Dark gray or navy suit. Long sleeve white shirt with cuff just past sleeve of suit jacket.
- White undershirt (no v-neck)
- Socks same color as pants
- Black shoes and belt
- Tie should reach just above belt buckle
- Cleanly shaven. Beard or mustache should be trimmed.

Women

- Dark skirt/suit with white blouse or color that blends or a formal pants suit.
- Dress shoes - Black or a color that matches your suit
- Stockings - neutral color
- Small earrings and simple necklace
- No nail art

Dress Tips for Men and Women

- Clothing should be clean, pressed, and color coordinated
- Dress one step above what you would normally wear on the job. (Err on the side of dressing conservatively.)
- Hair should be clean, neatly cut and combed.
- Avoid strong perfume/cologne.

PARTS TO THE INTERVIEW

Introduction: Breaking the ice

- Greet with firm handshake
- Maintain eye contact and good posture. Be aware of what your body language communicates.
- Demonstrate confidence
- Follow employer's lead as to how the interview will proceed
- Kindly refuse offers of food or drink (accept water if offered)

The Interview

- Answer questions in ways that will reveal your strengths. Demonstrate what you can do for them, not what they can do for you. Give examples of skills even if they don't ask for them.
- Take responsibility for the past while focusing on the future, but do not volunteer negative information.
- Make every answer relate to the position.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the company. "Why do you want to work for us?"
- Be enthusiastic about the position and your interest in working for the employer.
- Think before you answer and take your time (speak slowly).
- Ask for clarification of questions if needed.
- Be brief. Be truthful.
- Be positive about former/current employer if asked.
- See Appendices B and C for guidelines on answering and asking questions.

Closing

- Follow the employer's lead that interview is ending.
- Close on an upbeat statement. Reiterate what you have to offer, why you are a good match, and how you make a good fit for the position and the business.

- ❑ Get business cards from everyone you meet.
- ❑ Ask about next steps and when they plan to make a decision.

Debriefing: After the interview:

- ❑ Critique your performance; what went well and what could be improved next time?
- ❑ Send thank you letters within 24 hours to everyone who interviewed you.
- ❑ Follow up with additional info as requested to show your initiative (e.g., info you found on the internet about something that came up during the interview).

EVALUATING OFFERS

Ask yourself the following questions when evaluating an employment offer:

1. How does the position utilize your skills and relate to your goals and interests?
2. What is the potential for growth?
3. What are the company's expectations vs. your needs?
4. Can you support the company's mission or product? (your values).
5. What are the strengths of company?
6. What are the working conditions?
7. Do the salary and benefits meet your needs? Know your bottom line.
8. What are the pluses about the job?
9. What are the minuses of the job?
10. Do the pluses outweigh the minuses or vice versa?

SUMMARY

- ❑ Make a positive impression by being prepared, arriving on time, dressing appropriately, and displaying confidence.
- ❑ Lead with your strengths. Answer questions with examples of accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to do the job and how you would add value to employer's operations.
- ❑ Be positive about your abilities and experience and relate every answer to the job.
- ❑ Think before you answer. Be brief. Be truthful.
- ❑ Rehearse answers to common interview questions.

APPENDIX A – SELF-ASSESSMENT SUMMARY SHEET

Values

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Interests

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Skills/Traits

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Work History (Titles)

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Education

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Licenses/Certifications

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Goals

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Salary Requirement \$: _____

YOUR COMMERCIAL

Version 1 - I am _____ (title or area of expertise). My background includes a combination of training and experience in _____, and my strengths include _____ (name specific strengths or the skills your enjoy using the most). I possess _____ (name traits you have demonstrated or have been commended for, such as integrity or tenacity to get the job done).

Example: I am an experienced fundraiser with expertise in major and small gift fundraising and tax law. My strengths include the ability to understand the needs of clients and close the deal. In all of my positions, I have demonstrated tenacity to get the job done when others give up, mature judgment and decision making, and ethics and honesty in dealing with clients and co-workers.

Version 2 - I am a student at _____, where I am studying _____. I have experience in _____, and my strengths include: _____. I possess _____ (name traits you have demonstrated or others have commended you for, such as honesty, integrity, tenacity). My goal is to _____

Example: I am a student at Howard Community College where I am studying criminal justice. I have experience working with young people in community outreach programs and providing customer service in retail settings. My strengths include the ability to work well with others and organize projects, and I am knowledgeable about community resources. I

am mature and hard working, and my long-term goal is to get a Bachelor's degree in criminal justice and work in law enforcement.

APPENDIX B

GUIDELINES FOR ANSWERING TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Guidelines

- ❑ Lead with your strengths
 - ❑ Make every answer related to the job you are applying for
 - ❑ Think before you answer, be brief, be truthful
 - ❑ Follow up answers with examples of how you have accomplished similar tasks in the past
1. *Tell me about yourself. Relate your answer to the job.* Be prepared with your 60-second commercial: An integration of your skills, values, interests and goals, and brief summary of your career progression and strengths. Avoid giving personal information, such as marital status, children, country of origin.
 2. *Why are you leaving your current position?* Focus on your accomplishments and how this position would allow you to build upon your achievements and make a contribution to the company's mission. Be able to explain how your skills and goals relate to the job, and always avoid negative remarks about your current employer or position.
 3. If unemployed: *Why did you leave your last position?* Indicate how your experience was good, what you learned and contributed, and how this employer's product or mission is in line with your goals and values. Be truthful without volunteering negative info about yourself or former/present employer. Example: If left under less than ideal circumstances: "The job did not fully utilize my strengths and I felt it was time for a change." If you have frequent job changes: Emphasize how your changes have given you breadth of experience.
 4. *What are your strengths? Prepare extensively for this question.*
 - a. Break down the skills required for this position and compare them with your skills.
 - b. Give examples that demonstrate your skills by describing situations where you have used the same or related skills.
 5. *What are your significant accomplishments?* In developing accomplishment statements, think about (1) a problem or situation that created a need for your action, (2) what you did to resolve the problem, (3) the skills utilized and demonstrated in your actions, and (4) the results of your effort. Accomplishments can come from personal experience, not just from paid experience (e.g., obstacles overcome, high grades, or achieving a goal such as graduating from college).
 6. *Why should we hire you?* Discuss how your strengths, experience, and goals are in direct line with the position and organization's mission. Example: "I am a hard worker, I know how to listen and learn, and my experience is directly related to the requirements of the job and demonstrates my ability to be successful in it. Follow this statement with 1 or 2 examples of your abilities.
 7. *Why are you interested in working for us?* Be prepared to demonstrate your knowledge about the employer and how your goals and experience fit the position and the employer's mission. Example: "I believe in and support the work you are doing and would like to be part of it." Follow this statement with examples from your professional or personal life that show how you have supported the company's mission or how your goals relate to the mission.
 8. *What are you interested in this position?* Be prepared to explain how your strengths, goals and/or background relate to the job in question. Example: "This job represents the type of challenge I am seeking at this stage of my career and therefore I would be motivated to produce results and make a positive contribution to your organization."

(continued)

9. *What are your weaknesses?*
- Rephrase “weakness” as an area for “improvement” and describe steps you are taking to improve in that area or how you have improved.
 - Describe a weakness that is obvious from your resume but not critical to the job. Example: If education is limited, *I have strong experience in this area, but I would like to further my education.* If experience is limited, *I have strong educational credentials, and I am taking steps to gain additional experience through _____.* (e.g., volunteer project).
10. Salary:
- Know the market and try to defer answering until you have demonstrated your value and learned as much as possible about the position.
 - Possible responses: “I am excited about this job, and because it is directly related to my career goals, my salary requirements are negotiable.” Or, “My salary requirements are negotiable and I would like to learn more about the position and other benefits before giving a definite salary requirement at this time.
 - In negotiation, ego is involved. Convey a win-win attitude. Doing so conveys your skills in problem solving and negotiation. The employer should not feel as if he/she is losing.
 - If pressed, give a general range, but defend your answer with research data.
 - If their salary is non-negotiable, try to negotiate for other benefits (e.g., paid parking, flex schedule, extra week of vacation.)
11. Responding to illegal questions. Response could run along a continuum from answering all questions without objecting to confronting the employer. Between these extremes, respond to the intent of the question without volunteering potentially damaging info. Example: *Do you have children?* Response: “I gain a great deal of satisfaction from being with my family and have always demonstrated reliability in completing my work on time and accomplishing my objectives while making a positive contribution to the organization. I anticipate being able to do the same if hired here.”
12. *How would your coworkers describe you?* What complements have your coworkers paid you? Be specific by using examples of compliments you have received, or solicit feedback from present and past coworkers.
13. *How would your supervisor describe you?* Use performance appraisals for examples. *In past performance appraisals, I have been commended for...*

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

General rule: Ask questions that show your interest in and understanding of the position and the employer's mission or product, your potential fit, and your ability to do the job. Questions about salary, benefits, or promotion possibilities should be saved until offers are imminent. Your job is to impress them about what you can do for them, not what they can do for you.

1. Why is this position open? (Replacement, new job?):
 - a. If replacement, why did the person leave? How long were they in the position?
 - b. If replacement, how long has the position been open?
 - c. What is the typical tenure of the people who have occupied this position in the past?
2. How would you describe a typical day for the person in this position?
3. To whom does this position report directly? To whom does he/she report?
4. What are the backgrounds of the people who would be my colleagues?
5. How long have my colleagues been here?
6. How would you describe the working relationships among the staff?
7. What are the top 3 to 5 objectives within the first year for the person hired?
8. What is the biggest challenge facing the person hired?
9. What type of orientation process would the new person receive?