

Interviewing

What is an Interview?

Interviews serve two purposes. For the prospective employer the interview is an opportunity to gather information about a candidate and to assess the “fit” between the candidate and the position. For you -- the candidate -- the interview is an opportunity to highlight your skills, abilities, personal qualities, and enthusiasm for the position.

What Should I Wear? What Should I Bring?

Before you have even said a word, the recruiter will have developed an impression of you based on your appearance. You cannot afford to have that initial impression of you be anything less than positive.

Proper attire for an interview (men and women) typically consists of a well-tailored conservative business suit in dark blue or gray. Pair your suit with a clean, pressed shirt or blouse in white or blue and well-polished dress shoes. Men should wear a conservative tie. Also, men should be clean shaven and women should avoid excessive make-up. All candidates should avoid excessive jewelry and should be neat, well-groomed and avoid using cologne or perfume. No visible body art or body piercing; cover tattoos with clothing if possible and remove nose and lip rings.

We suggest that you bring a simple leather portfolio with a notepad, a pen, reference list, breath mints/strips, and a few extra copies of your resume.

What are Employers Trying to Assess?

Does this candidate have the skills and abilities needed to do the job effectively?

Convincing an employer that you possess the necessary skills and abilities requires that you have more than just a superficial perception of the job. You will need a clear understanding of the position and the employer’s expectations as well as a working knowledge of the industry.

Always review the employer’s website. Additionally, informational interviews are outstanding sources of firsthand information. Once you have an understanding of the employer and the position, review your resume and identify specific activities, experiences, or classes that allowed you to develop and demonstrate the skills, abilities, or specialized knowledge being sought.

Does this candidate possess the enthusiasm and work ethic needed to do what will be expected?

In answering this question, employers are focusing on your personal qualities and your character.

Highlighting courses, activities, or experiences that were especially challenging and that required a great deal of perseverance will provide the employer with examples of your high energy level, diligence, and ability to commit to a goal.

Will this candidate be a cooperative team player and fit in well with our organization?

In some direct or indirect way, you will be asked, “Why are you interested in this position/organization?” Your task is to develop a clear response with solid reasoning backed by specific examples. “I want to work with people” is not a sufficient response.

Demonstrate your knowledge of and your interest in the activities, philosophies, people, and goals of the organization. Create a connection between what you have learned about your own leadership or interpersonal style and the leadership or interpersonal styles you see in that career and in that organization.



Interview Questions

What Will They Ask Me?

You don't need to memorize answers to each question, but be prepared with responses that demonstrate self-awareness and advance preparation.

1. What are your long range and short range goals and objectives? How are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next ten years?
3. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
4. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
5. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
6. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
7. What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
8. How would you describe yourself? How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
9. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
10. How has your college experience prepared you for this particular career?
11. Why should I hire you?
12. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in this career?
13. How do you define success?
14. What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization?
15. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
16. What qualities should a successful _____ possess?
17. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
18. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
19. If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you seek?
20. Why did you choose Holy Cross? What led you to choose your major?
21. What college subjects did you like best/least?
22. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
23. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
24. Why are your grades low?
25. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic ability?

26. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
27. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
28. How do you work under pressure?
29. What jobs have you enjoyed most? Least?
30. Describe your ideal job.
31. Why did you decide to seek a position with our organization?
32. What do you know about our organization?
33. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
34. What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
35. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
36. Are you willing to relocate? Travel?
37. What have you learned from your mistakes?
39. How do your skills relate to our needs?
40. Tell me about your most difficult course or professor.

What Should I Ask Them?

During most interviews, recruiters will at some point ask, "What would you like to know about us?" Anticipate this and plan ahead. Prepare three to five questions that demonstrate your advance preparation and allow you to explore areas that were not explained completely in recruiting literature. Use this as an opportunity to demonstrate that you have researched this employer.

For example, you may wish to inquire about:

- The organization's mission statement
- Information gained from articles written about this organization
- The length and content of a training program
- The department's long term goals (and the role planned for you in meeting those goals)
- The career path of your predecessor(s) in the position
- Timeframe for hiring

DO NOT ask questions about salary, vacations, and benefits or questions which are answered on the organization's website. The employer will provide ample opportunity to learn about these issues once an offer has been extended.

Behavioral Interviews

What is a Behavioral Interview?

Behavioral Interviewing is being used routinely and by many organizations with the primary intent of increasing their success rates in hiring. The foundation of this kind of interview is the simple but important axiom that the best predictor of future (work) performance is past performance in a similar circumstance. Therefore, the questions asked of you will be behaviorally focused and evocative of how you responded to a variety of specific situations and the results of the actions you took in each situation.

Behavioral interviews are designed to assess your “real” ability or skill level in any number of work related activities and situations by delving into how you functioned in your past jobs or extracurricular activities. As with any sort of interview, there are a number of common behavioral “themes” or “performance dimensions” that most recruiters are likely to assess. These include (but are not limited to) leadership, interpersonal skills, communication, multi-tasking, flexibility, motivation, decisiveness and commitment.

Sample Behavioral Questions

- What is your greatest academic achievement? What did you do to contribute to that achievement?
- Cite an example of when you were faced with an unpleasant task. How did you go about facing it?
- Give me the most recent example of a conflict you had with a coworker or a supervisor. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to use your communication skills in order to make an important point.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use a persuasive argument to change another person’s opinion. How did you do it?
- Share with me an example of an important personal goal which you set, and tell me about how you accomplished it.
- Have you ever had too many different tasks given to you to complete at the same time? What was your style in managing these?
- We’ve all had times when we felt overwhelmed by a project. Give me an example of when this happened to you. How did you react to the situation?
- Describe a situation in which you showed determination. How did you go about it?
- Give me an example of a situation where you took charge.
- Tell me about a time when you were especially creative in solving a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you failed at something.

Use the STAR Technique!



The STAR technique is a good way to formulate your responses to behavioral questions. This framework will organize, structure, and arrange your thoughts so that you provide a complete, detailed answer.

Situation Describe the situation you were in. Set the stage/context for the employer, and provide lots of detail.

Task What needed to be done and/or accomplished?

Action What steps did you take? Keep the focus on you, even if you are discussing a group project. Describe how you contributed to the success of the team.

Result What happened? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Follow Up

Say Thank You!

Immediately after each interview, send a thank you note to the individual(s) who interviewed you. The note should be brief. It may be e-mailed, hand-written or typed on quality bond paper and should be received within hours of the interview. In writing such a note, you have an opportunity to highlight or comment on topics discussed in the interview and to reinforce your interest in the position. If you had a group interview, be sure to send individual thank-you's to all interviewers. You may also wish to send a brief thank you note to any members of support staff (secretaries, receptionists) who were especially helpful to you during the selection process. Each note should differ by referring to something specific you discussed in the interview.

Practice! Practice! Practice!

Practice! Interviewing, like any other complex set of skills, only improves with practice. It is a near certainty that your first interview will not be as polished as your second, nor your second as polished as your third, and so on. An excellent way to assess and develop your interview skills is to conduct a "mock interview" with a staff member in the Center for Career Development.

Prior to a mock interview, you should provide the staff member with a copy of your resume and a written description of your target position and organization. You then appear at a prearranged time in proper interview attire and respond to both general and position-specific questions posed by the "interviewer." After completing a 20-30 minute interview, the staff member will take time to review your performance, note your strengths, and discuss strategies for improvement.

Second Round Interviews

Initial interviews are usually screening interviews and are often conducted by individuals who have the ability to eliminate you from the selection process but not the power to hire you. Decisions to hire a candidate are usually not made until after a second or third interview. A second interview often involves a full day of interviews with several staff members at the organization's office. You can plan on meeting your prospective supervisor, the departmental and/or district manager, other managers, and prospective co-workers. Typically, at least one meal will be included on the agenda. Keep in mind that you will not necessarily know who the "decision maker" is during your day of interviews, so it is important that you put forth your best effort in each interview.

To prepare for a second interview, review your responses to the commonly asked interview questions. Learn as much as you can about the organization and those who will be interviewing you as well as the industry/field you hope to enter. Read newspapers and news magazines and be prepared to discuss current events and their relationship to your chosen field.

Some Final Words of Wisdom

- Be aware of body language -- your eye contact, handshake, smile, and posture all convey your interest in the position. Try to control nervous tics such as toe tapping, pen clicking, etc.
- Be confident, not arrogant.
- Be honest. Do not exaggerate what is on your resume.
- Do not take notes during the interview.
- Do not complain or show any negativity.
- Don't leave an interview without letting the interviewer know how interested you are. Just because you are there for an interview does not mean you want the job. Make yourself stand out!