

Interviewing Guide

Interviewing

The purpose of an interview is for an employer to determine if a candidate has the skills, knowledge, and abilities to perform a particular job. The employer is also looking for “organizational fit”; someone who would fit in at their organization. The candidate interviewing for the position is gathering information regarding the company, and the position, to determine if it is the right job opportunity for him/her.

Interview Stages

1. The initial interview is often a “screening” interview. It is conducted by the Human Resource department to determine the quality of the applicant. If the applicant does well in the screening interview, and meets the initial requirements for the position, the Human Resources will recommend the applicant to the department hiring for the position. The screening interview is used to narrow the field to several promising candidates and usually lasts approximately 30 minutes.

Interview Structure:

- Formal greetings
 - Discussion of qualifications, background, and career goals
 - Requirements for the position
 - Summary and final instructions
2. Subsequent interviews may consist of one additional interview or can be several more depending on the position. The interview(s) may last an hour, several hours, or a day or two. Taking achievement or personality assessments may also be required. The interview process may involve meeting many members of the organization individually or in groups. Travel to the corporate office may be necessary including an overnight stay and meals with the interview committee. Most employers reimburse for travel expenses, but plan to bring extra money for emergencies.
 3. Negotiation of terms is the final step of the interview process. If the employer makes an offer salary, benefits, starting dates, location, and training are determined at this time.

What an employer seeks in a candidate:

- Ability to communicate
 - Teamwork
 - Leadership
 - Critical thinking
 - Personal management
 - Creativity
 - Technical/Scientific skills
 - Social responsibility
 - Intelligence
 - Self-confidence
 - Initiative
 - High energy level
 - Flexibility
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Self-knowledge
 - Ability to handle conflict
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Preparing for an Interview

Preparing for an interview takes time and research. It is important for the candidate to be well prepared and to offer well-organized examples and information.

1. Research the company

- a) It is important to have as much information about the company as possible. Review the company's website, annual report, and recent newspaper articles. Additional resources for researching companies are available on the Creighton Career Center website.
- b) Gather information about the company informally by talking with current employees or employees in a similar industry to learn more about the company.
- c) Be familiar with the duties and responsibilities of the job.
- d) Consider doing general reading about the field. What are current trends and challenges of the field, and what direction is it headed in the future?

2. Research yourself

- a) Be prepared to discuss your education, training, personality traits, characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, accomplishments, awards, career goals, research, employment, and internships. Give careful thought to the points you want to make regarding these areas.
- b) Review interview questions (examples are provided) and state your answers out loud. Practice with a friend or make an appointment with the Career Center for a practice interview.
- c) Be prepared to give examples to provide support for your responses. For example: If you state you are organized be prepared to give an example that demonstrates your organizational ability. Your responses should demonstrate how your experience, background, and knowledge match the position.
- d) Be familiar with the information on your resume and take a copy to the interview.

3. Prepare questions for the employer

- a) Before going to the interview prepare questions for the employer. Questions will often arise during the interview, but when the employer states at the end of the interview "Do you have any questions?" it's important to have a couple of well-thought-out questions to pose to the interviewer.
- b) Ask questions that demonstrate you have done your research and are well informed. For example, questions regarding information that can be found on the company website or in the company literature would not be appropriate. Questions should demonstrate that you are seeking additional knowledge.

The Interview

The actual interview is a very important part of the job search process. It's okay to be nervous. A little nervousness can work to your advantage. Good interviewers will create an atmosphere to help candidates relax so they are able to demonstrate their true self.

Before the Interview

- Make a trial run to the interview site if you're uncertain of the exact location and parking options.
- Have a copy of your resume, references, and any additional information in a portfolio folder.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early for the interview. Be sure to allow plenty of time.

What to Wear

Dress professionally. Presenting a professional image during the interview is very important. If you are uncertain about what to wear feel free to contact the Career Center. Below are a few suggestions:

- Wear a conservative, well-tailored suit (men and women)
- Be neat and clean
- Color coordinate your outfit
- Have conservative jewelry, hairstyle, and makeup
- Clean fingernails & freshen breath
- Shined shoes
- No perfume or cologne
- Women should wear hose and closed-toe shoes
- Do not smoke before or on your way to the interview. Your attire should be smoke free.

Guidelines for Effective Interviewing

- Smile!
- Greet everyone with a firm handshake and use their name
- Refer to the interviewer as Mr., Mrs., or Ms.
- Remember the correct pronunciation of the interviewer's name
- Ask for business cards from the individuals on the interview committee
- Treat receptionists and secretaries with respect
- Use direct eye contact and be aware of nonverbal communication
- Demonstrate maturity and confidence; relax and be yourself
- Be honest, assertive, attentive, and poised
- Have good posture when seated
- Listen to the complete question before answering
- Ask for clarification of the question if needed
- Convey interest in and knowledge of the position
- Answer questions articulately; use good grammar and diction (no slang terms)
- Be clear, concise and provide examples
- Be aware of your tone, inflection, and rate of speech
- Use professional language. Ask questions related to the job
- Turn your weakness into strengths or discuss how you have overcome them
- Be courteous and appreciative of the interviewer's time. Thank them
- Send individual thank you letters to the interviewers
- Conduct a self-evaluation after the interview. What would you change? What can you improve for next time?

Interview Don'ts

- Wait until the last minute to prepare for the interview
- Chew gum
- Speak negatively about a past job, employer, or supervisor
- Exaggerate experiences or abilities
- Use "uh", "um", and "like"
- Interrupt the interviewer
- Answer questions the way you think you should answer
- Answer questions with just "yes" or "no"

Questions Asked by Employers

- Tell me about yourself?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would a friend, (co-worker, or supervisor) describe you?
- Why did you select your university?
- What subjects did you like most and least?
- Why did you major in _____?
- Do you feel your grades are a good indication of your academic ability, and why?
- What would you change about your college experience?
- Tell me about the activities (or specifically one) you were involved in during college?
- What have you learned from participating in extra-curricular activities?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience?
- Which is more important to you, money or type of career?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
- What did you learn from your part-time job or internship?

- Do you have plans for continued study or advanced degree?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What will you contribute to the organization?
- What is the greatest challenge you have faced and how did you handle it?
- What characteristics are you looking for in a supervisor?
- What are two or three things that are most important to you in a job?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- How do you perform under pressure?
- What major problem did you encounter and how did you deal with it?
- What is your organizational style? On a scale of 1 (low) - 5 (high) how organized are you?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in our organization?
- What are your short term and long term career goals?
- Why would you like to work for this company?
- What do you know about the company?
- Are you willing to spend six months as a trainee?
- How do you feel about traveling and how many weeks per month are you willing to travel?
- How do you feel about relocating?
- Why should I hire you?

Questions For Employers

Interviews usually close with an opportunity for candidates to ask questions. Have a few well-thought-out questions prepared in advance. This is an opportunity to clarify information gathered from the interview, demonstrate your interest in the position, and make a final impression. The questions should pertain to the position or the company, be sincere, and based on prior research.

- Can you describe a typical day for the person in the position?
- What kind of person are you looking for?
- What is the best experience and background for the position?
- How are employees and job performance evaluated?
- What are opportunities for advancement in the company for someone with my degree and skills?
- Could you tell me about the primary people I would be working with?
- How would you describe the office culture?
- What is the company's management style?
- What type of training is provided for this position?
- What is the next step in the selection process?
- I am interested in the position; do you see anything that would prevent me from being involved in the next step?
- What have you enjoyed about working for the company? What is challenging about working for the company?
- Is there anything else I can tell you about my qualifications?
- In your opinion, what makes your company different than the competition?
- Why is the position currently open?

Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral interviewing focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that are job related. It is based on the belief that past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance. Even if you don't have a lot of experience, companies expect you to be able to relate any past experience (such as work, hobbies, activities, volunteer work, school projects, internships etc.) to the job for which you are interviewing.

How do I prepare for a behavioral interview?

Simply practicing the list of common interview questions will not work. Companies that use behavioral interviewing have predetermined skill sets they require for a particular position. These skill sets could

include: decision making and problem solving, leadership, motivation, communication, interpersonal skills, planning and organization, critical thinking skills, team building and the ability to influence others.

Employers often look for:

- **Content Skills** – knowledge that is work specific such as computer programming, accounting, website development, etc. expressed as nouns.
- **Functional or Transferable Skills** – used with people, information or things such as organizing, managing, developing, communicating, etc. expressed with verbs.
- **Adaptive or Self-Management Skills** – personal characteristics such as dependable, team player, self-directed, punctual, etc. expressed as adjectives.

Preparation

- Analyze the type of positions for which you're applying. Try to get an actual job description. What skills are required?
- Analyze your own background. What skills do you have that relate to your objective?
- Identify examples from your past experiences where you demonstrated those skills. How can you "tell a story" about your use of particular skills or knowledge? Concentrate on developing complete answers and remember that a good story has a beginning, middle, and end.
- Whenever possible, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility.
- Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then?
- Before starting the interview process, identify 2 to 3 of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points during the interview.
- Once employed, keep a personal achievement diary to help document performance.

Behavioral Interviewing Tips

- Develop three stories in advance that demonstrate your past performance.
- Describe how you actually behaved, not how you would have behaved.
- It is acceptable to also describe how you should have behaved if the desired outcome was not achieved. This demonstrates what was learned from the experience.
- Articulate the story clearly and concisely.
- Stay in control of your story; be careful not to ramble.
- Use a three step process to convey your experience:
 - o Identify the problem – The Residence Life office experienced a decrease in the number of qualified students applying for resident assistant positions.
 - o Action – I designed a new marketing campaign directed toward freshmen students that included screen saver pop up ads, informational meetings, and an active recruitment plan carried out by current resident assistants.
 - o Results – There was a 25% increase of applicants for resident assistant positions and the average GPA of the assistants hired increased from a 3.25 to 3.45.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

- Give an example of a time when you had to keep from speaking or making a decision because you did not have enough information.
- Give an example of a time when you had to make a quick decision.
- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stress that tested your coping skills.
- Provide an example of an important goal you had to set and your progress in reaching that goal.
- Describe the most creative project you've ever completed.
- Tell me about a situation when you dealt with a customer or coworker who was upset.
- Describe a time when you had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas or approach.
- Give an example of a time when you went beyond the call of duty.
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on others.
- What have you done in the past to contribute to a teamwork environment?
- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
- Tell me about an important goal you set in the past and about your success in reaching it.

Interview Follow-up

1. Review what occurred at the interview and if you would change anything.
 2. Make notes and respond to any requests.
 3. Immediately following the interview write a brief note thanking the interviewer for his or her time. Briefly summarize again why you are qualified for the job.
 4. If you have received no response within a few weeks of the interview, you may wish to follow-up with a phone call to the office of the person doing the hiring.
 5. If you are not offered the position, you may want to ask the employer for constructive criticism or recommendations for future interviews.
 6. When receiving a lot of rejections see Career Center or someone for help.
 7. If you are not interested in the organization, let them know.
 8. If you are offered a position, write out the pros and cons of the position to assess your final decision. You can request up to two weeks to decide on whether or not to accept an offer.
 9. If you need additional information before deciding, ask the organization for the desired information.
 10. Once you accept an offer, it binds you to a contract, therefore do not accept an offer and then reject it for another offer.
 11. Send a written acceptance to the organization.
 12. When you have accepted a job offer contact Career Center so that your registration may be deactivated. It is an annoyance to the employer and Career Center to send out your resume and learn that you have accepted a position.
 13. Contact other employers and inform them that you are accepting another position. This keeps you in good standing if a future position occurs.
 14. Write thank you notes to your references.
 15. Update your resume immediately after you are hired. Constantly update the resume before you forget dates, activities and responsibilities.
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