



Tame Your Interview Fears

Most people see the interviewer as the one with all the power. Remember, though, that you have something the interviewer wants too, or you wouldn't be at the interview in the first place. Think of the interview not as an interrogation, but as a two-way conversation during which you and the employer determine whether you meet each other's needs.

Prepare to be Your Best

Employers are impressed by candidates who have researched the organization, analyzed the job description and show energy and enthusiasm for the job. Take the following steps to increase your interview IQ:

Research the organization

Learn as much as you can before the interview. Visit their website to understand their products/services, volume of business, competitors, culture, and other information. Search for news articles or other publications about the organization. Use Google News, LexisNexis, Hoovers, Wetfeet, and Business Week as well as LinkedIn and Twitter.

Research the job

In addition to researching the company, you need to understand as much as you can about the job itself. Analyze the job description and match your experiences, skills and interests to the job.

It is important to have a good idea of a salary range for the position so that you can better negotiate when the time comes. Professional trade associations, the Department of Labor and www.salary.com are some sources of salary statistics. Speaking to professionals in the field is the best way to find accurate salary information (see *Informational Interviewing* handout).

Know yourself

Now that you have completed your company, job, and salary research, you need to focus on yourself. Why are you interested in this position? How do your experience and qualifications fit the requirements of the job? Be able to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, your educational and work experiences, and your goals and values. Write down your accomplishments and prepare concrete examples as evidence.

Know the interview format ahead of time

It is completely appropriate to ask "with whom will I be meeting?" and "how long should I plan to be at your office?" so you can prepare appropriately and pace yourself once you are there.

Practice, practice, practice

Read the job description thoroughly. Prepare answers to potential questions in advance. Be sure to connect your skills with their specific requirements. Practice your answers with a friend or a Career Services counselor. Recorded mock interviews are also available, after a practice session with a counselor.

Take advantage of "Interview Stream," an online interview-practice tool that can be used from home if you have a webcam on your computer, or from the designated computer in Career Services.

Interviewing

Prepare to be Your Best

Make a list of questions to ask

The questions you ask indicate your level of interest in the organization and your preparation for the interview. If you don't have any questions to ask, most employers will think you're not really interested in the job. Don't ask questions that could easily be answered through your own research. Instead, ask questions which demonstrate a genuine interest in and understanding of the organization and the position.

Examples:

- What are some of the qualities that will make the person in this position successful?
- Can you describe a typical day or week for the person in this position?
- What will the biggest challenges be for the person in this job?
- What are some of the possible career paths that this position may lead to?
- Could you tell me about the people with whom I will be working directly?
- What are the challenges currently facing the department/organization?
- When may I expect to hear from you regarding my candidacy?

First impressions count

As soon as you enter the office, you are being assessed based on your appearance and behavior. Don't risk being late. If you arrive very early, don't ask for your interviewer until 10 minutes before the appointment. Be courteous to the receptionist and every other person you meet. Turn off your phone and ipod; don't smoke or chew gum. Smile and offer a firm handshake, maintain good eye contact and control nervous mannerisms.

Check your outfit and shoes well in advance to be sure everything is clean and pressed, and still fits. Dress professionally, even if you know that dress is casual in the company where you are interviewing, do not dress casually for the interview. A man should wear a suit or jacket and tie, and a woman should wear a suit, skirt or pants and a jacket. No low cut tops or too short skirts. Both men and women should avoid extremes in style, hair, makeup and jewelry, as well as strong aftershaves, perfumes or cologne as many people are allergic to certain scents. If you're unsure what to wear, err on the side of being too conservative. If you are still unsure review your dress plans with Career Services.

References

Bring a list of three to four people who can attest to your professional abilities. Your references might include former managers, co-workers, professors, clients or others who know your work well. Include a brief description of how each reference knows you and how they can be contacted. Note: only provide the reference list at the employer's request.

Common Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in this position?
3. Where do you see yourself in five years?
4. Can you describe one or two of your most important accomplishments?
5. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
6. What is a high pressure/stressful situation you've experienced recently? How did you handle it?
7. Give me an example of a conflict you encountered and how you handled it.
8. Describe a situation in which you worked as a member of a team/acted as a leader.
9. Why should I hire you?
10. List three things your former supervisor/co-workers would say about you.

Interviewing

After the interview

Be sure to get a business card from everyone who interviews you and send a brief individual thank-you letter or email soon after the interview. Reiterate your interest in the position and briefly state why you are the best candidate.

Behavioral Interview Questions

Many employers use an approach called “behavioral interviewing.” This consists of the employer asking you to describe your skills and experience by telling brief stories about tasks, responsibilities, successes or failures.

Examples of behavioral questions include:

- Give me an example of a time when you had to juggle multiple tasks.
- Tell me about a situation in which you solved a problem as a member of a group or team.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. What was the result?

Answering Behavioral Questions

Answers to behavioral questions should describe specific situations where your actions are the focus. (see *S.T.A.R. Strategy*) Often, behavioral questions are used to assess skills required by the position, such as time management, team work, initiative, organizational and communication skills.

Difficult Questions

Be prepared for the questions you hope no one asks. For example, if you have a gap in your resume, you should expect to be asked about it. Your explanation should emphasize the positive, such as what you learned from the experience:

“That’s correct, I didn’t work in 2009. I had been a part-time student, and decided to go full time to finish sooner, so I wasn’t working.”

Perhaps you were laid off. Frame your explanation in a matter-of-fact way that does not refer to your job performance:

“I was one of 180 people laid off last September when XYZ Inc. went through a major downsizing.”

What if you were fired for some reason?

“I just didn’t fit into the organization. Finally, my supervisor and I decided it was best for me to leave. This was difficult, but it showed me the importance of finding a good match for my next position.”

These examples show straightforward answers that reflect well on you, demonstrate that you are resilient and that you have learned from any mistakes or setbacks.

S.T.A.R. Strategy

One strategy for answering behavior-based questions is to use the **S.T.A.R. formula:** (Situation, Task, Action, and Result.)

Here’s an example:

“Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. What was the result?”

Situation: While working as a salesperson for Deluxe Caterers, I managed an account that had been mishandled in the past. When this customer came in to place a large, new order, she was angry. She expressed dissatisfaction with past service and asked us to guarantee superior work this time.

Task: I wanted to maintain this customer relationship, but also to not promise service we could not deliver. I expressed regret to her about past service problems and said I would review her order in detail with my supervisor and get back to her.

Action: I worked with my supervisor and we identified potential pitfalls and then adjusted the services we could provide. I called the customer back and negotiated a new contract.

Result: While the customer was disappointed that we could not provide everything she wanted, she appreciated my honesty and in the end both parties were happy.

Types of interviews

Always check with the employer in advance so you know what type of interview to expect, as there are a variety of styles and formats.

Phone: Phone interviews are commonly used to screen candidates in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. Without visual and body language cues, telephone interviews rely heavily on the content in your answers, and your ability to project enthusiasm and interest in your voice. (see Phone Interview handout)

Group: This typically includes a company and position presentation to multiple candidates simultaneously and group interactions such as work simulation exercises. Employers use this type of interview to assess things like communication, interpersonal, team and leadership skills, as well as how you handle stress.

Introduce yourself to the other candidates before the interview begins. Actively participate – which includes listening- but don't interrupt others or dominate the conversation. Watch your non verbal communication and pay attention to all of the interviewers for valuable clues.

Panel: Various representatives involved in the hiring process meet with a candidate at the same time. Because rapport is so important in an interview and difficult to establish with each person on a panel, take the opportunity when you are introduced to look each person in the eye, greet her/him using her/his name and shake hands.

As you answer questions respond by making eye contact and using the name of the person who asked the question, then include the rest of the panel in your answer. As you answer, try to cross reference answers you've previously made (if it's appropriate), but don't simply repeat your previous answer.

When preparing questions be sure to include ones that are relevant to each person's role within the organization.

At the conclusion of the interview be sure to get business cards for all panel members in order to send them a thank-you note.

Case: This style is usually seen in interviews for management consulting and investment banking but is also used in other industries. Candidates are given a case – a set of facts – to analyze and solve. Generally interviewers are looking at the approach used as much as the answer. Be sure to build a logical framework for answering the question. It is generally expected that you will ask questions.

Interviewers are usually assessing quantitative and analytical skills, problem – solving, communication, listening ability, creativity, flexibility, the ability to think quickly under pressure. It is imperative to prepare for this style of interview, do not “wing it” – research the company you're interviewing with- companies often post guides to “acing the case interview”.

To learn more, see...www.best-job-interview.com; and www.quintcareers.com

Thank You Notes

Employers expect to hear from you and will wonder about your interest in the position and your professionalism if they don't receive one. Traditionally thank-you notes have been brief handwritten notes sent by regular mail. It is completely acceptable to send a typed note by regular mail or by email. Try to send it within 24 hours after the interview, but don't send it immediately after, while on the commute home. Give yourself a little time to actually process the interview and write a targeted, thoughtful note.

Sample

Dear Ms. Jones,

Thank you for the chance to interview with Abell Research this afternoon. I came away feeling very enthusiastic about the position. The opportunity to combine independent research with team report production is just what I am looking for. I am also very excited about the possibility that my strong interest in evaluating early-education programs matches the need you have for someone who can quickly contribute in that area.

If you have any more questions for me, please be in touch. Again, thank you for your time in our interview and for considering me as a candidate for the position of researcher on your team.

Sincerely,

Suzie Queue

Responding to The Job Offer

Your first step after being given a verbal job offer is to thank the employer for the offer, ask when you can expect to receive a written offer, and when they need to hear back from you regarding your answer.

It is not advised to accept the offer on the spot, as that will not leave you even the possibility for negotiating your salary or other elements within the offer.

After receiving the offer letter with salary and benefits information, you can now ask any questions, negotiate, and/or accept the offer.

Salary Negotiation

To prepare for a salary conversation, research ranges for the position, keeping in mind that size and status of company, geographic region, and your specific skill set will influence it. Some web resources are salary.com, payscale.com and salaryexpert.com.

If salary comes up during an interview, try to postpone the discussion. For example, you could say, "I would be happy to discuss my salary expectations, but I feel I need to know more about the position first."

Stating your salary requirements in terms of a wide range is a fair response, as is a general statement like "I've researched ranges for a position like this, and I'm sure we can come to an agreement on salary within that range."

In a tight job market, candidates might or might not be able to negotiate salary. Sometimes an employer will agree to additional benefits or a signing bonus in lieu of a higher salary.

When negotiating, be prepared to articulate why you should receive additional compensation, based on industry research and your specific skill sets. It is always appropriate to ask, but critical to keep in mind that negotiation with a potential employer is not an adversarial process; ideally, all parties will emerge feeling they have achieved their goals.

See *Salary Negotiation* handout for more details.