

Interviewing: Making a Great Impression

Interviewing is one of the most dynamic forms of business and professional communication. The interview gives you a chance to prove to a potential employer that you are capable, competent and qualified. Therefore, it is important that you learn as much as you can about interviewing in order to effectively market yourself during an interview.

INTERVIEW FORMAT

No two interviews or interviewers are ever alike. However, a typical 30-minute screening interview may follow a format similar to this:

■ Greeting and Introduction

The first few minutes of an interview usually consist of a firm handshake, a quick and professional introduction and some small talk to develop rapport between you and the interviewer. Make sure you smile and that your initial presentation is positive. An employer spends the first minute of the interview developing an impression of you, and you spend the rest of the interview confirming or changing those impressions.

■ Overview of the Position and Interview

After the greeting, the employer may give you an idea of how the interview will proceed. In some cases, the interviewer will briefly describe the position and/or the organization. This may last about three to five minutes.

■ Answering the Interviewer's Questions

This section of the interview will typically last about 15-20 minutes. You will typically be talking about 70% of the time and the interviewer will be listening. Remember that this is your chance to elaborate on your qualifications; it is essential that you provide clear examples that further highlight your skills. Refer to the "Answering Questions" section to learn how to handle interview questions effectively.

■ Asking the Interviewer Questions

Always ask the interviewer questions. Prior to your interview, create a list of about 20 potential questions you would like to ask. Some of these questions may be answered during the course of the interview. However, you should still have a few questions remaining on your list at the end of the interview. Plan to ask three to five questions that reflect your genuine interest in the position and/or organization. You may also want to ask the interviewer to provide additional information about a topic discussed during the interview or refer to information you learned during your employer research. This will communicate to the interviewer that you were listening and prepared for the interview. You will have several minutes to ask questions.

■ Closing the Interview

It will take about three to five minutes to bring the interview to a close after you have asked your questions. The interviewer may outline what you can expect to happen next in the employment process and/or invite you for a second interview. If the interviewer does not discuss the employment process, it is fine to ask about this so you

will know what to expect. Thank the interviewer for his/her time and end the interview with a friendly smile and another firm handshake. If you did not obtain the interviewer's business card earlier, ask for one so that you can follow up with the individual.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

As an interviewee, you may find yourself in several different interview situations. Here are a few examples of potential types of interviews:

■ The Telephone Interview

Employers typically use the telephone interview as a screening tool to decide whom to interview in person. This can be a very simple interview with just a few questions, or it may be a full 30+ minute interview. The interviewee must be careful to speak clearly, listen attentively and communicate sincerely since the interviewer does not have the ability to read body language over the telephone. You may have your reference materials (resume, notes related to typical interview questions, work samples, etc.) available to review during the interview. Be careful to eliminate speak ticks such as "um," "like," "and," "ok," "ya know," etc.

■ The One-on-One Interview

This is probably the most frequently used interview. This meeting incorporates an individual approach to the interview process and allows you to meet directly with one interviewer. Work to establish rapport with the interviewer, as this is the only person making a decision on whether to offer you a second interview, or even the job.

■ The Panel Interview

In a panel interview, several individuals will interview you at one time. Interviewers may take turns asking you prepared questions. If a panel is interviewing you, relax, get a feel for the group dynamics, and keep communication lines open by periodically making eye contact with all panel members as you respond to questions.

■ The Satellite/On-Line Interview

In an effort to save time and money, many employers are conducting satellite or on-line computer interviews. Typically, in this type of interview the interviewee is sitting in front of a camera that is attached to a computer or television and communicates with the interviewer who utilizes similar technology.

■ The Group Interview

The group interview is almost the complete opposite of the panel interview. In the group interview there is one interviewer and several interviewees, with interviewees competing to see who will surface as the leader of the group. The person who answers questions professionally and diplomatically wins the competition and the right to continue in the interviewing process or to get the job. This is frequently used when an employer has many people to interview and few people to conduct the interviews.

▪ **The Meal Interview**

Frequently utilized by business professionals, the meal interview will give the interviewer a sense of your ability to function in social settings. Brush up on your table manners and rules of professional etiquette, order non-messy foods, treat your server with respect, and order a moderately priced meal. Avoid drinking alcohol because even one drink can reduce your ability to maintain a professional demeanor.

▪ **The Follow-up Interview/On-Site Visit**

If an employer is interested in continuing the employment process with you after the first interview, you may be invited for a second interview or on-site visit. A tour of the facilities, staff introductions, and multiple interviews typically characterize this type of interview. During tours, give the tour leader your undivided attention and ask interesting questions.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

The way you respond to interview questions tells the interviewer whether or not you are qualified. Therefore, it is important to know what types of questions may be asked and what responses are appropriate. A thorough review of the position job description will help you to prepare for the types of questions that you may be asked.

You may also wish to create an “interview study guide”, where you highlight key phrases from the job description, list your strengths and challenges, and write down specific examples/experiences where you have demonstrated the qualifications the employer seeks.

Practice interviewing before your scheduled interview. One good way to get started is to obtain a list of sample interview questions, prepare potential answers and practice interviewing with someone. Consider scheduling a mock interview with a Career Services staff member.

During an interview, remember the Three P's:

Before formulating an answer to an interview question, consider applying the following three P's to your response:

▪ **Ponder**

Ask yourself why the employer has asked a question. This will help you determine what skill, trait, value or ability is being measured. Try to respond to the question by giving an example of a time when you demonstrated the criteria that is being sought or evaluated.

▪ **Prove**

Prove every statement you make by providing clear and specific examples. If you say that you have excellent communication skills give examples of situations where you utilized these skills. If you claim that Webster University has provided you with an outstanding, well-rounded education, discuss the curriculum requirements.

▪ **Project**

Project a positive image even when the questioning gets negative. If you are asked to state one of your weaknesses, do so. However, explain what you are doing to eliminate that weakness and what you have learned in the process.

Behavioral Interviewing:

This type of interview is very popular as employers seek to determine whether or not you can actually demonstrate the skills needed for the position. In a behavioral interview you may be asked to give examples of instances when you have demonstrated a particular skill. The premise behind this type of interview is that past performance is an indicator of future performance (if you did it before, you should be able to do it again).

To be successful in the behavioral interview, relax and think quickly drawing upon particular examples from your education and experiences. When answering these questions, it is important to give specific examples; consider using the “STAR” technique. With the STAR technique, you provide examples by discussing the Situation you were in or the Task you completed, the Actions that you took and the Results. It is okay to give an example where you did not have a successful outcome, as long as you describe what you learned from this situation and what you would do differently in the future when faced with a similar issue.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is a list of sample questions that you may be asked; note that some of these are behavioral questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you choose this occupational field?
3. What do you consider to be your three greatest strengths?
4. What do you consider to be your three greatest weaknesses?
5. What things are most important to you in a job?
6. What do you know about our organization that makes you want to work with us?
7. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
8. Tell me about a specific occasion in which you needed to adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and/or environments.
9. Describe a situation that required you to complete a number of different tasks at the same time. How did you handle this?
10. Talk about a time that you worked on a team project. What was the project and what particular role did you play in the team?
11. Where do you see yourself five years from now?
12. Discuss a situation in which you had to adjust quickly to changes in your scheduled plans. What did you do in this situation and how did it affect you?

HANDLING INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

You may be asked questions regarding your marital status, age, race, religious preference, children, sexual orientation or other issues that are not job related. These questions may not always be illegal but all are definitely inappropriate or unethical interview questions because they are unrelated to the job qualifications. Handling these questions can pose a personal dilemma as you decide how to respond. There are no strict guidelines to follow in dealing with these questions and many times interviewers who are unaware that the questions are inappropriate ask them. However, if you feel uncomfortable about a question ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I really want this job?
2. How badly do I want this job?
3. Do I really want to work for an organization that asks inappropriate questions?
4. Does the interviewer realize that this question is inappropriate?

Based on your responses to these questions you may wish to:

1. End the interview.
2. Ask the interviewer what relevance the question has to the position or why the question is being asked.
3. Refuse to answer the question.
4. Answer the question with or without regret.

Keep in mind, the way you handle this situation says a lot about your professionalism and maturity. Avoid being rude and argumentative while remaining positive, polite and assertive.

ASKING QUESTIONS

It is essential that you ask questions during your interview; this will demonstrate to the employer that you are interested in the position and/or company. While questions regarding salary and benefits are considered inappropriate in a first interview, the following are examples of questions that you may ask during an interview:

1. How long have you been with this organization?
2. Describe your career path within this organization.
3. What do you enjoy most about working for this organization?
4. Is there a formal orientation program?
5. What is the typical career path for this position?
6. How does this position fit within the organization's structure and/or mission?
7. What are some of the biggest challenges facing this position, this department or this organization?
8. What are the performance expectations for this position?
9. How frequently is performance evaluated?
10. Will I have supervisory responsibilities? If so, how many people will I be supervising?
11. How would you describe your leadership/management style?
12. Describe the individuals with whom I will be working.
13. What kind of training and/or professional development programs do you have?

INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

It is important to always send a thank you letter to the interviewer(s) after an interview. Note the names and job titles of everyone you meet during an interview. Thank-you letters should be mailed to every person who interviewed you within 24 hours of your interview; emailed letters may be appropriate in some instances with short timeframes. Consider sending handwritten thank-you notes to people you met throughout the day but who did not interview you (i.e. support staff members and tour guides).

GREAT INTERVIEWEES

- Are on time
- Are dressed professionally and are well groomed
- Have a solid hand shake
- Are self-confident and assertive
- Smile and have a great sense of humor
- Demonstrate excellent interpersonal communication skills
- Answer questions succinctly
- Are aware of non-verbal cues
- Can talk objectively about their qualifications without appearing boastful
- Show interest
- Have applicable work experience
- Are focused
- Are flexible
- Are polite and conscientious
- Generate excitement and enthusiasm
- Are positive
- Can accept negative feedback
- Carry extra copies of their resume and reference list
- Carry a notepad in a professional portfolio and pen to record important information
- Have documentation and reference information readily available
- Can pass the drug screen
- Follow-up

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- Read books on interviewing. Several are available in the Career Services resource library and in most public libraries.
- Schedule an appointment to discuss interviewing or conduct a mock interview with a Career Services staff member.