

Official Guide *For*
Effective
INTERVIEWS

Office of Career Services INDIANA UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST

The Office of Career Services

Official Guide for Effective Interviews

Landing an interview with an employer you are interested in can be a great reassurance that you are on the right track towards gainful employment. Through preparation and follow-up, you will demonstrate what a capable, knowledgeable, confident and energetic candidate you are for the job.

The next few pages will outline preparation and follow-up strategies needed for a successful interview. Included are sample questions and a detailed dress guide. The best preparation is to practice the suggestions provided here. The Office of Career Services offers mock interviews to give you the opportunity to rehearse and gain feedback. As always, the Office of Career Services staff is available to answer questions and assist you with your search.

MAKE THE INTERVIEW COUNT:

6 P'S OF JOB INTERVIEWS

Job interviews can cause stress and anxiety since it is the interview that usually lands (or fails to land) the job. Interviewees must know how to give the best answers to the interviewer's questions; and it helps to know what some of these questions might be and how to best prepare for the interview.

1. Preparation

Learn about the company to prepare for the interview.

2. Practice

Hold practice sessions that prepares you for the interviewer's questions.

3. Presentation

Presentation includes appearance, attitude, enthusiasm and arrival for the interview.

4. Powerful Interview

Be able to answer the most commonly asked questions during an interview, as well as those that are difficult to answer.

5. Post-Interview

Write thank-you notes and make follow-up telephone calls.

6. Ponder the Position

Make proper considerations when deciding whether or not to accept the position.

Preparation

It is not easy to articulate your strong points to an interviewer if you cannot articulate them to yourself. Be sure you can discuss your skills/abilities, training, experience, education and career plans/goals. A common reason recruiters reject an applicant is due to his/her inability to convey goals, strengths and career direction.

Consider the following suggestions:

- List your strongest skills with examples on how you have demonstrated each of them.
- Determine which of your skills meet the qualifications required by the specific job you are seeking.
- Prepare responses to common interview questions.
- Consider your weaknesses. Weaknesses should be considered as potential strengths or areas for growth.

For example, if a job description request experience with a particular software program for which you have no experience, then you could respond with: "I have learned similar software programs in a short amount of time and have confidence that I could do the same with this program."

Research the Organization and Field

Thoroughly research each employer with whom you have an interview (be familiar with product lines, services offered, growth prospects, etc.). Also, look for the company's mission statement or philosophy. Often this can give you clues on what the company values and what skills would best fit those values.

Possible research resources include:

- The Office of Career Services - Career Library
- Infotrac or the Readers' Guide
- The Internet
- Annual report
- Field-specific journals
- Magazines and newspapers
- Local Chamber of Commerce

Dressing for Success

Professional business attire is an important factor in projecting a competent image. Venturing into the world of work may be cause for a drastic shift in your wardrobe. In most settings, conservative and conformity is the order. Each company will have its own guidelines, so it is important to know your potential employer before you meet them in the interview. When in doubt, it is better to be too conservative than too flashy.

Some guidelines to consider are:

- Wear solid color clothing
- Tighter-woven fabrics rather than bold prints or patterns
- Keep accessories simple
- Avoid wearing flashy patterns and bold prints or patterns

Hints for Women

Basic pumps, modest jewelry and conservative makeup helps to present a professional look.

(13 Rule)

Never wear more than thirteen items from head to toe.
(Keep accessories simple)

Hints For men

Wear polished shoes with socks high enough so, no skin is visible when you sit down and cross your legs.

During the Interview

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early to allow you time to relax before the interview begins.
- Learn the interviewer's name in advance and greet him/her by name with a firm handshake. If you are anxious, you may want to slowly count to ten or wipe your hands on a handkerchief to keep them dry.
- The moment you arrive for the interview is when the recruiter begins to evaluate you.
- Many interviewers begin the interview with small talk. Topics may range from weather to sports. Despite the casual nature of this part of the interview, be aware it is likely that you are being evaluated on your communication skills.
- The main part of the interview starts when the interviewer begins discussing the organization.
- Make sure that you have a clear understanding of the job and the company; if not, ask clarifying questions.
- When asked to talk about your qualifications, structure your answers to be specific, concrete and detailed.
- Be yourself. Let the interviewer get to know you.
- Consider offering examples of your work (i.e. a portfolio) that will document your accomplishments.
- Be prepared to leave copies of your resume, transcripts and a reference page or reference letters.

Questions You May Want to Ask Employers

Ask some of these **Questions** only if the answer is NOT provided in company literature or in an information session.

- What personality traits do you consider critical to success in this job?
- Will I be working with a team or on my own?
- What will my responsibilities be as a team member?
- Will I have leadership responsibilities?
- What do you consider the five most important day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- How do you see me complementing the existing group?
- What are the major projects I will be working with in the first six months/year?
- What is the timetable for filling this position?
- What other training and development programs exist to help me grow professionally?
- What do you see as the strengths of this department?
- What does the department hope to achieve in the next two or three years?
- How will that help the company?
- Will I be encouraged to learn about the company beyond my own department?
- How are market trends such as [fill in topic) affecting the company's growth?
- What is being done about them?
- Currently, what new endeavors are actively being pursued by the company?
- What expansion is planned for this department, division or facility?

Types of Interviews

Traditional Interview

Behavior-Based Interview

Panel Interview

Group Interview

Video Interview

Consulting or Case Interview

Traditional Interview

This type of interview typically involves more global or general questions.

Questions You May Be Asked By Employers during an Interview

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your short and long-range career objectives? Why did you choose those goals? How do you plan to achieve them?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing? How has your college experience prepared you for this career? How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation? What do you think it takes to be successful in this job/field/career?
- Why did you choose your college? What led you to choose your major?
- What college subjects did you like best and least? Describe your most rewarding college experience. Do you have plans for continued study?
- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- What do you consider your greatest strengths and weaknesses? What have you done to improve your weaknesses? What challenges have you encountered? What motivates you? How would you describe yourself?
- Why should I hire you? What qualifications do you have that will be successful in business?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this company? What do you know about our company? What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours? In what ways do you think you would make a contribution to our company? What two or three things are most important to you in your job? Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable? What kind of boss do you prefer? How do you work under pressure? How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What questions would you like to ask me?

Behavior-based Interview

More and more employers are using behavioral interviewing based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is a past performance in a similar situation.

Behavioral interviews provide employers with a more objective set of information about candidates than other interviewing methods. Employers predetermine the skills necessary for the position and ask pointed questions to learn if you possess those skills. Your responses to their questions will have the most positive effect if you use the following three-step format to outline your answers:

***Situation:** Describe a challenge you faced similar to the example posed by the interviewer.*

***Action:** Explain the actions that you took to resolve the situation.*

***Results/Outcome:** Detail the beneficial and positive outcomes that came from your initiatives.*

Questions You May Be Asked During A Behavior-based Interview

- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
- Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Give an example of a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Give me an example of an important goal, which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

Panel Interview

This interview typically consists of the job applicant being interviewed by three or more interviewers.

Address your responses to all members of the panel.

Group Interview

In this format, several interviewees are interviewed at the same time by one or more interviewers.

The goal of this style is to allow the interviewer(s) to observe your communication style and how you interact in a team.

Video Interview

This format is cost-effective for employers located in distant cities. It utilizes a camera-mounted PC linked to a special telephone line. For this type of interview, focus on the interviewer's image, and speak clearly. You may keep a resume in front of you for reference.

Consulting or Case Interview

In this type of interview, employers poses a problem relevant to their business and asks the candidate to propose logical steps to resolve the problem. The interviewer usually does not know the answer to case questions. They are more interested in the logical way you approach and solve the problem. This method is popular with consulting firms because it introduces you to the kinds of questions consultants encounter daily. At the same time, this approach assesses your organizational, analytical and problem-solving approach to unfamiliar situations.

Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are often used as a cost-saving screening technique. During the interview, the company representative has only ears with which to judge you, and that is something you must overcome.

Telephone Interview Tips

- Be articulate!
- Return any messages from the employer right away. If you delay, it may appear you are not interested.
- Set up the interview so you can be somewhere comfortable where there are no distractions.
- When introductions are made, acknowledge all the interviewers. You may want to write down their names so you will remember them and have them available for sending a thank-you letter.
- Take a surprise call in stride. If you receive a call as a result of a mailed resume or a telephone message you left and you are unprepared, be calm, sound positive, friendly and collected: "Thank you for calling, Mr. /Ms. _____. Would you wait just a moment while I close the door?" Place the phone down, take three deep breaths to slow your heart down, pull out the appropriate company information and your resume, smile (it improves the tone of your voice) and pick up the phone again. Now you are in control of yourself and the situation
- Beware of over-familiarity. You should always refer to the interviewer by his or her surname until invited to do otherwise.
- Allow the company representative to do most of the talking - to ask most of the questions. Keep up your end of the conversation. Be sure to ask a few questions of your own that will reveal you as an intelligent person and provide you the opportunity to promote your candidacy.
- Beware of giving yes/no answers. They give no real information about your abilities.
- Be factual in your answers. You should be brief yet thorough.
- Speak directly into the telephone.
- Take notes

Closing the Interview

- During the closing, the recruiter typically asks, "Do you have any questions?" It is important to have some ready. The questions you ask should bring out your interest in and knowledge of the organization. By asking well-thought-out questions, you show the employer you are serious about the organization and demonstrate to the recruiter that you have done your research.
- Shake the recruiter's hand and thank him/her for considering you.
- Ask/request to contact the recruiter if additional questions arise.
- Ask about the time frame in which they plan to fill position.

After the Interview

- Take some notes regarding information obtained in the interview that will help in writing a thank-you letter. (Incorporate an item of interest into letter)
- Write a thank-you letter within 24 hours of the interview.
If you have been asked to send additional information to the company, do so as soon as possible.
- Make follow up phone calls.
- Express your continued interest.