

THE ULTIMATE INTERVIEW GUIDE: STANDING OUT IN THE INTERVIEW

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OVERVIEW

An Interview Is...

- A chance for the employer to get to know you
- A chance for you to evaluate whether the manager and company culture are a fit
- An opportunity to prove that your experiences and skills align with the job duties

What Employers Look For

Employers use the interview process to obtain answers to four questions:

1. Can you do the job?
2. Will you do the job?
3. Will you fit in with the organization?
4. Are you a person I will like and our team will like?

It is your job to convince the prospective employer that the answer to all four questions is yes. Be honest about your experiences and skills that make you an excellent candidate.

Types of interviews

Phone/Virtual: Often, employers conduct first round interviews via phone or Skype. Phone and virtual interviews last 15-60 minutes and employers use them as a screening tool for future interviews including on-campus and on-site interviews.

On-Campus: Employers may offer an on-campus interview after a candidate has completed a successful phone or virtual interview.

On-Site: Employers offer on-site interviews after a candidate completes a successful phone, virtual, and/or on-campus interview. Some on-site interviews could last 2 hours while others could last a half-day or full-day. The on-site interview is the last step in the hiring process where candidates meet multiple people and may be asked to take assessments. It is also the last opportunity for you to evaluate the employer.

HOW TO PREPARE



TOP 10 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

What interests you about this job? Why did you choose this particular career path?

Why should we hire you?

What do you know about our organization?

What are your strengths? What is one weakness?

What courses have you enjoyed the most? Least?

How would your boss or professors describe you?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

What questions do you have for me?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about a time when you envisioned a better outcome and energized others to achieve the desired results. (**leadership**)
2. Tell me about a time when you chose to step into a situation, took charge, gained support, and brought about excellent results. (**leadership**)
3. Tell me about a problem situation when you had to analyze facts quickly, define key issues, and develop a plan that produced good results. (**problem-solving**)
4. Describe a time when you learned from a mistake to improve your solution to a problem. (**problem-solving**)
5. Tell me about a time when you contributed a new and better way of doing something. (**creativity**)
6. Tell me about a time when you were able to think “outside-the-box” to come up with a solution. (**creativity**)
7. Tell me about a time when you “pushed back” against doing something even though the majority, including some at higher levels, favored the idea. (**risk-taking**)
8. Describe a time when you took a well-informed risk and failed. (**risk-taking**)
9. Describe a situation where you influenced a group decision to your point-of-view. (**collaboration**)
10. Tell me about a situation where you formed productive relationships with a diverse group of people to accomplish a common goal. (**collaboration**)
11. Tell me about a time when you were challenged by multiple, competing priorities. How did you focus your efforts? Describe your results. (**time-management**)
12. Give me an example of setting a goal and meeting it despite short-term obstacles. (**time-management**)
13. Give me an example of a situation where you faced a conflict or had a difficult communication issue. (**communication**)
14. Tell me about a special contribution you have made to your employer. (**individual strengths**)
15. Tell me about the most difficult situation you have faced in the context of work or campus organization. (**problem-solving**)

When answering behavioral questions, use the STAR method. The interviewer is looking for you to articulate specific examples of your responses to certain situations. Provide focused answers that demonstrate specific skills or qualities necessary for the position.

S – SITUATION

T – TASK

A – ACTION

R – RESULT

To practice answering behavioral interview questions, set-up a chart using the STAR method.

Example:

Behavior Based Question	S Describe the SITUATION	T Describe the TASK	A Describe the ACTION taken	R Quantify the RESULTS
Tell me about a situation where you formed productive relationships with a diverse group of people to accomplish a common goal.	My group was assigned a class presentation to discuss the unique challenges that homosexual students face on our campus. Some in the group were more accepting of this student population while others were less accepting.	We were asked to present ideas about increasing university support of homosexual students on campus.	Despite viewpoints very different from my own, I pulled the group together by suggesting that we focus on our task of providing services to a student population, rather than discuss homosexuality from a moral/ethical perspective.	We received an A on our presentation and the university adopted our idea to provide safe zone training to faculty, staff, and students.

DIFFICULT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What would you do if you discovered that your company was doing something illegal?
2. How do you handle stress? Give examples.
3. What was the last book you read? How has it impacted you?
4. If you could meet a historical figure, who would it be and why?
5. How would you gain the confidence of a client who has over 30 years of experience?
6. What would you do if a colleague is underperforming and it is affecting your department?
7. Where else are you interviewing?
8. What types of people do you dislike the most?
9. You appear to be overqualified for the position. Why would you be interested in a position at this level?
10. What do you see as future trends of our industry?

HOW WE CAN HELP YOU PREPARE

Big Interview

Big Interview gives students a powerful suite of tools to get you ready...fast. Their complete lesson curriculum teaches students how to get inside the head of any interviewer and prove that they're the ideal candidate. The interactive interview practice module gives you the hands-on preparation you need to comfortably and confidently deliver stellar answers. Additional tools like the Answer Builder, Question Library, and Interview Roulette help users drill down on specific skills and get even more guided instruction.



Mock Interviews

In addition to Big Interview, you are invited to schedule an appointment with a career advisor for a mock interview. It is most helpful to submit your resume and the job description of a desired position to a career advisor in advance of the appointment. To schedule an appointment email careerservices@highpoint.edu or visit www.highpoint.edu/careerinternships.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Questions to Ask the Employer

1. What do you see ahead for your company in the next 5 years? What do you see as future trends for this industry?
2. How do you distinguish yourself from your competition?
3. What skill-sets do you not have on board already that you are looking to add with a new hire?
4. What is the overall structure of the company, and how does your department fit within the structure?
5. What have been the department's successes over the last few years?
6. What would you consider to be the most important aspects of this position?
7. Where have successful employees in this position progressed to within the company?
8. Can you describe a typical day/week in this position? Can you describe the typical client/customer/student I would be working with?
9. How would you describe this organization's culture?
10. What should I expect the next steps to be after our interview today?

Questions NOT to Ask Employers in the First Interview

1. What will be the salary? What are the benefits? (You may ask these questions in the final interview.)
2. How much vacation time will I get?

Examples of Illegal Questions from Employers:

1. Are you a U.S. citizen?
2. What is your native tongue?
3. What religion do you practice?
4. Which religious holidays do you observe?
5. How old are you?
6. When do you plan to retire?
7. Are you married or partnered?
8. Do you have children or plan to have children?
9. Are you disabled?
10. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?
11. Are you single?

If employers ask you an illegal question, there are some strategies that you can implement. First, you can respond by asking them a question. For example, you may say, "that's an interesting question that I'm happy to answer, but could you tell me how it relates to the job?". A second strategy involves addressing the concern behind the question. For example, if an employer asks about plans for marriage and children, you can respond by saying, "nothing that comes up in my family life will get in the way of my ability and desire to do the job well." You also can choose to answer the question or refuse to respond, though both may be undesirable. Regardless of your strategy, if an organization asks an illegal question, evaluate whether it was intentional or unintentional bias and decide whether the organization remains a place in which you want to work.

How to End the Interview

At the end of the interview, ask for the interviewer's business card. Be sure to shake the interviewer's hand and thank them for meeting with you. Clarify next steps, their timeline for the hiring process, and when you can expect to hear from them. Also, indicate that you plan to follow-up with them if you have not heard from them by the date they specified. Be aware that confidently following-up is a critical part of the process. Do not leave anything to chance.

FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Thank You Note

It is important to send a thank you note that not only thanks the interviewer for their time, but also reiterates why you would be a good fit for the organization. Send an email or hand-written note on a professional looking notecard within 24 hours of the interview. **Below is a sample thank-you note.**

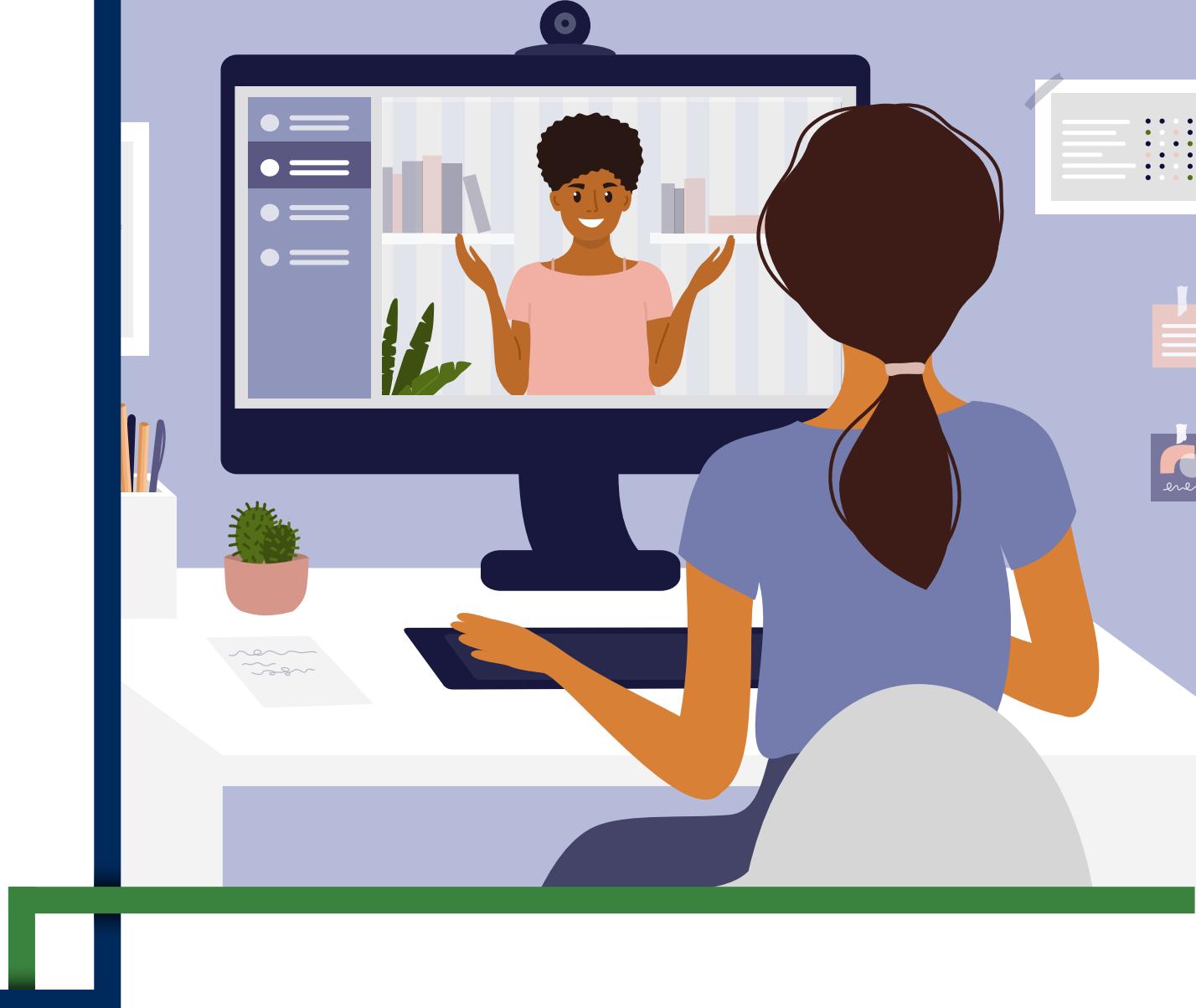
October 20, 2017

Mrs. Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I enjoyed hearing about BB&T's Leadership Development Program as well as your many professional accomplishments within banking. I was impressed to learn that Leadership Development Program participants will be taught by senior and executive management and will have an opportunity to choose one of two areas of focus. As we discussed, my internship with Wells Fargo and my experiences as President of the Sales Club and Vice-President of Zeta Tau Alpha have prepared me to excel within BB&T's structure. I would be delighted to be considered for a position in BB&T's Leadership Development Program, and I will follow-up with you next week. Thank you again for talking with me yesterday morning.

Sincerely,

Will B. Banker



INTERVIEW STRATEGIES GUIDE



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

STUDENT
LIFE

Career Exploration
& Education

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INTERVIEW PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Interviews are an opportunity to show and communicate to an employer why you are the best candidate for the position. Interviews allow you to discuss your relevant skills, strengths, and experiences, then to relate them to the position and the needs of the employer. You also have the opportunity in the interview to determine whether the employer and the position are a good fit for your needs at this time. Interviews are a two-way process and the goal is a mutually satisfying match. To be successful in an interview, there are a number of steps to take before, during, and after the interview.

Before the interview you will be engaging in:

- Pre-interview research and preparation
- Thinking about how you will make a good first impression and share your experiences
- **Learning about your rights.** To learn more, Appendix C has additional resources on page 16.

During the interview you will be engaging in:

- Answering interview questions
- Asking your questions
- Closing the interview by thanking the interviewer and inquiring about the next steps in the recruiting process

After the interview you will be engaged in:

- Following up with the employer to thank them for the interview
- Reviewing and evaluating your performance to learn from your experience

TYPES OF INTERVIEW FORMATS

Interviews don't come in one standard format. Ask what format your interview will take, and who will be conducting it, so that you can be prepared. Here are the more common formats:

Panel, board, and committee interviews

- This type of interview is conducted by a panel of usually three or more people.
- The panel may consist of a supervisor of the department, the person to whom you would report, potential co-workers, supervisors of other departments, and a representative from the human resources department.

Multiple rounds interviews

Often, the interview process involves more than one interview.

1st interview

- Interviewers try to assess that you meet the position requirements by looking at your skills, experiences, and qualifications.
- Interviewers want to know what you can do for them and how you will add value to their company.

2nd interview

During the second interview, interviewers focus on making a decision between final candidates which may involve any of the following:

- A more detailed assessment of specific skills required for the position
- An interview may continue over lunch or dinner
- A tour of the company if you have not already had one, and introductions to other co-workers and senior staff

Telephone or video interviews

- The telephone or video interview may be more common if you are applying to positions or companies that are located in another city, and typically, the time of the interview is prearranged.
- There may be more than one interviewer. When arranging the interview, ask the number of interviewers, their names, and their position titles.

There are some additional interview formats and interview components that you may also encounter in some interview situations:

Case interviews

Case interviews are typically used by management consulting firms whereby the interviewer describes a business problem from the perspective of a client and asks how you, as the consultant, would solve the client's problem. The interviewer is trying to assess your problem-solving and analytical skills rather than looking for one right answer. Listen carefully, ask questions to clarify the problem, and draw out the critical aspects of the issue before making your recommendations. There are many different types of case questions depending on the company you are meeting with. Some are short business cases that refer to market size and estimation and some examples of this include:

- Estimate the market for basketballs in New Zealand.
- How many lightbulbs are sold in Toronto in one year?

Other cases are longer and feature a full business case problem focusing on helping a client solve their business issues. An example of this would be:

- You are consulting for a small manufacturer of motorcycles. They handcraft their motorcycles and are well reputed for having some of the best quality on the market. A large multinational competitor has announced that it will begin selling high-end motorcycles incorporating the newest engine technology. What should your client do?

A key consideration for this type of interview is that it will require extensive preparation and practice well in advance of your interview. Some resources that will help you develop strategies for the case interview include mbacase.com and [The Vault Guides to Case Interviews](#).

Interviews can also feature certain components that you may need to prepare further for:

Written tests

Candidates may be asked to complete a written test assessing different skills required for the position. Some examples may include assessment of language proficiency, math, computer or technical competency and/or administrative skills. When setting up your interview, it is important to ask for details about the type of written assessment you will be involved in, the length and any advance preparation that might be required.

Presentation

You may be required to prepare and deliver a presentation as part of the interview. Once again, it is important to prepare and gather as much information as possible regarding the topic of the presentation, length, audience, availability of audio-visual resources. Consider what, if any, materials might be necessary to bring to your interview and to practice your presentation beforehand.

PRE-INTERVIEW RESEARCH

This step is an opportunity for you to research and understand the needs of the position and organization, anticipate interview questions, and prepare answers. The more research and preparation is conducted, the better you will be able to showcase your suitability for the position and company.

Here are some aspects to consider researching:

Position

- What skills, qualifications, experience, education and other qualities are required for this position?
- What are the core duties and responsibilities?
- What are the hours of work? Is overtime or weekend work involved?
- Will there be travel involved? If yes, how frequently?
- What is the salary range for this type of position?

Organization or company

- What are their products or services?
- What is their organizational structure?
- Who are their clients and competitors?
- What is their organizational mission and vision?
- What is their organizational history, present state of business and future goals?
- What is the work environment like?
- How does the organization demonstrate a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility?

Industry

- Are there any trends occurring in the industry that may have an impact on the organization?
- What impact do global and economic trends and current events have on the industry?

Record your research information below:

Position

Organization or company

Industry

PRE-INTERVIEW RESEARCH PREPARATION— ANTICIPATING QUESTIONS

There are several ways to anticipate the types of questions you may encounter in the interview.

Ways of anticipating questions	Example questions
From the analysis of the position criteria, make a list of skills, qualifications, and responsibilities required for the position. This list will allow you to begin to anticipate questions that could be asked during the interview.	<p>If the position requirements indicated that they are a team-oriented environment, then some types of questions that you may be asked include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can you give an example of a time you worked on a team, what was your role and contribution?• In your opinion, what key characteristics make a team successful, please elaborate. <p>If the position requires leadership skills, a possible question may be, can you provide an example of where you have demonstrated leadership qualities?</p>
Review your documents, such as, your resume and/or cover letter, as any content you have included in these documents can be turned into potential interview questions.	<p>You may be asked to elaborate on your educational background with questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why did you decide to study environmental science?• Tell us more about the independent project you completed in your fourth year political science course. <p>Other examples of questions could focus on the different experiences you have listed on your resume or cover letter such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What did your experience as a volunteer coordinator entail?• What did you like best about your role as a teaching assistant?• As a summer intern with Company X, what would you identify as two key accomplishments?
Review commonly asked interview questions.	Refer to examples of commonly asked questions of open-ended, behavioural and situational questions on the next page.

EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are numerous types of questions employers could ask you in an interview. However, these questions can be categorized into the following types.

Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions cannot be answered by yes or no. Below are some examples of open-ended questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would you describe yourself?
- Why are you leaving your job?
- What motivates you?
- What do you find are the most difficult decisions to make?
- What are you passionate about?
- How do you evaluate success?
- Why are you the best person for the job?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- What previous experience has prepared you for the responsibilities of this position?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Describe a previous experience that you feel is most relevant to this position.
- What are your short term/long term goals in this field? Where do you see your career in five years?
- Why are you interested in this industry? Organization?
- If I talked to your co-workers, how would they describe you?
- What does initiative mean to you?
- What are your strengths? Describe a weakness that you have and what are you doing to improve it.
- What are your salary expectations?

Behavioural questions

Behavioural questions focus on asking for specific examples of where you have demonstrated a particular skill, or how you have handled a particular situation in the past. The rationale behind such questions is that your past behaviour is a good indicator of how you will respond to the demands of the position.

- Describe a team project that you have undertaken. What was your role? What did you learn?
- What is an example of a time when you demonstrated creative problem solving?
- Share with us an example of where you have demonstrated leadership qualities.
- Tell us about a time when you demonstrated initiative.
- Describe a situation in which you had a disagreement with a supervisor or co-worker. How was it resolved?
- Discuss a major paper you have written. What was the model you used and why? What were your results?
- Think of a time you faced a challenge. How did you react? What were the results?
- Discuss a major project that you undertook. What are some of the challenges you encountered? How did you overcome them?
- Give an example of a goal you reached and how you achieved it.
- What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handle it.

- Have you had to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
- Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.
- Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction?
- Give me an example of a time when you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or colleagues?
- Tell me about a specific occasion when you complied with a work policy even though you did not agree with it?

Situational questions

Situational questions are hypothetical, problematic scenarios that require solutions. When answering these types of questions, it is important to demonstrate your critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills.

- You have been working on a project for over a month and are about to finish writing the report. Suddenly you realize some very important facts that should be included in this project have been overlooked. What would you do in this situation?
- You are working on a group project with your colleagues. While the deadline is getting closer, the group still cannot agree on how the project should be completed and one of the members is simply not doing his/her/their share. What would you do in this situation?

- You have heard that one of your colleagues has complained to your manager because s/he/they is/are dissatisfied with your work. What would you do in this situation?
- If our organization were to change its focus in terms of target client market, what target market would you suggest?
- Your colleague was repeatedly making mistakes that affect customer service and your ability to do your work. You talked to this colleague about the problem but s/he/ they kept making mistakes again. What would you do next?
- You figured out that an employee was stealing from the company. What would you do?
- You believe strongly in a recommendation you made in a meeting, but most of your co-workers do not agree. What would you do in this situation?
- Who would you talk to if you discovered that a co-worker was disclosing confidential information that should not be divulged?
- You don't have the information you need to prioritize your projects. Your co-workers and supervisor are unavailable for you to ask for assistance. How do you handle the situation?

Field specific knowledge/technical questions

Field specific knowledge/technical questions are questions related to your subject matter expertise and your academic area of study. They may be technical, theoretical or situational in nature.

- Discuss three natural resources issues that Canada is currently facing and discuss their policy implications.
- In your opinion, how will Bill C-69 impact the manufacturing industry?

- Describe your experience in using database systems such as SQL, Oracle and MS Access.
- Give an example of a SWOT analysis – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- Which financial models did you use to interpret data in your research project? Which of these would you recommend for risk management?

Track your interview questions

As an additional way of preparing for your interviews, use the space below to keep track of interview questions you come across for the types of positions you are interviewing for.

PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION— PREPARING YOUR RESPONSES

Steps to preparing your responses

1. Analyze the question: What is the interviewer really trying to assess? From the research you have done about the position, organization and industry you will be able to determine which particular skills, qualities and/or experiences the interviewer may be trying to assess through asking you that question.
2. Describe your experience(s) and use a relevant example ensuring that you are highlighting the key skills and qualities that you have analyzed and determined are being asked in this question. These examples can come from your volunteer, internship, extracurricular, academic and /or paid experiences. Highlight results wherever possible and show evidence of having researched the position, company and industry.
3. Organize your response in succinct manner. Use the S.T.A.R. method to organize your answers and to create a detailed picture of your skills and experiences to help the interviewer remember you.
4. Link your skills and experiences to the needs of the position and the employer.
5. Set up a Interview Prep at Career Exploration & Education. We'll support you in identifying the core competencies of the role, and how craft responses to common question types. For information on how to book an appointment please refer to studentlife.utoronto.ca/service/career-advising-appointments/
We recommend using Big Interview available on clnx.utoronto.ca within the Student Resources section to practice

and improve your interview technique. Big Interview offers virtual mock interviews for all experiences and dozens of industries.

S.T.A.R. method—sample question

Tell me about a time when you were working on a team and encountered a challenge. How did you respond? What were the results? What's behind the question? What does the interviewer really want to know?

- Analytical, problem-solving, teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills

S—situation In 2019, I was working as a research assistant at the Political Science Department at the University of Toronto as part of three-person team and we ran into a problem on what method to use to analyze the data we had gathered.

T—task We were analyzing election results in electoral districts of Canada deriving from demographic variants and other contemporary political topics. We needed to come to a consensus as to how to analyze the data in order for the project to be completed.

A—action I and the team acknowledged that each one of us had different ideas on how to analyze the data.

- We met and each one of us presented our ideas and reasoning behind it.
- Everyone listened respectfully and asked for clarifications if needed.
- We decided individually to consider the various methods and their merits and to meet in a few days.

- We met again and discussed openly and respectfully the various methods highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- Over two meetings, we brainstormed how to blend the valuable parts of each method and negotiated a new analysis strategy which was an amalgamation of the methods proposed.

R—result

- Prevented delays in project's completion.
- Maintained a collegial working relationship with team members.
- Arrived at a method of analysis that was superior to ones proposed.

Linking Statement “This experience further strengthened my ability to collaborate closely with colleagues utilizing effective communication skills to solve problems efficiently. These qualities will be key to my success in this position.”

Preparing questions to ask the interviewer

During the interview and typically towards the end of the interview you will have the opportunity to ask questions of the interviewers and share any concluding comments regarding your candidacy for the position. Based on your pre-interview research, prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered in order to determine if the position and company are right for you. Your questions should demonstrate:

- Your understanding and research of the position, company, and industry;
- Your interest in learning more about the position and company.

Here are some sample questions to ask at the interview:

- I have read on your website that your organization has a strong focus on creating inclusive workplace environments. Can you tell me a little more about how your organization supports diversity and inclusion? What does this look like day-to-day?
- I have read on your website that you are focusing your new projects in Asia. Can you tell me a little more about your initiatives?
- What are your expectations in the first three months, six months, or a year?
- Can you tell me about how will I and my work be evaluated?
- How is the work, schedule, or day organized? Is it flexible? Could I customize it?
- Can you please describe the opportunities for further training and continuing education.
- Would you be able to tell me which projects I would be involved in?
- Will there be opportunities to collaborate closely with other departments?
- Can you share with me the next steps in the process? When are you planning on making a hiring decision?

Ensure that you are well prepared to make a great first impression and conduct yourself professionally.

- You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. Creating a good first impressions involves a variety of things such as dressing appropriately, arriving on time, and treating everyone you meet with courtesy.
- More information about creating great first impressions and professional interview behaviour can be found on Appendix A and B on page 15 and page 16.

Closing the interview and post-interview follow-up

As you close your conversation thank the interviewer(s) for their time, and ensure that you find out about the next steps in the interview process (i.e., will there be second round interviews) and when they expect to reach a decision.

After the interview you may want to follow up with the employer to demonstrate your interest in the position and to reiterate some of your key qualities.

- Send a thank you email to the interviewer(s) highlighting your interest in the position along with 2-3 key qualities that make you a strong candidate for the role.
- If you are not invited back for the second round of interviews, or are not selected for the position, ask for feedback from the interviewer(s) so that you can improve your interview skills and or evaluate any gaps in your qualifications.

Assessing your performance by reviewing what went well and areas where you can improve, will help you improve your interview and presentation skills for future meetings with employers. Here are some tips.

- Create an inventory of the types of questions you were asked and make notes of your responses, and assess them for improvement.

- Did you encounter questions that you did not anticipate? Add these to your list for further preparation and practice.
- Set up a practice interview at Career Exploration & Education for further practice and feedback. For information on how to book an appointment please refer to studentlife.utoronto.ca/service/career-advising-appointments

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Career Exploration & Education ebooks including 101 Smart Questions to Ask on Your Interview, The Essential Digital Interview Handbook, 201 Knockout Answers to Tough Interview Questions and more
- uoft.me/interview
- [The Vault's Sample interview questions](http://TheVault.ca)

NEXT STEPS

As you begin to prepare for upcoming interviews, refer to this checklist to keep yourself on track.

Research the position, organization, and industry.

Anticipate questions that may be asked in the interview.

Prepare responses to questions (using the S.T.A.R. method where possible).

Prepare questions to ask the interviewer.

Prepare your attire.

Prepare any additional materials for the interview:

- Extra copies of resumé

- List of references

- Portfolio and writing samples (where applicable) or technical portfolio (where applicable)

- Notepad and pen

Practice! Attend an Interview Strategies workshop or book a practice interview at the Career Exploration & Education.

Visit the Career Exploration & Education website at careers.utoronto.ca or clnx.utoronto.ca for a full list of programs, services and resources. Consult our [advice page on interviewing](#) for quick tips and to access our Interview Technique and Academic Interview guides.

APPENDIX A: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Punctuality

Be on time whether it is for interviews, meetings, or lunch. Give yourself extra time to get there; get specific directions or visit in advance to familiarize yourself with the location of the interview. We recommend arriving 15 minutes early.

Dress code

Dress appropriately for the industry for which you are being interviewed. Your company research should guide you in this; if unsure, ask the Human Resources person who arranged your interview about the dress code of the company. If an office's dress code is business casual, employees often dress in slacks, casual dresses or skirts, sometimes topped with blazers or cardigans. Jeans and athletic wear would be out of place in this type of office. If a work environment is business formal or business professional, employees dress in suit jackets with pants or skirts. Suits are usually in solid dark and neutral colours, worn over lighter coloured shirts or blouses. Formal, close-toed, clean and shined dress shoes are worn. Regardless of the dress code, clothes should be well fitting, in good condition and wrinkle-free and footwear should be neat and clean. Err on the side of formality. It is always better to be slightly overdressed, rather than slightly underdressed, for an interview. Lastly, be comfortable. Your comfort will be reflected in your body language so do not wear clothing that restricts your movement or footwear that is difficult to walk in.

Professionalism

The co-curricular record (<https://clnx.utoronto.ca/CCR/Overview>) explains professionalism as "Commitment to, demonstration of and accountability for the appropriate behaviour, character, attitudes, skills, conduct and integrity corresponding to a given circumstance or environment." When presenting for an interview you want to convey an appropriate level of professionalism for the industry and this means taking into account all the factors listed above.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW MEALS

Being asked to join a future colleague or employer for a meal is at times a part of the hiring process. Dining practices vary in different cultures and different settings, so be sure to do your research before the interview meal. We suggest being observant of the individuals you are eating with and taking into account their conduct (behavior, food/drink order) during this part of the interview. As with your first impression, maintaining a strong level of professionalism is important.

Some resources that highlight North American dining practices include:

- [About Dining Etiquette page from Virginia Tech](#)
- [Dining Etiquette Tips from Creighton University](#)

APPENDIX C: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination in employment on grounds of:

- race
- ancestry
- place of origin
- handicap
- colour
- age
- ethnic origin
- creed
- marital status
- citizenship
- family status
- sex
- sexual orientation
- record of offences

Consequently, employers cannot screen applications based on any of the grounds listed above unless the factor is a genuine qualification for the position (e.g. for some positions within government agencies, you are required to be a Canadian citizen). To learn more about your rights visit [studentlife.utoronto.ca/task/know-your-rights](#).

Although some employers may ask direct questions about the above items, you are not required to answer them on an application form or during the interview. To find out more about employment laws, see the Ontario Human Rights Commission site at [ohrc.on.ca](#).

Interview Skills & Preparation Guidance

Interview tips

Homework (If you know who the employer is):

- What exactly does the company do?
- How is the company structured?
- What are the current hot topics (company and industry)?
- What are the company's values and principles?
- What does the basic information suggest? Doing well/poorly?
- Who are the key personalities?

Phone interviews:

- Agree a time when you know you can be alone and undisturbed.
- Ensure the interviewer has the correct contact number to reach you on.
- Ensure your chosen location is quiet – no background noise (traffic, chatter, children etc.)
- Ensure your chosen location has satisfactory reception if using mobile.
- Try to use a location with a table and space to spread basic documents.

Face-to-face interviews:

- Avoid cramming in revision immediately before the interview.
- Avoid taking sheets of notes into the interview for reference.
- Avoid taking (writing) your own notes in the interview.
- Try to dress to fit the company/role on offer, not your old or current one.
- Always dress on the side of smartness unless certain otherwise.

Key questions to prepare for

1. Tell us about yourself.

Recommend:

- Plan on 2 minutes max.
- Consider starting with your immediate situation and why you have left/are thinking about leaving your current job (most relevant).
- Go back to education.
- Then each key role/phase of your professional career back up to current situation.

2. What do you consider your key achievements? What are you most proud of?

Consider educational, professional, and personal.

3. Why are you interested in us and the role on offer?

4. What have you been told are your areas for development?

Only ever give 1. Apply STAR. What was identified, what you did, what the positive outcome/development was.

5. Tell us about a time you managed a project, or showed leadership or innovation?

Apply STAR. Try to use impressive examples with valuable and positive outcomes. Consider using one of your stated key achievements.

6. Tell us about a time you came up against an obstacle or were faced with confrontation?

Apply STAR. Use examples with positive outcomes and/or lessons learnt.

7. What is your management style?

8. What cultural differences do you think you will face between your previous/current employer and this one?

Try to highlight similarities and skills & methods that both areas share.

General principles of answering

DO

- Always apply PEPP:
 - Show that you're **prepared**
 - Be **engaging**
 - Be **positive** and describe **positive** decisions and results
 - **Demonstrate** your professionalism
- Always apply **STAR** when giving examples.
- Always finish on a positive – even when giving a ‘negative’ example.
- Always be focussed, and interested in the role on offer.

DON'T

- Do not volunteer examples of failure.
- Do not answer with irrelevance or waffle – answer the question.
- Do not belittle yourself or your achievement.
- Avoid negatives, after-thoughts, cynical or sarcastic comments, and strong negative opinions.
- Never be confrontational with the interviewer.

STAR

If asked to give an example of something you did, always follow this method:

Situation

- **Describe the situation you were confronted with.** Why was it important? Why and how were you involved?

Task

- **Describe the task which needed to be done** to resolve the situation.

Action

- **Describe what you did.** Be clear about your exact role. Explain what you did, how you did it, and why you made the decisions you did.

Result

- **Describe what the result was.** Always volunteer examples with positive outcomes. If asked for an example of something that did not work – always use an example where positive lessons were learnt and follow this up with an example of when these lessons learnt were evidenced.

Asking questions in an interview

Consider asking some of the following additional questions:

- If I got this role, what would you see as my priorities in the first e.g. 3 months? (to future line manager)
- How does this role fit into the company's longer-term plans? (to future line manager)
- How would you define success for this position? (to future line manager)
- As an employee, how could I exceed your/the company's expectations? (to any interviewer)
- What do you like about coming into work here? (to any interviewer)

More importantly, questions you should not ask:

- Do not ask about gossip or rumours you've heard about the company or role.
- Do not ask too much about the interviewer themselves.
- Do not ask if they do background checks.
- Do not ask how quickly you can be promoted.
- Do not ask how soon after hiring you could start applying for other positions in the company.
- If you can Google it, don't ask it (unless the interview purpose is to introduce you to a role).
- Do not ask about salary, leave, or benefits during interviews (unless with caution during 1st interview or openly during final offer/contract negotiations).

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS, PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW, SALARY NEGOTIATION, AND INAPPROPRIATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



Practice makes perfect! Call Career Education at 814-332-2381 to schedule a mock interview with a Career Counselor.



After your mock interview is scheduled, send your Career Counselor a copy of your resume and the job description for which you are applying. The job description will help your Career Counselor develop tailored questions that you might experience in the actual interview.



Attend workshops, employer presentations, and career fairs each semester to stay connected to the job and internship search process and to build your network. Continue to visit Career Education to learn about dressing for success and job and internship search strategies.

THE GATEWAY · CAREER EDUCATION

(814) 332-2381 · Allegheny Career Education · accareered · @accareered

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TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

THE BASICS

An interview is a meeting between an applicant and employer that allows an employer to get to know you by assessing your skills and qualifications, and determining whether you are a "good fit" for the job/internship. The interview is also an opportunity for you to determine if the opportunity and company is a good fit for you.

There are different ways interviews can occur: in-person, via phone call, or over video-conferencing (Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.). These interviews may be structured using specific questions from a list, or unstructured feeling more like a conversation, where the interviewer may shape follow-up questions based on your responses. Regardless of the type of interview, preparation is the key to your success. Understand the type of interview you will encounter and be prepared to have more than one interview to get a job!

PHONE & VIDEO CONFERENCING INTERVIEWS

Phone interview:

Many companies screen candidates over the phone before conducting in-person interviews. Prepare for this as you would an in-person interview as this screening often leads to the second/in-person interview.

- Phone interviews typically last about 30 minutes
- If using a cell phone, make sure it is fully charged and has good service, or use a landline
- Consider using LinkedIn to find an image of the interviewer to help visualize the conversation

Video conferencing (Skype, Google Hangouts) interview:

Companies screen candidates in a video conference interview to determine which candidates to invite for face-to-face interviews. This type of interview can also be used for a second/follow-up interview to save on travel costs.

- Be sure to register with the video-conferencing program they are using in advance and test your connection with a friend
- Make sure the internet connection is smooth and audio is working, look directly at the camera, and make sure other computer notifications are turned off

Important tips for success:

- Clarify the time of the interview, especially if you are in different time zones, and make sure you know who is calling whom
- Find a quiet, clean place that is free from interruptions
- Wait a few seconds before you respond to make sure the interviewer has finished talking
- Have your resume and notes in front of you and a glass of water nearby
- Dress in proper interview attire for both phone and video-conferencing interviews; even if the employer can't see you, this will help get you in the right frame of mind

IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

One-on-one/traditional interview:

- This is the most common type of interview
- The candidate meets with the interviewer, and sometimes others members of the search committee or team on the job site

Panel interview:

- You will meet with several people at once including your potential peers, supervisors, and sometimes people from other parts of the company that you may have to collaborate with in the position for which you are applying

Group interview:

- Group interviews can include you and other candidates being interviewed simultaneously by the employer; you may engage in some group discussion/activity with other candidates and then meet individually with the employer afterwards
- Interviewing potential employees in a group allows employers to see how well you "fit" within an already established team or how you work collaboratively

Meal Interview:

- The meal interview could be one-on-one with your future boss or with a group of potential colleagues
- As with a panel interview, interviewers will be evaluating how you interact within the group and what you are like outside of the office
- Do NOT drink alcohol during a meal interview, even if the employer says it is allowed or is planning to have a drink
- Choose a meal that will not make a big mess and is easy to eat; for example, chicken wings will create quite a mess and can be very distracting
- Take small bites so you are able to talk through the meal
- Although this might take place in a more informal environment, it is still an important part of the interview process so remember to dress and act professionally

Important tips for success:

- Dress in proper business formal attire for all rounds of the interview, even if the culture of the company is casual
- When interviewing with more than one person be sure to speak with all of them. Answer questions from the person who asked, but make eye contact with others around you
- Use good manners and be polite to everyone you meet, including the receptionist or custodian, employers often check with these individuals regarding their interaction with you



PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

THE BASICS

Preparing for an interview takes time and practice. It is important to prepare in the same way for each new interview. Spend time researching the organization, developing your elevator pitch, practicing your responses to interview questions, mapping out your travel, preparing your outfit, and practicing your handshake. Taking time to work through each of these steps before the interview will help alleviate some of the most common stressors.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Outline your day:

- When you get a call/email to set up an interview, try to find out as much information about the interview process as you can so you know what to expect and can better prepare yourself
- Ask the individual setting up the interview about the format of the interview (phone, Skype, in-person, etc.), approximately how long the interview last, and with whom will you be interviewing (if possible, get the names/position of the interviewer(s))

Do your research:

- Identify the mission, vision, and/or strategic plan of the organization
- Review annual reports, newsletters, news articles, and company reviews on websites like Glassdoor
- Familiarize yourself with company policies and understand who their competitors are
- Learn the interviewers' names and backgrounds (when possible) using LinkedIn and Gator Connect
- Draft a few questions to ask at the end of your interview, always ask at least one question before closing the interview
- Conduct informational interviews with individuals in your network to learn more about the company/opportunity

Update your social media:

- Ensure your LinkedIn profile is up-to-date and other social media accounts are appropriate
- Make certain that your personal social media profiles (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) are free of any inappropriate content

Plan your attire:

- Always dress in business professional attire for interviews, even if the company culture is casual. Review the "Dress for Success" guide in Career Education and view the photos on our website and social media for ideas on appropriate dress
- Try on your interview outfit ahead of time; make sure it fits, is clean and wrinkle free, and make sure your shoes are comfortable and that you can walk in them; have the entire outfit ready PRIOR to the day of the interview
- Dress for the weather – wear boots in the winter and plan to change

Practice your handshake:

- With most handshakes, the person who has the most authority takes the lead; therefore, in the case of an interview, the interviewer will generally be the one to offer their hand first
- If sitting, stand so that you are face to face with the person, smile, and make eye contact

- Accompany your handshake by stating your first and last name and providing a friendly greeting (nice to meet you, thank you for the opportunity, etc.)
- The pressure should be firm, not limp, and do not squeeze the opposite hand too hard
- Use the same technique regardless if the person is the same/opposite gender

Map out your travel:

- Map out the route and save the information in your electronic GPS
- Print out directions as a back-up in case your technology fails
- Know specifics about the location (parking information, building and office number, etc.)
- If possible, do a “practice run” and travel to the location to smooth out any nerves and locate the entrance to the building

Important tips for success:

- While it is good to practice, you don't want to sound rehearsed
- If you are going to an interview that requires you to have a portfolio or work samples, prepare those ahead of time; make sure samples adequately reflect your work and “match” the position you are applying for
- Pick up an “Interview Survival Kit” in the Career Education Office to practice different types of interview questions or schedule a Mock Interview to get practice and feedback
- If possible, attend the meetings with employers on campus to help learn more about the company or contact alumni
- Do not pick the day before an interview to drastically change your look/hairstyle



QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

An employer will expect you to ask questions and not having any could make you look uninterested or unprepared. Write down questions ahead of time as you conduct your research on the company and also as you think of them during the interview. You do not always have wait until the end of the interview to ask questions, if you can work them into the interview, then go for it!

- What are the responsibilities and objectives of the position?
- What skills have you found to be valuable in this position?
- What improvements would you like to see in this area?
- Who will evaluate my performance? In what way?
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?
- Is there anything else about my application/qualifications you would like to discuss?
- Can I provide you with any other information to help you in the decision-making process?
- What is the timeline for hiring this position? When will I hear from you?
- What will a typical day in this role look like?

Important tips for success:

- Do not ask questions you could easily find the answer to or should already know after having read the job description
- When researching the company, click through the website instead of just reviewing the home page. You can often find valuable and interesting initiatives listed further into the website which can help formulate questions and expand your knowledge



INTERVIEW DAY

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Prepare for success:

- Set your alarm and get up on time
- Eat something prior to the interview, avoiding foods that will cause bad breath
- Plan to arrive early. Typically arrive: 15 minutes early = on time; on-time = late; late = not hired
- Go to the interview alone - if you have to get a ride to the interview, get dropped off away from the building
- Organize and carry only have the items you need in a professional bag including: several copies of your resume and references list, writing utensil, and padfolio or a notepad
- Bring business cards

Important tips for success:

- If you are having a phone/internet interview, make sure all technology is working
- For on-site interviews, leave early giving yourself extra time to get there in case your commute gets interrupted or slowed down by something unexpected
- Avoid bulky or multiple bags
- Bring breath mints that dissolve quickly, we recommend Listerine Pocketpaks
- Do not take coffee or other beverages that might make your breath smell unfavorable. If you plan to bring a drink, take only water in a clear, non-reusable water bottle and ask if the interviewer minds if you have it on the table

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Keep calm and...

- Take time upon arrival to use the restroom, double check your outfit, get a drink of water, and clear your head
- Give a proper handshake and introduce yourself to everyone you meet
- Make and keep good eye contact with everyone you meet throughout the interview
- Speak slowly and watch for interviewer facial expressions and body language
- Keep your posture open and sit up straight
- If possible, collect business cards from everyone you meet to ensure you have the correct names and contact information so you can follow up

Important tips for success:

- Keep your energy and enthusiasm up! This is especially important for phone interviews, since the interviewer cannot see you or read your body language
- Make sure your cell phone is turned off – not just on vibrate

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

You're almost there:

- The interviewer will leave time at the end for you to ask questions signaling the interview will be ending shortly
- Always ask questions, having none will make you look unprepared. If no one has addressed it yet, please ask, "What are the next steps in the hiring process and what is your timeline?"
- NEVER ask about salary or benefits at this stage. Talking about compensation prematurely signals that you are more concerned with the money than being a good fit for the company. Wait until the job has been offered before asking
- Shake the interviewers hand and thank them for taking time to talk with you, reiterating your interest in being hired

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

The thank you letter is an important part of the job interview process and should not be omitted. Interviewers may use this as another point of evaluation for each candidate. In addition to being polite, this is a good opportunity to reiterate your interest and reference a part of the job or organization that made a positive impression on you; thus, demonstrating to the employer that you are enthusiastic about the opportunity and were engaged in the interview process.

Take or review your notes:

- If you did not take notes during the interview, make a few notes immediately after while your thoughts are fresh, this can help when writing thank you notes and preparing for second interviews
- Jot down something about each person on the back of business cards

Write your letter:

- Send an e-mail or mail a typed letter or hand-written notecard (make sure it is legible)
- Send one thank you to each individual interviewer; try to make each one unique
- Follow up immediately within 24/48 hours after the interview
- Create a brief draft and proof read it several times before sending

Important tips for success:

- Evaluate the interview/ opportunity: Did the interview match your expectations? Do you have any concerns?
- If more than a week has passed beyond the date when you were told you would hear something from the employer, call or email to politely inquire about the status of the organization's decision-making process. Sometimes timelines get changed for reasons outside of anyone's control
- A polite email or call shows that you are still interested in the position and may encourage the employer to respond. In your inquiry, mention the following: name of the person with whom you interviewed, time and place of the interview, position for which you are applying, and ask the status of your application
- If you plan to withdraw from the interview process for any reason, alert the point of contact, interviewer, or human resources as soon as possible and plan to send a thank you to the employer for their time and consideration



SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Your Name

Address

City, State Zip

Month Day, Year

Company Name

Address

City, State Zip

Write directly to the person you met. If you interviewed with a panel, you could write one letter to the chair of the interview committee and ask that your appreciation be shared with the group.

Dear Employer,

The first portion of the thank you letter expresses your appreciation of the time/energy of the individual(s) you met with or talked with at the interview. In this paragraph you should include specifics about what you appreciated in your conversation or meeting.

The second portion of the thank you letter reinforces your interest in the position and highlights more specific information about how you may fit into this position. This may be in regard to specifics of the job or of the personality/culture of the company/employer. You should include a few examples of your connection and potential areas of contribution.

The third portion of the thank you letter restates your interest/disinterest in this position. If you decide you are no longer interested in this position your letter should still reflect professionalism and appreciation, though it may be much shorter.

Sincerely,

Your Name



SALARY NEGOTIATION

THE BASICS

It is normal to feel nervous when talking about money, especially when a job is on the line. Approaching this phase of the job search is often overwhelming, but it can set the tone for your employment. More importantly, an aggressive approach could result in a retracted job offer and a timid approach could result in you not receiving enough compensation to meet your financial needs.

THE PROCESS

Have a point of reference:

- Employers decide their salary levels using a variety of benchmarking tools. Knowing these will help you determine the range of pay that is appropriate for your situation. Benchmarks include comparing pay rates with:
 - Average pay at other companies in their industry
 - Average pay for professionals with your level of experience and education
 - Average pay for professionals in your field in their area of the country

Wait for It:

- Try not to be the first person to give a number. There's an old saying "The first person to bring up money, loses." Offering too low of a salary could lock you in to that rate without ever knowing they were willing to pay more. Conversely, providing too high of a number could show you didn't do your research or make them think you cost too much
- This can lead to an uncomfortable back-and-forth banter between you and the employer as they will likely be employing the same tactic. The best approach is to be kind and appreciative, restate your interest in the company, and outline the skills you'll bring to the team
- If you have to provide a number, give the employer a range rather than a solitary amount. This will keep the negotiation open a little longer or push them to giving a firm amount based on your range

Negotiate perks:

- If the salary is not flexible, consider negotiating other benefits, such as:
 - Relocation assistance; tuition reimbursement for continued education; additional paid time off; training, professional development, and certifications; childcare; gym membership; and schedule flexibility (i.e. working from home or working on a different schedule)

Important tips for success:

- Don't forget that salary is made up of much more than just your net pay. Employers may also pay for health insurance and other fringe benefits, all which raise your cost of employment on their end allowing them less flexibility
- Know what your absolute minimum is and don't go below that amount. Calculate your expenses (rent, utilities, food, gas, transportation, student loan payments, etc.) and know what you need to make every month to cover these comfortably
 - If you are moving to a new location, take into account the cost of living in that area. A salary in New York City might sound attractive but you have to factor in the average cost of rent, food, etc. to make an informed decision



COMMON TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

THE BASICS

While preparation is key, it is impossible to anticipate every interview question that you may be asked. You will likely be asked a variety of questions and the format of the questions can change based on the industry in which you interview; however, the two most common types of interview questions are, "general or traditional questions" and "behavioral based questions."

In addition to practice, one of the best ways to prepare for the interview is to get to know yourself. What is on your resume? What are you good at? Bad at? Interested in? When did you lead a group of people? Solve a conflict? Work under time constraints? The answers to these questions take a fair amount of reflection that many people don't engage in prior to the interview, adding to the difficulty. It is important to understand your narrative!

GENERAL/TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

These questions are designed to help the employer learn more about you, your interests, and what you have to offer a position. The goal is to build a rapport while getting to know each other in a low-stress environment. Answer each question thoughtfully and honestly. Do not try to make something up that you think the employer wants to hear.

Q: Tell Me About Yourself:

- Respond with a quick, about a 15-30 second, snapshot of who you are and why you're the best candidate for this position. This is often referred to as your "elevator pitch".

Q: Why are you interested in/what attracted you to this position?

- The interviewer is trying to determine how you may fit the position and how motivated you will be once hired
- Explain why the position interests you, how it aligns with your current and future career goals, and describe what you will bring to the role
- Offer insight that shows you understand the company and job role
- Salary should not be included in your answer

Q: Why should we hire you for this position?

- Provide reasons why you are the best candidate and how you will "fit" in with the organization
- Think about how your skills match the needs of the job and what unique skills/characteristics/experiences will set you apart
- Mention if you have successfully done similar work before

Q: What are your strengths? What are you good at?

- The interviewer wants to know how your skills align with the needs of the role and how accurately you view your strengths
- Relate how the strength is important to the role you are seeking or to a skill outlined in the job description and provide an example of how you have used your strength
- Be proud but not arrogant, and don't worry about sounding boastful, this is your opportunity to express what you know you are good at
- Do not choose cliché answers, such as, "I am a people person"

Q: What weaknesses do you have? What is something you want to improve about yourself?

- The interviewer is trying to determine how self-aware you are, whether or not you will be honest, and if you are willing to improve yourself
- Be honest, pick weaknesses you have, not what you think the interviewer wants to hear
- Talk about a skill you would like to develop and share an example of how you are already working on strengthening an area
- Do not select cliché answers, such as, "I'm a perfectionist"

Important tips for success:

- Employers consistently seek the same top skills from candidates. Take time to reflect on how your experiences and education can demonstrate these skills and find ways to show that in the interview process:
 - Verbal and written communication
 - Problem-solving
 - Leadership
 - Teamwork
 - Organization
 - Adaptability
 - Analytical ability



BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEW

Behavioral based interview questions are designed to discover how the interviewee acts in certain situations. The questions are specific and require an example/story which outlines your skills and abilities. Questions will usually start with, "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of..." These questions require an interviewee to demonstrate they have a skill rather than list a skill. Utilize the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method to answer these questions.

SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULT
Describe a specific situation that addresses the question. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who• Where• Why	Outline the tasks associated with the situation. What tasks did you need to achieve? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What	Explain the actions you took to address the situation. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How	Provide the results of your actions (most important) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What effect• What changed or improved

Do your homework:

- Think of potential examples/stories ahead of time
- Analyze the description, responsibilities, and skills required; this may help you to anticipate interview questions in certain areas or for certain skill sets; connect the opportunity to your career goals

Practice your timing and narrative:

- A typical answer to a question using a STAR response will last one to three minutes.
- Be brief in your set-up (who, where, what) and give just enough background information for your example to make sense.



Important tips for success:

- The result is essential. Everything in your scenario builds towards helping the employer understand the purpose of why you are telling this story/using this example.
- Provide the interviewer with strong reasons to choose you over other candidates; be honest with your answers about your skills and abilities; show willingness to learn if there are gaps
- Utilize the STAR method handout in Career Education to practice your technique and formulate answers to the most common skills employers are seeking.



INAPPROPRIATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Adapted from: "Do I Really Have to Answer That?" Washington State University - Vancouver

Inappropriate interview questions come in a variety of different forms. Federal and state laws prohibit interviewers from asking questions that directly or indirectly prompt information about an applicant's protected status, meaning they should not ask questions regarding your

- Race or ethnicity
- Age
- Religion
- Veteran status
- Medical conditions or health history
- Appearance
- Gender identity, sex, or sexual orientation
- Marital or family status
- National origin
- Ability
- Arrest record

RESPONSE STRATEGIES

There are many nondiscriminatory reasons why an interviewer might ask an inappropriate question and, although you may find it difficult, try to remain calm and utilize these tactics to guide your response:

Ask them to repeat or rephrase the question:

- This will give the interviewer time to pause and either restate the question or ask something completely different
- Asking for clarification may help you get a better sense of the interviewers intention and what information they are trying to learn about you
- Attempt to approach the situation with sincere curiosity and not frustration or anger

Redirect the question back to the interviewer:

- Try to perceive what the underlying concern is and try to steer the question back to a conversation about your relevant skills
 - For example: if the employer asks, "do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?" you might suspect they are trying to determine whether or not you are committed to the work schedule. Consider responding with, "Why do you ask? If you are concerned about my ability to work long hours, you should know that I am deeply committed to my work and I have long been able to balance my work life with my personal life."

Politely decline to respond:

- Remember that you have the right to politely decline to answer the question if you ultimately do not feel comfortable or asking the interviewer for clarification does not help

EXAMPLES OF LEGAL & ILLEGAL

National Origin or Citizenship

Legal:

- Are you authorized to work in the United States?
- What languages do you read/speak/write fluently? (Only appropriate if it is relevant to you being able to perform your job)

Illegal:

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Where were you or your parents born?
- What is your native tongue?

Age

Legal:

- Are you over the age of 18?
- Are you over the age of 21? (only appropriate if it is relevant to you being able to legally perform your job)

Illegal:

- How old are you?
- What is your date of birth?
- When did you graduate high school?

Marital or Family Status

Legal:

- Are you able to work the shifts necessary for this position?
- Would you be willing and able to work overtime if necessary?

Illegal:

- What is your marital status?
- With whom do you live?
- Do you plan to have a family? When?
- How many kids do you have?
- What are your child-care arrangements?

Ability and Health

Legal:

- As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, employers can ask that you undergo a medical exam if results are kept confidential and the employer is only informed of necessary job accommodations based on the exam results. The employer should not ask about accommodations before a job offer has been made

Illegal:

- Do you have any disabilities?
- Please complete the following medical history form
- Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?
- How is your health? How is your family's health?
- If hired, would you need an accommodation to be able to perform this job?
- How many sick days did you take last year in your previous job?

Religion

Legal:

- If the employer's goal is to get a better sense of your availability they can ask if you are able to work specific days of the week and/or holidays

Illegal:

- What religion do you practice?
- What religious holidays do you observe?
- Do you believe in God?

Military	
<p>Legal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? (Only appropriate if the candidate has disclosed that they served in the military) • What type of training or education did you receive in the military? (Only appropriate to ask about training and education as it relates to the job and appropriate to ask if the candidate has disclosed that they served in the military) 	<p>Illegal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have served in the Military, were you honorably discharged? • What is your current registration status?
Race	
<p>Legal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<p>Illegal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your racial background? • How do you identify racially / ethnically? • Comments about complexion and color are also inappropriate!
Sexual Orientation	
<p>Legal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<p>Illegal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your sexual orientation? OR any sort of inquiry into your sexual orientation.
Appearance	
<p>Legal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you able to lift up to 50lbs and carry it 10 yards, as this type of physical activity is part of the job? (Only appropriate when there are minimum standards for employees to be able to safely perform their work) 	<p>Illegal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How tall are you? • How much do you weigh?
Arrest Record	
<p>Legal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is permissible to ask if an applicant has ever been convicted of a specific type of crime that relates to the job. • Companies can require applicants to pass a criminal background check prior to being hired. As a part of this, some companies will ask if there is anything the applicant thinks they should be aware of as they prepare to request a background check. 	<p>Illegal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been arrested? If so, for what? • Questions about pending charges and tickets, other than those that are substantially related to the particular job.



FINAL ADVICE

The company chose you for an interview because your resume and cover letter demonstrated the appropriate skills necessary to perform the essential functions of the job; now, they are simply trying to identify your fit within their team. You should use the interview as a chance to determine the same thing. Remember, interviews are not one sided; you are interviewing the company just as much as they are interviewing you.

- Always be truthful when answering questions
- Talk about your accomplishments with confidence, but don't brag
- Try to keep your examples related to academics, work, and related experiences
- Avoid vague responses (most of the time, usually, sometimes...), opinions (I think, I believe), criticism of other co-workers, supervisors, and past places you've worked
- Only share personal information if it is relevant and if you feel comfortable doing so
- Keep your answers brief, straight forward, and easy to follow
- Make sure you actually answer the question asked of you
- Don't zone out, pay attention throughout the interview and stay engaged in the process
- You may be asked a question that you are not prepared for or know how to answer. In this case, remain calm and try not to panic. Simply ask the interviewer for clarification or to restate the question and request a moment to reflect on the answer

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Research the company and position description by using their company website, CEO resources, LinkedIn, and networking with contacts and employees.
- Be prepared to give specific examples from your experience, education, or skills that are relevant to the job and organization. Use the position description as a guide.
- Prepare 4-5 relevant questions for the interviewer that focus on the company's mission and goals (see examples on back).
- Practice, practice, practice! Visit the CEO for a mock interview and more information on preparing for an interview.
- Create a portfolio with samples of your work, reference letters, awards and other materials that demonstrate your abilities.
- Get travel and parking information and an estimated time commitment so that there are no surprises on the interview day.

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- Make sure that you look professional. It is appropriate to dress more formally for the interview even if the environment is casual.
- Avoid heavy use of scented body products as others may be sensitive to the scent.
- Arrive at least fifteen minutes early and be sure to bring money for parking.
- Bring a professional looking folder or padfolio with two copies of your resume, list of references, pen, calendar, and notepad.
- Demonstrate enthusiasm and interest by making eye contact, smiling, and a firm handshake.
- Be courteous to everyone you meet; others not directly in the interview process may be asked to express an opinion about you.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Give clear and concise answers with specific examples about your past experiences, skills, and abilities that directly relate to the position or company goals. Mention your accomplishments whenever possible.
- Clearly articulate your career goals and how they relate to the position.
- Avoid talking negatively about past supervisors, co-workers, or companies of employment.
- Avoid asking about salary and benefits during the first interview.
- Ask at least two of your pre-prepared, well thought out questions to determine if this organization and job is right place for you.
- Maintain eye contact and avoid fidgeting during your interview. Calm nerves.
- You need to be fully engaged in this conversation, so turn off your cell phone and do not check it.
- Do not chew gum, eat or drink (unless offered to you).
- Be honest and sincere. Just be yourself!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Send a thank you letter within two days to the people who interviewed you. Reiterate your interest and some key points that were discussed during the interview. You can also use thank you notes to expand on a point that you discussed in the interview or ask any additional questions if you have any.
- If a large panel (more than 3 people) interviews you, you may elect to send a thank you note to the chair of the interview panel and ask them to convey your thanks, but when possible, send an individual thank you to each interviewer.
- Request business cards during your interview to ensure correct spelling of names and email addresses.
- Follow up with a phone call within a week if you have not heard back. Be persistent and try to stay optimistic.
- Be sure to send any requested material such as transcripts, applications, or references in a timely manner.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

When deciding what to wear, consider your industry's standard. It is always better to dress a bit more formally if you are unsure. Everything should be cleaned, pressed and polished.

- **Business Attire:** Consists of two-piece suit in black, gray, or navy with a matching shirt/dress. Make sure that clothing is not open below the neckline. Ties or stockings may be required in more formal workplaces or industries. Dark closed-toed shoes.
- **Business Casual Attire:** Can include dress pants/skirt and a shirt/sweater without a jacket. Can also include khaki pants or slacks and a nice shirt. Ties and stockings are not usually required.
- **Do NOT Wear:** revealing clothes, extensive jewelry/piercings or makeup, have exposed tattoos, too much cologne or perfume, hats indoors, open toed-toes, headphones, sunglasses, dirty clothing, or any clothing with holes.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS AND TIPS FOR EACH TYPE

- **Phone/Screening Interview** – Preliminary, brief interview to determine if the candidate should move forward in the process.
 - As with every interview, make sure you are enthusiastic and discuss how your skills match the needs of the employer.
 - Make sure to keep a copy of your resume close along with notes on the company and your calendar.
 - Determine a location with little distractions and background noise ahead of time. Make sure you have good cell service.
- **In Person Interview** - One or more employer representatives will interview the candidate. May be multiple interviews or all day.
 - Can include either traditional interview questions or behavioral interview questions. See below for examples.
- **Group Interview** - Takes place with other candidates seeking the same job, predicts how well the candidates interact with others.
 - Try to find a good balance between getting your points across and dominating the conversation.
 - Practice a two minute introduction that summarizes your education, skills, experience, and related career goals.
- **Panel Interview** - Two or more people will interview you to get different opinions. Can be a very intimidating interview format.
 - Be careful not to ignore anyone on the panel. Make eye contact with each person while answering a question.
 - When asking questions, make sure they are directed at the group rather than a specific person.
- **Videoconferencing or Internet Interview** - Usually take place over Skype or other videoconferencing services.
 - Dress professionally from head to toe and make sure that your background is not distracting (e.g., white or neutral wall)
- **Pre-recorded Interview** - Usually no direct interaction with a person. Given set of questions and asked to record answers.
 - Don't sound too robotic, rehearsed or rushed. Consider attire and background.
- **Stress Interview** - Designed to see how you react under pressure. Used in fast-paced positions where quick decisions are needed.
 - Focus on the way you solve the problem, not the "right" answer. A typical question is designed to induce stress and can appear very aggressive: "Was the stress of your last job too much for you to handle?"
- **Case Interview** - Includes case questions about hypothetical situations. Used to test your analytical and problem-solving ability.
 - Be sure to explain your thinking process in detail to give them a good idea of the steps you take to solve a problem.

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND COMMON EXAMPLES

Traditional Interview – Below are common interview questions with a tip on how to answer the most common ones. Employers usually use your resume to guide their questions. Always have the job description in mind and consider ways to match your skills.

- ✓ Tell me about yourself.
 - Tip: Summarize your skills and why you are interviewing today.
- ✓ Why did you choose the career you're pursuing?
 - Tip: Share what excites you about this field and how you will be successful.
- ✓ What do you consider your strengths?
 - Tip: Describe skills that match the job description and will make you an asset.
- ✓ What do you consider your weaknesses?
 - Tip: Acknowledge your limitations, but most importantly, explain how you manage or are working to improve them.

Here are some others:

- ✓ How would a friend or professor describe you?
- ✓ What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- ✓ In what ways do you think you'll contribute to our company?
- ✓ Where do you see yourself in five years?
- ✓ What 2 or 3 accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- ✓ Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- ✓ Why did you select your college or university?
- ✓ What led you to choose your field or major study?
- ✓ What do you know about our company?

Behavioral Interview - Consists of questions about past experiences to determine how you will behave in the future. Use the STAR method to guide your answer: Situation and Task (details), Action and Results (skills, accomplishment). Give enough details so the interviewer understands the situation, but spend more time on the skills you used, the results, what you learned and what you might do differently next time. Ask for clarification if you do not understand the questions and make sure your answers are clear and complete.

- ✓ Tell me about a time when you worked on a group project and disagreed with a team member's ideas.
- ✓ Give me an example of a goal you reached and how you achieved it.
- ✓ Tell me how you work effectively under pressure.
- ✓ Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
- ✓ Have you ever made a mistake? How did you handle it?
- ✓ Describe a stressful situation at work and how you handled it.

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

Usually near the end of the interview, the employer will ask what questions you have for them. Your goal here is to ask questions that will help you determine if this position and organization is the right place for you. Additionally, questions regarding diversity, equity and inclusion are certainly worth inquiring about to determine further details of workplace culture. Do not ask any questions that could be easily answered by looking at their website!

- ✓ What are the challenges facing this company?
- ✓ What type of growth do you see for the organization in the next five years?
- ✓ What social issues does your company support?
- ✓ How does your organization define and promote diversity?
- ✓ Is this organization taking actionable steps to ensure an increase in diverse representation across all levels and titles? If so, what are those steps?
- ✓ How does the company promote professional growth?
- ✓ How would you describe the organization's culture?

The most important question you should ask, typically as your last question – what's the next step in the process?. This gives you information on who else may be in the pool and the company's timeline. You can use this information to determine when to send a follow-up message.

THANK YOU NOTE EXAMPLE

Dear Ms. Pierce:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss the public relations internship at Pierce & Baker with me yesterday. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about the firm.

The small size of your firm, as well as the emphasis on word-of-mouth marketing strategies, really appeals to me. After seeing the office in action, I'm confident that I'd be a good fit for this position. I work well in fast-paced environments, and my strong communications skills will enable me to have productive interactions with clients and other employees.

Thanks again for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 410-555-5555.

Sincerely,
Jamila Stimson

For other tips & questions contact the CEO at 410-337-6191 or
visit the CEO website at <https://www.goucher.edu/CEO>

Updated Summer 2025

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

Remember the five “P’s” – Proper Preparation Prevents a Poor Performance!

Preparation

Make sure that you've received a copy of the job description and that you've read this and fully understand what the role entails. Find out as much as you can about the company, including their structure, products and services from their website.

It's always a good idea to ask what style of interview you should prepare for. We've provided some tips below on how to get ready for the most common interview type, but there're other interview styles that may be used so if you're unsure, just ask!

Competency-Based Interviews – The STAR Technique

Competency-based (also called ‘behavioural event’) interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. They require you to draw on previous experience to demonstrate your competence in a particular area.

To prepare for the interview you should refer to the competencies set out in the job description. This will assist you in referring to actual examples and relevant situations. Don't be afraid to prepare notes and take them along with you to the interview. You can find examples of common behavioural based interview questions [here](#).

To ensure you provide the interview panel with the information they're seeking, structure your answers into a ‘story’ using the STAR format, as follows:

STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Results):

S: Set the scene and describe the wider context for your answer (*what was the situation?*)

T: Discuss the tasks, deliverables, expectations and/or your responsibilities in the situation you're describing (*what was required of you?*)

A: It is important to tell the interviewers both what you did and how you did it. This gives you the opportunity to demonstrate the approaches you took and the behaviours you used, which are what make you a unique candidate. It allows you to demonstrate in a powerful manner that you personally were responsible and took ownership for activities and outcomes (*what was the course of action you took?*)

R: Finally, detail the outcomes of your actions: what went well, what went wrong and what you would do differently next time (*what was the result?*)

Be careful to avoid saying “we” – the interviewer wants to know what actions you took so that they can determine how you would react in a similar situation in the future.

Before you go to your interview, using the STAR method, prepare a couple of examples that you can draw on with regards to each of the competencies in the job description. Remember that one example may be used for a number of competencies. The more recent the examples you use, the better.

Planning and Time Management

Make sure you're clear on where to go and at what time. Ensure that you allow yourself sufficient time to get to the interview.

Know how much travel time you need to allow for and aim to arrive at reception about five minutes prior to your interview. Parking can often be difficult, so if you're driving allow extra time to find a parking space.

Ensure you know who to ask for at reception and who will be on the interview panel. The interview will usually take a maximum of one and a half hours, allowing time for questions afterwards. There are likely to be at least two interviewers.

First Impressions

An interview is a formal means to assess your suitability for a job and creating a good first impression is vital. The way you present yourself at interview is just as important as the way you answer the questions asked of you. It's imperative that your appearance is as professional as the organisation that you wish to work for.

When greeting the interview panel, ensure a firm handshake and appropriate eye contact.

Questions to ask the interviewer

Always prepare questions that you would like to ask the interviewer, either about the role or the company, as you'll likely be asked at the end of the interview whether you have any questions.

Types of question you may wish to ask may include:

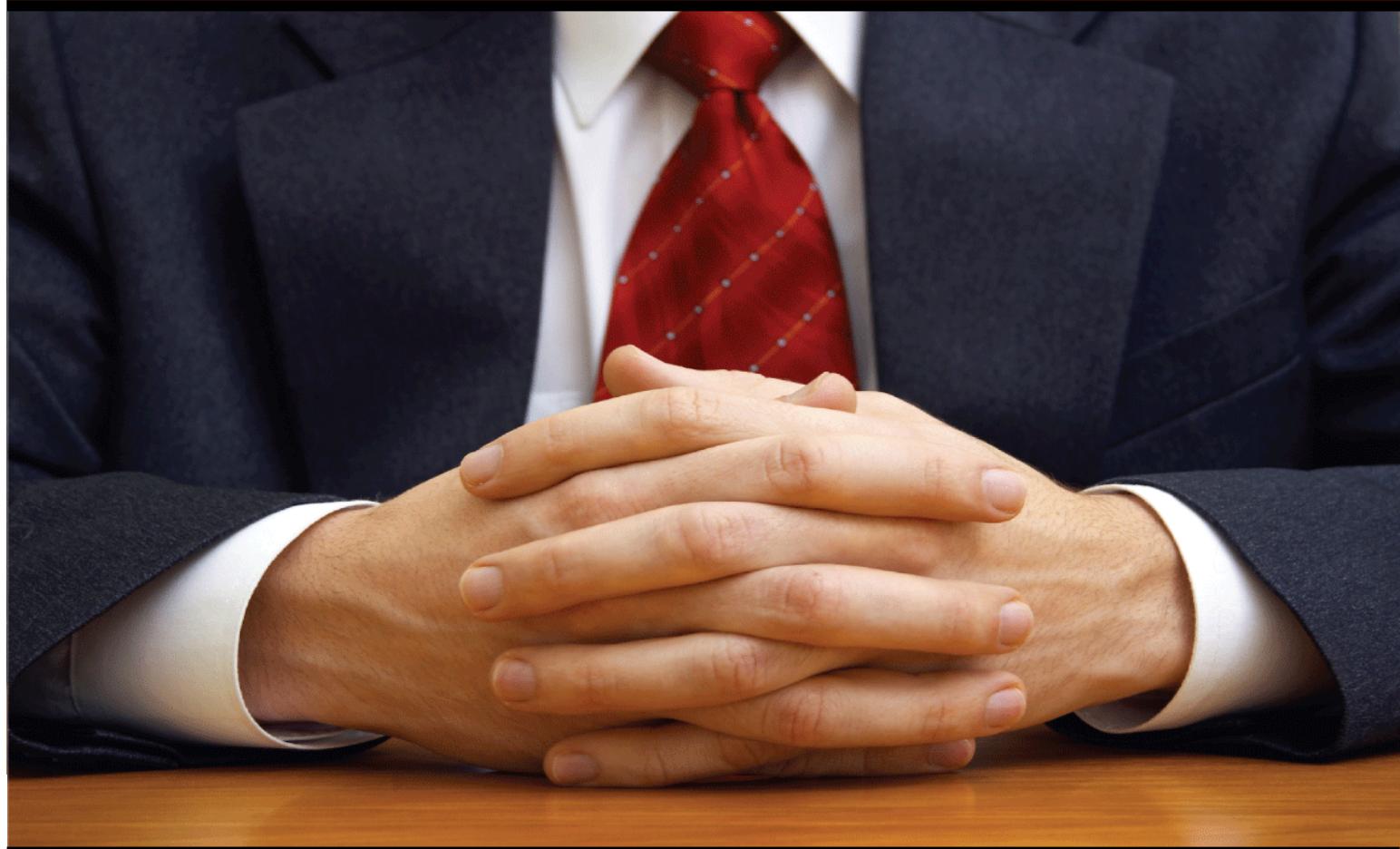
- What is the biggest challenge facing somebody coming into this role?
- Why does the vacancy exist?
- What is the team like?
- Why do you like working for this company?

In Summary:

- Prepare thoroughly for the interview
- Plan what you're going to wear the day before
- Ensure that you know where you're going and allow sufficient time to get to the interview
- Make sure you have read and understand the job description
- Ensure you greet the interviewer with a firm handshake and make good eye contact
- Don't interrupt the interviewer at any time
- Back up your answers with examples
- Be positive about past employers
- Ask questions about the position and company
- Understand your strengths and weaknesses, you'll be asked questions around them
- Do not be over confident or aggressive
- Your answers must come across in the interview as factual and sincere
- Make the interviewer aware of your qualities and what you can offer to the company
- Don't answer questions with closed answers i.e. "yes" or "no"
- Never lie – always answer questions truthfully, frankly and in a concise manner
- Smile throughout the interview
- Thank the interviewer for meeting with you
- After the interview please call your McLaren Associates Consultant immediately with your detailed feedback.

GOOD LUCK!

INTERVIEW HANDBOOK



Career Development Services
805.437.3270
civilengineering.services@csuci.edu
www.csuci.edu/careerdevelopment/



THE PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW

An interview is a mutual exchange of information between an employer and you, as a candidate for a position. The primary objectives are to:

- Supplement resume information
- Show that you understand your strengths and weaknesses and have a sense of direction
- Enable the employer to evaluate your personality and attitudes in terms of the demands of the organization and the position
- Allow you to gain information about the organization and the job that is not available through other sources
- Give you and the employer an opportunity to discuss the desirability of further contact or an offer of employment

The interview is a two-way process. You evaluate the employer while he/she evaluates you. Since there is no one way of interviewing, you will have to develop your own style. In order to present yourself well during the interview, you must be prepared. Preparation builds confidence and enables you to give a better presentation of your qualifications.

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST:

- 5-10 copies of your resume
- A portfolio/notebook
- Pen/pencil
- Questions for the interviewers
- Positive attitude
- Professionally dressed

PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE:

- Solid color, conservative suit
- Coordinated blouse/shirt
- Minimal jewelry/accessories/tie
- Moderate shoes
- Neat, professional hairstyle
- Manicured nails

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

First Impressions

Your success or failure in an interview can depend on your appearance and the interviewer's first impression of you. Research indicates that, on average, an interviewer decides to hire in just 5½ minutes. If the first impression is not positive, it will be difficult to change the interviewer's mind during the rest of the interview.

Be punctual. Arrive 10 minutes early to allow yourself time to collect your thoughts. Take the opportunity to observe the work environment. Keep your eyes and ears open.

Look professional—neat, clean, and well groomed. Select proper clothing for the type of organization interviewing you. If in doubt, be conservative. It is also advisable to keep fashion accessories to a minimum, to avoid wearing strong scents, and to turn off devices such as cell phones and electronic organizers.

Greet each person with respect and professionalism. When you shake hands, make eye contact and smile. Handshakes should be firm but not aggressive; try to match the grip of the interviewer. It is good etiquette to wait to sit down until the interviewer invites you to do so.

Know the Company/Organization

You must be familiar with the position and the organization so that you can demonstrate your interest in and fit for the job. Refer to the research notes you made as you reviewed print and online materials, spoke with people about the position, and prepared your resume and cover letter.

BEHAVIOR-BASED QUESTIONS

- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills and how you handled it.
- Describe a time when your work was harshly criticized. How did you react to this feedback?
- Tell me about a time when a project really excited you.
- Tell me about a situation when you had absolutely no idea how to approach a problem and how you eventually solved it.
- Give me an example of a situation when your solution to a problem did not help. What was the outcome?
- Describe the steps you would take if a customer came to you with a problem that was beyond your responsibilities but your supervisor was not available.
- How would you handle a co-worker who you notice being rude to customers?
- Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to people from different cultures and environments.
- **CAR METHOD TO ANSWERING BEHAVIOR-BASED QUESTIONS**
 - Use a three step process:
 - 1) context/situation
 - 2) action
 - 3) result or outcome.

A commonly asked interview question is: "What do you know about our company?" If you are unable to answer this question effectively, employers will see this as a sign of lack of planning or interest.

Research the Employer

Thoroughly research the organization to impress those with whom you meet and discuss your alignment with the company.

Suggested information to research:

- Key people in the organization
- Size of organization
- Location of facilities
- Structure of organization
- Types of clients
- Product line or service
- Potential markets
- Stock and assets information
- Competition
- Training provisions
- Recent news items

You can find this information in the following places:

- Employer brochures
- Public Relations
- Glassdoor.com
- Company website/Internet
- Other employees

ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The next phase of the interview consists of the interviewer asking you questions to try to determine your fit. Having knowledge of potential questions helps you to prepare points to include in your answers. Think about why a question is being asked. What does the employer really want to know?

Behavior-based and situational/hypothetical questions are increasing in popularity because they are considered to be more valid predictors of on-the-job performance.

Behavior-Based Questions

Behavior-based interviews are designed to elicit information about how you have performed in the past because past behavior is a good indicator of how you will function in the future. Interviewers develop their questions around the traits and skills they consider necessary for succeeding in a position or organization.

These questions usually begin with phrases such as:

- Tell me about a time...
- Describe a situation in which...
- Recall an instance when...
- Give me an example of...

Some applicants find the format of these questions difficult to understand and have trouble responding. However, if you have done your research and prepared for the interview, you will have work, academic, and life experiences ready to share. You can prepare for behavior-based questions by recalling specific actions that demonstrate your

- Always cite a specific event and briefly fill the employer in on the situation.
- Have a thorough understanding of the questions.
- Ask for clarification if needed.
- Deal with all questions positively.
- Some questions give you the chance to acknowledge your failures while showing how you have learned from them.
- Don't be afraid to take a few moments to think about the question--it's better than making something up!

EXAMPLE

"Tell me about a time you had a difficult customer. How did you handle the situation?"

When I was working at XYZ Company as an entry-level sales associate, a customer wanted to return an item purchased over nine months ago due to dissatisfaction (**Context**). I informed the customer that the product no longer met the company's return policy and the customer became angry and demanded to speak with a supervisor. I calmly let the customer know that I would be happy to assist them in their request and shared other products as alternative solutions as the customer waited for a supervisor (**Action**).

Eventually, the customer calmed down when I provided suitable alternative options and even apologized for being rude to me earlier (**Results**).

accomplishments, abilities, and fit for the position. Be certain to tell the truth, get to the point, stay focused, turn negatives into positives, and be consistent with your responses.

Answering Behavior-Based Questions: W5 Model

The W5 model is a useful method for answering a behavior-based question. The answer should take approximately 90 seconds (the length of a typical attention span).

70 seconds - Identify the skill/knowledge/ability and give an example of how you applied or developed it by explaining:

- What, Who, When, Where, Why, and How
- What the successful outcome was

20 seconds - Re-state the skill and outline the benefits transferable to the interviewer's organization

COMMON BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEW THEMES

INCLUDE:

- Working effectively under pressure
- Handling a difficult situation with a co-worker
- Applying good judgment and logic in solving a problem
- Completing a project on time
- Persuading team members to do things your way
- Writing a report or proposal that was well received
- Anticipating potential problems and developing preventative measures
- Making an important decision with limited facts and information
- Making a quick decision during the absence of a supervisor
- Making an unpopular decision
- Adapting to a difficult situation
- Being tolerant of a different opinion
- Dealing with an upset client or customer
- Delegating a project effectively
- Explaining complex information to a client, colleague or peer

By analyzing the questions asked of you, you will discover further details about the position. Does the interviewer seem to be emphasizing certain skills, knowledge, personality traits, and attitudes? That insight can help you tailor your answers more easily to the employer's position.

For example, in response to the query "What experience do you have organizing projects?" you determine that the qualification being evaluated is organizational skills. Your statement could be, "I have developed excellent organizational skills by working on two major projects. The one I would like to tell you about ended successfully six months ago."

Every statement you make must be true! Don't lie or embellish. Ideally, the illustration you choose to confirm your statement should be a project that required similar competency to the typical project the

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

In addition to asking the other types of questions, many employers rely on a series of standard questions, and you should prepare for them:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your short-term goals? What about in two and five years? How are you preparing to achieve them?
- What is your vision or mission statement?
- What do you think you will be looking for in the job following this position?
- Why do you feel you will be successful in this work?
- What other types of work are you looking for in addition to this role?
- What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?
- For you, what are some advantages and disadvantages of working in a team environment?
- What did you like/dislike about your last job?
- What motivates you to do a good job?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What kinds of problems do you handle best?
- How do you reduce stress and try to achieve balance in your life?
- How did you handle a request to do something contrary to your moral code or business ethics?
- What do you know about us?

prospective employer wants you to complete. If you do not have a similar experience to relate, try to choose a relevant story from your academic, extracurricular, or volunteer activities.

Choose words that will help the employer visualize you in the experience. Whenever possible, include positive feedback from supervisors, colleagues, professors, and others to reinforce your accomplishment.

The next step is the one that most candidates forget. Tell the interviewer what specific benefits or competitive advantage you can bring to the position because of the experience you have just described. For example, "As part of the team, I would be able to coordinate...." Avoid generic statements such as "All organizations need people with leadership ability."

Situational/Hypothetical Questions

An interviewer will use situational/hypothetical questions to establish how you would react to and handle real-life situations on the job. For situational/hypothetical questions, candidates must have a good understanding of the job and its requirements.

Here are some examples of this type of question:

- If you had met your project deadlines and your direct supervisor was unavailable, describe how you would remain busy.
- You are the manager of a small marketing team, and one individual is continually late for work and taking extended breaks. How would you approach the issue?
- During construction, a contractor unexpectedly finds a very large object in one of the trenches where he is about to dig. He requests that you tell him how to proceed. How would you deal with this situation?
- You plan a workshop to teach newcomers to the country how to use word processing software. Unfortunately, only four people have registered and you are required to have a class of ten. It is five days before the class is scheduled to begin. What do you do?
- You have a conflict with someone who is senior to you and is not your supervisor. Describe how you would handle it.

HOW TO SHARE YOUR STORY

In an interview, you need at least five to eight stories that highlight skills, accomplishments, character traits, or passions. People remember stories, and you want to be memorable. All stories should have a purpose in telling them, either to highlight something you did or to demonstrate you learned something. All stories have a beginning, middle, and an end. Leave one out and it's not a story.

BEGINNING: Describe the scene so the interviewer understands the context.

MIDDLE: Next, identify what YOU did to make this happen. Be specific and make sure you are teaching the person something positive about you.

END: Share the results of what happened. Even if it was not positive, what did you learn from it? Describe what you would do differently next time.

ANSWERING CLASSIC QUESTIONS- PAWS MODEL

The PAWS model is a useful method for answering classic questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The answer should take approximately 90 seconds (the length of a typical attention span).

When an employer asks this question, the employer is looking for those aspects of your life that are relevant to the job, such as how you became interested in the field, related experience, and courses taken.

The "PAWS" acronym stands for Profile, Academic, Work, and Skills. Include all or as many of the four (in any order) to reinforce your fit for the job. As with any interview response, limit your answer to a maximum of ninety seconds. Here are some examples of what to discuss in each of the four areas:

Profile: Mention how you became interested in this field and perhaps point out any relevant community involvement, extracurricular activities, memberships, and personal interests that further demonstrate your commitment to the field

Academic: Talk about your educational background (degrees/diplomas/certifications) and other related training and professional development initiatives/courses that you participated in

Work: Highlight paid or unpaid experience related to the job

Skills: Refer to specific technical skills that relate to the position or field (programming C++, knowledge of GIS) and relevant transferable skills (time management, problem-solving skills)



TRICKY SITUATIONS

Awkward situations may occur during an interview, and it is up to you to be prepared to confidently handle whatever happens. To increase your confidence and prepare for an interview, practice interviewing. Check for quality of information in your answers, and the positive, non-verbal reinforcement of your words. By practicing responses out loud, you can hear your answers and assess their effectiveness; however, don't practice so much that you lose your spontaneity and your answers sound rehearsed.

The key to tricky situations is to remember that barriers to employment can often be overcome by focusing on the positive. Circumstances that you may find problematic are:

1. Salary
2. Silence
3. Interviewer is an excessive talker
4. Note-taking
5. Being stumped
6. Negative questions
7. Many short-term jobs or gaps in employment history
8. Having never worked or no recent work experience
9. Being over-/under-qualified
10. Low grades
11. Ageism
12. Disclosure of disability
13. Reasons for leaving last job
14. Poor or no references
15. Proprietary information

SALARY

If applying for short-term work (such as co-op or summer positions), you will likely have only one interview, so it is acceptable to discuss salary. If you need to know the salary and it has not been discussed, ask about it as your final question.

Employers hiring full-time or contract staff may inquire about salary during a first interview to see if your expectations are compatible with what they are offering and to see how much value you place on your experience, skills, and educational background. Try to defer the subject until you have been offered the job, but if the employer insists, be prepared to offer a salary range that you know is realistic based on your research.

Over eighty percent of employers expect you to negotiate salary. Therefore, it is appropriate to do your salary research and develop a negotiation strategy. Visit the Career Development Center to discuss salary negotiation techniques with a career counselor.

SILENCE

If you answer a question and there is no prompt response or follow-up question, what do you do? Try to remain calm and collected. Silence may not be a negative sign; the employer could be taking time to process and record your answer or could be considering the next question. A few employers create periods of silence during an interview to see how candidates handle stressful and awkward situations.

In response to uncomfortable silence, ask the interviewers if they require any further details regarding your last response, shifting the responsibility to them. Resist the temptation to ramble because you may provide irrelevant information that may hurt your chances of being offered the job.

NOTE-TAKING

Although the interviewer will likely take notes, generally you should take basic notes. If you have your head down writing everything frantically, the conversation will be uncomfortable and disengaged because of your lack of eye contact and inability to show enthusiasm.

Making brief notes is acceptable when you need to record information that may be easily forgotten, such as a key word, phone number or contact information. If you fear you may not recall other pertinent details, document the information immediately after the interview.



BEING STUMPED

You may have difficulty communicating your thoughts clearly and concisely, especially when you are not sure how to respond to a question. The key is to remain calm and positive, focus on the question, and continue to remind yourself that you are doing well. You may request clarification if you are not sure what the interviewer is asking or pause and politely ask for a few moments to consider your response; however, don't take too much time because employers want to see that you can think well under pressure.

After a brief pause, if you still cannot respond to the interviewer's question, you may ask to defer your answer to the end of the interview. The risk is that interviews usually follow a certain structure and the question might be missed entirely, leaving the interviewer with an unanswered question. Of course, if you're stumped because you simply do not know the answer, be honest with the interviewer in a positive and professional manner.

When asked a question about a skill that you don't have, demonstrate that you have the transferable skills necessary to succeed in the position. For example, "I have excellent computer skills but I do not have knowledge of that specific software. However, I did learn Dreamweaver, a similar program, on my own and quickly applied the concepts by independently creating a website for a project that received a grade of 90%."

NEGATIVE QUESTIONS

Interviewers will often ask negatively phrased questions to assess your perceived weaknesses and strengths. The following are a few examples:

- They might want to know your leadership style, or how you handle conflict between co-workers.
- What are your weaknesses as an employee?
- Recall a time from your work experience when you made a bad decision or mistake. How did you get beyond it?
- Give me an example of a time you did not meet a project deadline. How did you handle the situation?

Be honest and discuss a real work-related weakness or past event that would not negatively impact performance for the job you are applying for. Avoid the popular advice to turn a weakness into a strength (for example, "I'm a perfectionist...") because this kind of response is unconvincing and over used. Be sure to end your "weakness" response on a positive note by indicating what steps you are taking to overcome the weakness.

It is important to be as positive as possible, even when answering a negatively framed question, and to keep your answer short.

BEING STUMPED

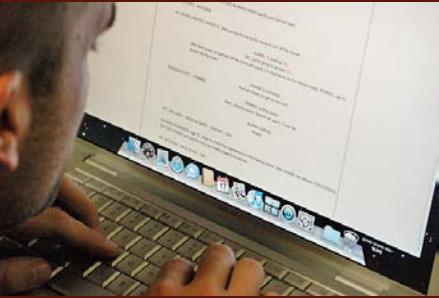
Try not to focus on "what you should say." Focus on the purpose of this question. What do you think they want to know about you, based on the question they asked? They might be purposely testing your ability to solve problems under pressure. Provide a response that demonstrates your process in finding a solution to a problem.

Example: What is your experience with supervising others?

- They might want to know your leadership style, or how you handle conflict between co-workers.

"I haven't had the opportunity to supervise others yet. However, I led my senior capstone project in developing a business plan...(provide detailed info on how you lead the team)."

"In the past three years working at XYZ Company, my leadership responsibilities have grown from being part of a project team to spearheading a new project...(provide detail info on how you've increased your leadership opportunity)."



GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT EXPLANATIONS

"While I was in between positions, I volunteered at XYZ Company to improve my customer service skills."

"I utilized this gap in employment to help out my family, which also gave me the chance to improve my computer and time management skills. I completed several self-guided courses online through Lynda.com"

MANY SHORT-TERM JOBS OR GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

It is becoming more common to work for shorter periods for a variety of employers, so employers may not place as much emphasis on dates worked as they might have in the past. However, if asked, be prepared to provide reasons that the employer will understand for your frequent job changes or gaps in employment history.

Gaps in your employment history can occur for many reasons, some within and some beyond your control: short-term positions, lay-offs, health or personal concerns, raising a family, extensive traveling, completing a degree, unemployment, or time for career planning. In creating a targeted resume, you may also have chosen to omit some experiences.

Although you should truthfully explain in a few words the reasons for your job changes or gaps in employment, focus on what you did during the gaps that was related to the position.

HAVING NEVER WORKED OR NO RECENT WORK EXPERIENCE

Tell the interviewer about any relevant courses, workshops, volunteer or internship experiences, and extracurricular activities. Indicate if you have researched and joined associations or societies in your field to learn or stay knowledgeable about industry trends and connect with other professionals. Convey your interest in the position and indicate that you look forward to a long-term association with the company.

BEING UNDER-/OVER-QUALIFIED

Although you may be concerned about your qualifications, the interviewer liked something about your resume or you wouldn't have been offered an interview! Counter the interviewer's fear that you may not be suitable by emphasizing your positive traits and describing how your experience, education, and skills will help you succeed in the position. Demonstrate to the employer your commitment by describing how the position aligns with your career goals and how your decision to apply for the position was carefully planned.

LOW GRADES

Low grades can stem from a lack of commitment (such as skipping classes or excessive socializing), enrollment in an unsuitable program, or dealing with traumatic personal events. In any case, explain briefly and honestly what happened and describe what steps you have taken to remedy the situation so that it is no longer an issue: "I know my grades were less than stellar during my third year, but I really improved this term because I attended a series of study skill workshops and they made a huge impact. I now know how to manage my time successfully, and I'm confident that I will perform well in this position."

IF YOU HAVE POOR OR NO REFERENCES:

If you were unable to obtain a reference from your previous place of employment because you left on bad terms, you must briefly explain why. Read the section on "Reasons for Leaving Last Job."

Quickly follow up your statement to suggest that the interviewer contact other references from your list to obtain a more accurate picture of your previous work experiences. Stress how direct managers, supervisors, teachers, and colleagues enjoyed working with you and can attest to your achievements and skills.

If your references are outdated, you must decide if they are still appropriate to use. If you feel your referees can still successfully highlight your skills, follow up with them to request their permission to be contacted by potential employers. You will also want to remind them of your previous accomplishments and provide them with an updated resume. If you do not obtain their permission, you must obtain new references by volunteering, requesting client testimonials, etc.



DISCLOSURE OF DISABILITY

People with physical, sensory or learning disabilities or chronic medical conditions are advised, like all job seekers, to focus on their abilities and interests when choosing a career.

It is important to be up front and honest about your situation if your disability may present a performance barrier or if you need to request accommodation or assistive devices. If you determine that your disability does not pose any risk to you or to fellow workers, you may choose to disclose your disability once a job offer is formally presented. It is not necessary to disclose your disability in your resume or cover letter, although you may prefer to do so if the company you are applying to has a specific policy to hire people with disabilities or if you are applying to an agency that deals with persons with disabilities.

Employers may not understand what your disability involves and may feel uncomfortable asking; the result is that they may perceive your disability to be more of a barrier than it actually is. Determine how you can overcome or compensate for any perceived or real stumbling blocks to employment so that you can explain your situation more clearly and positively. For example, you may say, "Due to a spinal injury, I have no sensation in my legs. I can get around and travel easily in my wheelchair. My injury does not affect how I think, solve problems, or communicate and will not affect my performance on the job." You may also want to ask if the employer has any additional questions.

Some regions offer assistance to help you secure employment. As well as offering job placement programs, programs may provide you with specialized equipment, sign language interpreters, readers, and note takers to help you with job searching and interviewing.

REASONS FOR LEAVING LAST JOB

An employer may inquire about your reasons for leaving a job to determine if concerns from a previous job might impact the organization. Employers like to gauge your attitude toward work, management, organizational change, and policies or guidelines.

Begin your response with a positive statement regarding your previous place of employment. Honestly and concisely state your reasons for leaving. If you left on good terms, offer the interviewer letters of reference that outline your relevant achievements. If the conditions under which you left were negative, focus the interviewer's attention on what you accomplished and avoid speaking negatively about past managers, colleagues or the organization. Emphasize that you will be able to handle the present job no matter what may have happened in the past.

YOUR RIGHTS IN THE INTERVIEW

There are clear legal rights and guidelines for employment interview questions. An applicant for employment may be asked to divulge only information relevant to the position applied for. By law, an employer must focus on gathering information relevant to deciding if an applicant can perform the functions of a position.

Some employers mistakenly believe that they have a right to ask any question they choose since they are paying the salary. Others are simply awkward in their technique and an unlawful question results. However, the law does not distinguish between the interviewer who is asking questions with the intent to discriminate and the one who is just curious or inept at interviewing.

Some questions are inappropriate and others are illegal. You do not have to answer questions that are illegal. Most regions have laws that prohibit discrimination in employment on the grounds of:

- Race
- Ancestry
- Place of origin
- Ethnic origin
- Citizenship
- Religion
- Gender
- Age
- Record of offences
- Marital status
- Family status
- Disability
- Medical history

PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

If you are asked to provide confidential information about a past employer, it is best to refrain from giving any information that is not publicly available. Revealing information about a past employer, who may or may not be a competitor, could create a breach of confidentiality. Even though you may have worked for this employer some time ago, you are still obligated to keep confidential information private. The interviewer could be testing to see if you divulge any company information because doing so may be an indicator that you will reveal confidential information about the interviewer's company.

If your portfolio includes performance reviews or samples of written work, ensure that no proprietary information is included, such as the names of customers or clients.

HANDLING ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

What should you do if you're in the middle of an interview and have just been asked what is clearly an illegal question? There is no clear-cut answer. Much depends on you.

In some cases, you may be able to answer the "hidden" question. Think of what information the employer is trying to elicit. For example, "Do you have or plan to have children?" may indicate a concern about an ability to work overtime or to travel. In this example, your answer should convey your willingness to maintain a flexible work schedule. You may elect to say "Why do you ask?" or "Would you explain how this point is connected to the qualifications for this job?" This could cause the employer to reconsider or clarify the question. It may offend some employers, but probably not the majority.

If you feel that you should not answer the question (you shouldn't have to, after all) or that you are not interested in working for the company, you may state, "I don't feel obligated to answer personal questions unrelated to the position" or "That question seems inappropriate for an interview." If you choose this option, you will either enlighten (the employer may not realize it is illegal and will be happy that you pointed it out) or offend (the employer may not consider you for the position).

For more information about illegal interview questions, contact your local, state or federal employment service office.

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Smile when appropriate during the interview. Be enthusiastic and responsive. As you talk about your past and present activities, your passion and energy can be communicated both through your words and your body language (an excited tone of voice, leaning forward, nodding your head in agreement). Maintaining eye contact is important; failure to do so may imply a lack of confidence or, worse, cause the employer to question your truthfulness.

QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK

Your questions should be pertinent to the position and show your enthusiasm and knowledge. By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions that genuinely matter to you, you will convince the employer that you are serious about the organization and the position. Avoid asking questions mentioned in the interview.

- What do you see as the priorities for someone in this position?
- Please describe a typical day on the job.
- What training programs do you have available for your employees?
- What level of responsibility could I expect in this position?
- What are the company's plans for the future?
- What do you see as the greatest threat to the organization?
- What/where are the greatest opportunities for the organization?
- How would you describe your organization's management style, culture or working environment?
- What do you like most about your organization?
- How are employees evaluated and promoted?



Sit comfortably, without slouching. Don't put anything on your lap or in your hands if it will restrict your natural body movement or if you may be tempted to play with it. Keep your clipboard, note pad, briefcase, or portfolio on the floor beside your chair for easy retrieval.

Respond to questions specifically and concisely but give sufficient details to enable the interviewer to evaluate your credentials. Interviewers become frustrated when they have to listen to long, rambling answers. Think before you speak. It is quite acceptable to pause before talking in order to organize your thoughts. Avoid verbal fillers such as "um," "ah," "you know," or regularly repeating the question to provide thinking time.

Use business language. **Avoid slang.** Speak clearly. Watch the interviewer for clues on how the interview is progressing. Is the interviewer's face or body language telling you that your answers are too long, not detailed enough, too boring? If in doubt, ask the interviewer if more or fewer details are needed.

Prepare in advance to talk about any topic that you are concerned or feel uncomfortable about. If there is something that you don't want an interviewer to inquire about, it will likely be raised during the interview. Practice your answer out loud often enough to feel confident. Maintain poise and self-control. Consider a difficult issue as a learning opportunity that has made you a better person.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The most common interview format is one interviewer interviewing one candidate, either by phone, via video or in person.

INTERVIEW WITH TWO OR MORE PEOPLE

It is also common to be interviewed by a panel of people. Although it is important to have good eye contact with the person who asks you a question, also look at the other interviewers frequently to include them in the discussion. Try to remember each person's name and use his or her name during the interview.

GENERAL/GROUP INTERVIEW OR INFORMATION SESSION

This approach is intended to provide applicants with a large amount of information about the organization and the job. The format is used to save time and ensure that everyone understands the basic facts. This process is usually followed by an individual interview. A well-timed and intelligent question may help the employer remember you positively.

INTERVIEW RESOURCES

Virtual Mock-Interviews on Dolphin CareerLink

- Practice a mock-interview recorded on Dolphin CareerLink.
- The video can be utilized for your own purposes or sent to others for review.
- You can request CDS staff to review and provide feedback.

Mock-Interview during Drop-In Career Counseling

- Practice a mock-interview with CDS staff on a first-come, first-served basis, without an appointment.
- The mock-interview will last approximately 15-20 minutes. Then CDS staff will provide 10-15 minutes of feedback and/or suggestions.
- You will need to bring your resume and a copy of the position description (job posting).
- Even if you are not applying to a specific position, you will need to bring a sample position description to effectively conduct a mock-interview.

Employer Interviews

- Each semester, CDS brings various local employers on campus to provide mock-interviews for students.
- Employers will vary each semester.
- Students can register for this event on Dolphin CareerLink under "Workshops."
- Please visit the CDS website to find out which employers will be on campus.

COMPETITIVE GROUP INTERVIEW

In this interview format, one or more people interview many candidates at the same time. This type of interview is sometimes used when a position involves teamwork and the interviewers want to see how you interact in a group setting, when the company wants to see who emerges as a leader within the group, or when people are being interviewed for several similar roles within the company. It is important to thoughtfully and intelligently contribute, be attentive to the contributions of others, and not to monopolize the conversation.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Telephone interviews are an effective way to quickly and cost-effectively screen or hire candidates. If there will be more than one interview, the first may be conducted by phone. Candidates being seriously considered may be invited to a subsequent on-site interview.

If you are not ready for an interview when called, politely request that the interviewer call back at another, mutually convenient, time. This request will allow you to refresh your memory on the organization and consider what points you want to make.

All of the advice about interview skills still applies. Your attire is your choice, but you may find that dressing professionally increases your confidence and allows you to perform better. Keep your resume, company research, points that you want to highlight, and list of questions handy; in fact, keep these in front of you during the interview for easy reference. (Don't shuffle your papers though!) Have a pen and paper available to note any comments or questions that may occur to you during the interview.

Choose your words carefully and be succinct. It is also important to vary your voice tone, tempo, and pitch to keep the employer's attention. Ensure that you are in a private setting to eliminate distractions and background noise.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

In this type of interview, recruiters use video technology to conduct interviews at a distance. Use the same strategies you would if you were meeting in person; clothing, body language, and dialogue are important. Depending on the sophistication of the technology, you may experience short transmission delays.

Make eye contact with the camera, which, to the employer, appears as direct "eye contact." Remember to check the monitor periodically to observe the interviewer's body language.

If speaking on camera makes you nervous, try to practice in front of a video camera or mirror before your interview.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Send a thank you note within 48 hours! Make sure you express your continued interest in the position.
- Follow-up with the employer regarding the position. One of the questions you should always ask at the end of an interview is “What is the next step in the hiring process?” If you were given permission during the interview to follow-up in two weeks, you don’t have to worry about contacting them too soon or too late.
- Conduct research on potential salary offerings for the position. If you need help with salary negotiating, please visit Career Development Services during Drop-In Career Counseling after the interview ASAP.



SECOND INTERVIEW

When interviewing you for a long-term position, a prospective employer may invite you and other finalists to visit the organization. The visit can take from one hour to an entire day. One purpose is to allow you to meet other staff. The second is to give more people an opportunity to interview you in greater depth to determine whether a good match is developing.

Do not assume that a second interview will lead to a job offer; ensure you actively listen, ask relevant questions, and collect specific information about the company so you can elaborate on how your strengths match the organization's requirements. Use the opportunity to observe the work environment (physical space, relations between employees, work pace) to determine if the setting matches what you are seeking.

APPROACHES TO INTERVIEWING

Structured Interview

The goal of this approach is to reduce bias and assist the employer in making an objective decision. Typically, each candidate is asked the same set of questions, responses are recorded, and ratings are assigned to each response.

Unstructured Interview

In this format of interview, questions are based on the applicant's resume, so different questions will be posed to each applicant. Without structured guidelines, the conversation can be free flowing, thus making this method of interviewing the most prone to bias. Although this type of interview may seem more casual, you must still be well prepared and know the points you want to make. Be careful not to provide information you would not have communicated if the interview was more structured.

Ending the Interview

When it appears that the interviewer is about to end the interview, you should make sure you have covered certain points before you leave the room. Make sure you understand the process that will occur before a candidate is selected for the job (another interview, meetings with other individuals in the organization, etc.). Ask the interviewer when you can expect to hear about a decision or ask when you should make an inquiry as a follow-up.

Enthusiastically express your interest in the position (unless you are sure that you are not interested) and thank the interviewer for interviewing you. Ask for a business card or ensure that you have the interviewer's name, title, and address so that you can send a thank you letter. Make sure your letter is sent within 48 hours of the interview. In addition to being a standard business courtesy, a thank you letter may tip the scales in your favor if you are in close contention for the job.

Interview Evaluation

If you do not receive a job offer and you felt that the fit was very good, consider contacting the interviewer for feedback on your performance. Did the interviewer hire someone better qualified for the position? If so, what additional qualifications might you need to be hired for a similar position? Did you adequately present your qualifications? If not, stay motivated but learn from any feedback and make necessary changes for your next interview.

CONTACT INFORMATION

CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



One University Drive, Bell Tower 1548
(805) 437-3270 (office)
(805) 437-8899 (fax)
career.services@csuci.edu

For further assistance please visit us during
[Drop-In Career Counseling](#).



THE COMPLETE INTERVIEW GUIDE
HELPING YOU LAND THE PERFECT ROLE

ROBERT WALTERS

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WELCOME TO ROBERT WALTERS



ROBERT WALTERS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Helping professionals find fulfilling careers

Our story begins in 1985 when the Group opened its first office in central London. Since then we have developed into a global specialist professional recruitment group, operating in a diverse range of markets worldwide.

For over 32 years, we've been helping talented professionals develop their careers, job move after job move. It's a success story we're proud of and one that's built on the strength and passion of our people.

As the business continues to expand, we operate with the same commitment to service and quality. Every candidate is treated as an individual with a

focus on advising, consulting and helping you to succeed through the job screening process.

It's one of the reasons we've produced this comprehensive interview guide. We are committed to helping our candidates conduct successful interviews and therefore outshine the competition. Regardless of your level, this guide will help you to perfect your interview skills.

Our consultants often come from industry backgrounds and know what hiring managers want, so they're also well placed to help you prepare for an interview. They take the time to listen to your career goals and match you with the right role.

In addition, unlike the majority of our competition, we will put you forward for all suitable roles, regardless of which consultant you speak to. We also promise to never send your CV out without your permission.

We hope you find this guide useful and invite you to get in touch if you would like to discuss your next career move. Our contact details are at the back of the guide.

Robert Walters
CEO
Robert Walters Plc



PREPARE TO BE THE BEST YOU



“

We see it all the time – great candidates being passed over because they didn't prepare for an interview properly. Even if you don't have the full skill set you can still land the job by being well prepared and enthusiastic.

”

HOW TO PREPARE

The importance of preparation cannot be overstated. As well as boosting your confidence, it will help you to show the best you.

Interviewers frequently test a candidate's preparation to see how enthusiastic they are about the role and the company. Thorough preparation demonstrates to them that you're serious about the job.

For a fairly straightforward interview you should allow half a day's preparation time, but for more senior roles which will require you to go deeper, it's best to allocate a full day.



RESEARCH

The first thing to do is visit the company's website and social channels. Make sure you read the home page, about us and services/products sections and note down the key points you learn about the company including its history, vision and mission.

Then move on to a web search of the company to find out if it's been in the news lately. This will ensure you come across as informed and up-to-date with topical issues. It's also a good idea to know who its competitors are and what differentiates them from other businesses in their field.

LEARN

Learn your CV off by heart so that you can talk naturally and fluently about your employment history and key achievements. Spend some time mapping out how your skills and experience

match the job description. You want to make it easy for the interviewer to see how you're a great fit for the role. It's also wise to research your current and previous employers online so you can answer questions confidently.

PRACTICE

Ask someone you trust to help you practice common interview questions and competency-based interview questions. Practising out loud will stop you from 'rambling' on the day and help you to communicate your thoughts clearly and succinctly. We cover interview questions later in the guide.

DEVISE YOUR QUESTIONS

Try to think of questions that will make you stand out from other interviewees. Interviewers tend to be impressed by candidates with an enthusiastic attitude and those who have gone the extra mile to prepare for the interview.

Use your questions to demonstrate your preparation and insight. For example, if you've looked at some of their employees' LinkedIn profiles and seen that people tend to get promoted every two to three years, then ask about that.

While it's a good idea to look at the interviewer's LinkedIn profile, it's important to ensure you don't come across as 'creepy' by commenting on personal information you've gleaned – it's best to keep it professional.

Likewise, read the annual report and latest press releases.

Look for things where you can make a link to the role and department you are hoping to join. For example, "I read that you've just launched x. What will that mean for the growth of this role?"

Be creative and imaginative, and remember to avoid questions about pay and benefits in the first interview. These topics can be discussed once you've been offered the job.

FAST FACTS

- Go the extra mile with your research
- Map out how your skills and experience match the job description
- Do a mock interview with a friend or your recruiter
- Prepare interesting questions to make yourself stand out

“

I always start by asking people to explain what our business does. This deceptively simple question floors lots of people – it's amazing how many interviewees struggle with it, perhaps because they're attending several interviews in a row and haven't made the time to do much research.

But if you don't come across as having a firm grasp of the company and why it's hiring, the interviewer can only conclude that you're not really that bothered about the job.

”

THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

While preparing for the interview is important, it's also vital to prepare for the day itself by planning your outfit, transport route and what to take.

WHAT TO WEAR

With six in 10 managers saying how an interviewee dresses has a big impact on their employability, first impressions really do count. However, nowadays there is a lot of flexibility and variety in what people wear to work, so it's important to do your research by looking at social channels such as Glassdoor and YouTube to see what the dress code is. You don't want to show up at a tech start-up in a three-piece suit!

Your recruitment consultant will advise you on the dress code, but if you're dealing directly with the hiring manager, then it's perfectly acceptable to ask them outright. For example, "I hope you don't mind me asking but can you please tell me what the dress code is for the interview?" Dressing professionally will help your skills, achievements and personality to shine through. Remember to subtly change your outfit for the second interview.



PLAN YOUR JOURNEY

Research your route the night before, ensuring you build in plenty of time in case of delays. You may like to arrive in the area early so you can go over your notes at a café. Regardless of what time you arrive, don't report to reception until 10 minutes before your interview time.

WHAT TO TAKE

It's always a good idea to take several copies of your CV in case the interviewer unexpectedly brings a colleague to the meeting. You will come across as calm and organised if you can hand out additional copies without becoming flustered. Writing down the company address, interview time, and name and title of your interviewer is also advisable, in case your mobile phone fails on the day.

FAST FACTS

- Find out the dress code before the interview
- Research your transport route
- Arrive at reception 10 minutes early
- Take extra copies of your CV and a portfolio if appropriate

“

While it's important to dress professionally you don't want to appear a clone – it's ok to express your personality through your dress, just don't overdo it. You want the interviewer to recognise your skills and experience, not to be distracted by what you're wearing.

”

MAKE A STRONG START

“

One candidate I interviewed recently asked me a non-stop string of questions about my family, the job, the company, things in the news – all sorts of things. But he didn't really have much to say himself and he didn't really wait to hear my answer before asking the next question, so he just came across as rather anxious and scattered.

”



HOW TO MAXIMISE THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES OF AN INTERVIEW

We've all heard it said that first impressions count and it's especially true of job interviews. One third of bosses say they know within 90 seconds whether they will hire someone, so starting strong is a must.

From the all important hand shake to making small talk and maintaining eye contact, there are so many things to be aware of in the first five minutes of an interview. Given these first few moments can have such a decisive impact on how well the rest of the interview goes, here's how to start strong – together with some cautionary tales of what not to do from real interviewers.



1. REMEMBER THE INTERVIEW STARTS AS SOON AS YOU LEAVE THE HOUSE

The interview starts long before you shake hands and sit down around the table. You never know who you might bump into as you get off your bus or train, or enter the company's building – for all you know, your interviewer could be in the same coffee bar queue as you. So make sure you project a friendly, confident, professional air from the moment you set off.

Doubtless you'll have made sure you arrive early. Give yourself time to have a comfort break and make sure you're hydrated. Make conversation with the receptionist, switch off your phone and take in your surroundings – you might notice something that will make a useful small-talk topic later. Don't try to cram in any last-minute facts – you want to come across as calm and

organised, not flustered and under-prepared.

2. TREAT EVERYONE YOU MEET AS YOUR INTERVIEWER

Make sure that you're polite and friendly to everyone you come across in the interview process. From greeting the receptionist, to the people you share a lift with, to walking through an open-plan office to reach your meeting room – these are all touchpoints with your potential future employer. Co-workers will often share their impressions of visitors afterwards, so you want everyone who comes into contact with you to see you in as positive a light as possible.

3. CREATE A STRONG FIRST IMPRESSION

First impressions count, and non-verbal cues matter even more than verbal ones. So in those first few minutes, it's all about smiling confidently, shaking hands firmly, making eye contact and generally looking as if you're glad to be there and you want the job. Lean in slightly, look alert and interested, and wait to be invited to sit down. In everything you do, project an attitude of energy, enthusiasm and interest.

Clothes-wise, try to match your dress style to that of the company you're meeting.

You want to project some personality and charisma, but you also want to come across as a good fit, so if in doubt always err on the formal side.

FAST FACTS

- Be professional from the moment you leave the house
- Be courteous and friendly to everyone you encounter
- Make sure your body language shows you're engaged and enthusiastic
- Match your dress style to that of the company you're meeting

“

It's important that you stand to greet your interviewer with a firm handshake, eye contact and a smile. Remember not to sit until you're offered a seat. They may initiate some small talk to put you at ease, so use this opportunity to demonstrate your interpersonal skills.

”

“

I like to make a point of coming down to greet candidates in person. On one occasion, a candidate assumed I was an assistant, treated me in a very offhand way and rather rudely asked me to get them a drink. They got quite a shock when they saw I was heading up the interview panel! But what most disappointed me was the idea that it's appropriate to treat staff of any level in such a way.

”

4. BE READY FOR THE SMALL TALK

Getting the small talk right (or wrong) can have big consequences. It's a way for people to build rapport and affinity, and start to generate that elusive, intangible quality of 'chemistry' that characterises all effective business relationships.

So as part of your interview preparation, it's a good idea to think ahead to some likely topics that might come up, to help keep the conversation flowing smoothly. The key is to think of some topics where you have a shared interest, so that you're able to both ask and answer credible questions.

For example, if you see a picture of your interviewer's family, perhaps you could ask about them – and be ready with a family anecdote of your own. Or if you're a sports fan and you spot signs that your interviewer

is too, perhaps you could ask a suitable question that you've also got an interesting answer to ('Do you ever get to the matches?' 'So who's going to win the Cup this year?' etc).

Think, too, about topical themes. For example, has your potential employer been in the news recently? Or could you ask about the potential impact on the company of a recent development, such as Brexit or falling share prices or a serious malware attack? In each case, make sure you have an interesting thought of your own to contribute too.

5. BE ON MESSAGE FROM THE OUTSET

Politicians coached in handling the media are always advised to have a maximum of three key messages to get across, which they should stick to and repeat throughout any interview. Similarly, it's a good idea to have two or three key points that you want to make about what you have to offer and what you're looking for. For example, 'I'm ready for the challenge of managing a team', 'I combine compliance experience with technical expertise', 'In my

career, I've developed an extensive digital transformation skill set'.

These are the three key points that you want your interviewer to remember about you. So try to work them in naturally whenever you can, even in the first few minutes. It's also important to have a ready answer for some of the most common questions that come up early on, such as 'Tell me why you want this job' and 'What's your understanding of what this job involves?'



“

I once heard someone standing outside our building, smoking furiously and complaining loudly on their phone about the early start time of their meeting and wondering aloud why they were even there. When I got to my next interview, I realised to my dismay the noisy moaner was my next candidate. Not a great start!

”

KNOW YOUR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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Make sure you're listening to the questions and tailoring your answers – you can prepare, but you need to understand the nuances of the person interviewing you. You may have great intentions about what you plan to say in the interview, but don't force it if it's not natural.

”



COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are some interview questions that you can almost guarantee will come up in one form or another, so make sure you've got some good answers at the ready.



'SO HOW WAS YOUR JOURNEY?'

The interviewer may initiate some small talk with a question like this to help put you at ease. They're looking to test your interpersonal skills too, so just relax and answer naturally. Avoid one-word answers, and don't be afraid to ask a relevant question or two back.

'TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF'

Most interviewers start by asking you to talk about yourself and your career history. What they're really asking is 'What would you be like to work with and what difference could you make to the organisation?' This is your opportunity to talk about your strengths, skills and experience. Don't give a detailed account of every single job you've ever had. Instead summarise your career history by highlighting the most important points that relate to the job you're interviewing

for. Keep your summary to five minutes. Think about your personal brand and the story you want to tell, and ensure you display enthusiasm and flexibility.

'WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK FOR US?'

Look beyond the obvious points such as the size of the company or its current bottom line. Say something different that shows you have really done your research. For example, you could point to a new product or CSR initiative, or a staff project presented on the company's social media pages. Show how the things you mention about the company align with your own personal values too.

'TELL US ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS'

Answering this question well is all about showing your ability to do the job, your commitment to work, and your

ability to function effectively as part of a team. Choose three qualities that focus on how your strengths will benefit this specific role, and try to include a combination of hard and soft skills.

'WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?'

Think realistically about where this job can take you and how that fits with your career plans. You want to come across as ambitious, but not impatient or ruthless. Ideally you'll find a way to show how your goals and

ambitions align with those of the company.

'TELL US ABOUT YOUR HOBBIES AND INTERESTS'

This is a good chance to show another side of yourself and to hopefully build rapport with the interviewer. Look to surface something surprising or unexpected that will provoke curiosity and help you to stand out in the interviewer's mind.

FAST FACTS

- Practise summarising your skills, experience and career history
- Make note of your strengths and weaknesses
- Think about the future and how you want your career to grow
- Know why you'd like to work for this company

“

Don't exaggerate when answering common or competency questions. It's important to tell the truth and discuss what you learned through the experience.

”

TELL A POWERFUL STORY

Interviewers are relying more and more on competency questions to help them differentiate between competing candidates. But what are they exactly – and what's the best way to approach them?



DISTINGUISH YOURSELF

Competency questions are a useful way for employers to distinguish if you're a good fit for their organisation, and to differentiate between different candidates with similar levels of skill and experience. That's because no two stories – and no two storytellers – are the same.

Stories are a powerful communication tool because they appeal to both the emotional and rational sides of the brain. They're a chance for you to show more of your personality and establish a warmer connection with your interviewer that goes beyond the data of your CV. You can also use them to demonstrate more of what you're capable of, and to steer the interview in the direction that best showcases your suitability for the role.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED?

There's a wide range of topics that you might be asked a competency question about. The questions tend to fall into several predictable categories, such as personal qualities, interpersonal skills and team behaviour, leadership and management, commercial and client skills, as well as problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Here are some examples:

- ‘Tell us about a time when you had to deal with challenging feedback on your work’
- ‘Tell me about a time when you were able to resolve a conflict within your team’
- ‘Tell me about a time when you were able to help a team member who was struggling with morale issues’

- ‘Describe a situation where you were able to directly influence your company’s bottom line’
- ‘Can you tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult strategic decision and win over others in the process?’

You can often infer the sort of questions that you might be asked at a specific interview from what you know of the role, the job description, and of course your own CV. If you’re working with a recruitment consultant, make sure you

ask for their advice too – as experts, they’ll know which competencies the employer is looking for.

If, for example, you are interviewing for a role where you’ll be managing people for the first time, you can expect a question like: ‘Tell me about a time when you had to step in and show leadership in your team’. This gives you a chance to show that, even if you haven’t formally had to demonstrate a particular competency before, you already have the potential to do so.

FAST FACTS

- Competency questions help employers differentiate between similar candidates
- Use competency questions to tell your unique story
- Look at the job description for clues on what may be asked
- Ask your recruitment consultant what competencies the hiring manager is looking for

“

Stories are a powerful communication tool because they appeal to both the emotional and rational sides of the brain. Use competency questions to tell your unique story.

”

“

If you’re working with a recruitment consultant make sure you ask for their advice too – as experts, they’ll know which competencies the employer is looking for.

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If you are moving into a role where the ability to cope with significant time pressure is critical, you might be asked, ‘Tell us about a time where you had to juggle lots of conflicting deadlines’. If close team-working or client-facing skills are essential, you might be asked, ‘Tell us about a situation where you had to find a way to work with a colleague who you didn’t always get on with’, or ‘Tell me about a time when you went the extra mile to delight a customer’.

HOW TO ANSWER A COMPETENCY QUESTION

Think of your answer to a competency question as a very focused kind of story. Any good story has a character we care about – that’s you. The character is set a challenge or finds themselves in a tricky situation. Then they have to go on a journey and take some actions to find the answer,

and usually gain a valuable life lesson in the process. For your big finish, focus on the positive outcome that you helped to achieve, and briefly say what you learned in the process.

To make your story more credible and relatable, add in a few specific details and anecdotal touches (but stay on point – don’t waffle). And don’t be afraid to show yourself in a less than perfect light at some points too: as in any good Hollywood film, things tend to go worse for our hero before they get better, and seeing how you overcome these challenges – whether internal or external – adds to the power of the story.

EXAMPLE ANSWER:

Q: TELL US ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TO 'MANAGE UP'

A: 'When I first started my current role, I saw that we had a recurring difficulty in getting new client reports signed off in a timely fashion because they had to be personally approved by a particular director. This individual was perceived as intimidating and hardly ever available, so we were constantly on the backfoot with deadlines.

I did an audit of our existing approval processes, and identified all the potential risks and bottlenecks. It seemed to me that only certain reports really needed such a senior level of sign-off, and empowering other managers to own approvals would help ease the pressure on the system. I was asked to present my proposal to the director which

was a bit nerve-wracking, but I put forward the case that possible late delivery of reports to clients was a significant business risk. When I concluded with my new proposed approach, the executive congratulated me on my efforts and said they'd been looking for a way to delegate some of their responsibilities for a long time.

As a result, a modified version of my process was introduced almost immediately, and colleagues have commented how the production process is now much more efficient. I learnt from this experience that if you want to make positive change, it's important to look beyond individual personalities and build instead a compelling case that everyone can get behind. And if you want to point out a problem, people will listen to you much more if you've got an idea for the solution too!'

Be a STAR storyteller

Another good way to remember how to structure your answer to a competency question is to follow the STAR system:

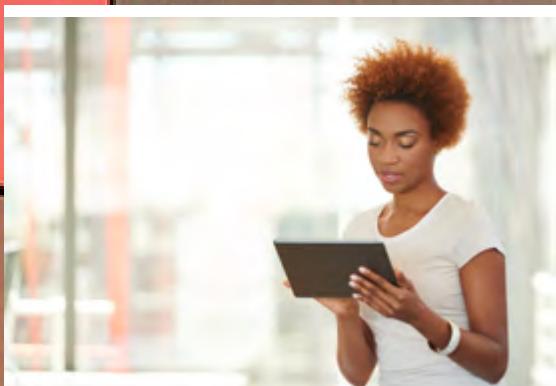
- **SITUATION:** Explain the context, your role and the potential challenge you and the organisation were facing.
- **TASK:** What specific task were you given responsibility for to help your company meet the challenge?
- **ACTION:** What steps did you decide to take, and why? How were your actions received by stakeholders and co-workers?
- **RESULT:** What was the outcome of your actions? What difference did you make? What did you learn?

AVOID COMMON INTERVIEW MISTAKES

“

There are great candidates out there who make common interview mistakes such as interrupting the interviewer or speaking negatively about their former employer, and sadly it ends up costing them the job.

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TOP SIX INTERVIEW MISTAKES TO AVOID

While it's important to know the right thing to do and say at an interview, it's also essential to understand the common interview pitfalls that many unwittingly fall into. Here we share the top six interview mistakes to avoid.



DON'T BE APATHETIC

We've all been there, agreeing to an interview even when you're not overly excited by the job description. However, it's important that you are enthusiastic from the get-go because it will be too late if you decide halfway through the interview that you do want the job after all.

The interviewer will have already picked up on your lack of enthusiasm and it will be extremely difficult to turn the interview around. Put your doubts aside, go in wanting the job and approach the interview in that frame of mind.

It's also important to note that no matter how qualified you are, you still need to display energy and enthusiasm. If you sit there with all the experience in the world but don't convey enthusiasm, then the interviewer won't be interested. Clients

have an ego too, they want to feel that the candidate sees the role as a good opportunity and will value it.

AVOID NEGATIVE TALK

Speaking negatively about your current or previous employer is a major pitfall you will do well to avoid. You may feel negatively about your current workplace, but don't be too honest if that's your reason for leaving.

Sometimes people nail an interview but then end it by saying something negative about their employer. It comes across as unprofessional and we all know there are two sides to every story.

It's also important to avoid flimsy answers to the question 'why are you looking to change jobs?'. For example, 'I got bored' or 'I wasn't progressing' when you've only been in the role for 12 months will set off

alarm bells for the interviewer. It's best to construct answers that are honest but still paint you in a positive light. For example, 'I'm looking for a more challenging, varied role as my current role isn't stretching me' or 'I really enjoy being part of a dynamic team and my job doesn't offer that currently'.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

We talked earlier in the guide about your physical appearance and finding out the dress code before the interview so you don't look out of step with the company culture when you arrive. But it's equally important

to consider your personal cleanliness. For example, if you stopped for a coffee on the way to the interview make sure you have a mint to freshen up. It's also a good idea to avoid smoking prior to the interview.

On the flip side, the overpowering smell of aftershave or perfume can be equally off-putting for interviewers. Sometimes in our eagerness to smell good we may get carried away which can be distracting for the person we're meeting. To be sure, ask a friend to check that you haven't overdone the

FAST FACTS

- Remember to listen and never talk over the interviewer
- Check your personal hygiene but don't overdo the cologne
- Put your doubts aside and show you're enthusiastic about the job
- Don't speak negatively about your current employer

“

Overfamiliarity is something that really puts me off a candidate. You should always let the interviewer lead the tone of the interview and not behave or speak informally unless the interviewer does so.

”

“

You want to prioritise listening and achieve the right balance of confidence and humility. These are the candidates who stand out.

”

perfume or cologne prior to your interview.

DON'T TALK TOO MUCH

If you've spent hours preparing for an interview you'll be keen to get the answers you've prepared across. However, don't fall into the common trap of not listening to the question carefully. Sometimes people are so desperate to share what they've prepared that they give an irrelevant answer to the question. You may have great intentions about what you plan to say in the interview, but don't force it if it's not natural.

It's also important to let the interviewer lead the interview and set the tone. Interviewers find it very off-putting when a candidate jumps the gun and asks questions before they've been invited to. It comes across as over-confident. Another big mistake is to interrupt or talk over the top of the

interviewer – bite your tongue and wait your turn to speak. You want to prioritise listening and achieve the right balance of confidence and humility. These are the candidates who stand out.

Overfamiliarity is also very off-putting for interviewers. "I don't like it when a candidate acts like they're my best friend before they've even built rapport with me. If I start to relax and laugh towards the end of the interview then I'm happy for the candidate to do so too. For example, I had one candidate who made a funny joke about selling gravy in a previous role, but it was at the end of the interview so it worked."

MAKE TIME TO PREPARE

Even if you're attending multiple interviews you need to build time into your schedule to prepare properly. Interviewers find it inexcusable when candidates don't know about the company and the role. When asked about the company, just reciting information from the website isn't going to cut it. Interviewers want candidates who will look beyond the surface level facts and delve deeper into current trends and what's happening in the market.

The best candidates will be able to link market trends back to the business and talk about what they think makes the company interesting and unique. But you can only do this effectively if you're well prepared.

Another fatal mistake is not reading the job description properly or taking the time to

understand the role before going for the interview. Hiring managers spend a lot of time and effort devising job descriptions, so make sure you've mapped out how your skills and experience match the role and know your strengths and development areas.

ALWAYS ASK QUESTIONS

If there's one way to leave a lasting negative impression it's to say you don't have any questions at the end of the interview. Interviewers believe it shows a lack of interest and initiative. Be different and ask imaginative questions, it will help you to stand out from the competition.

“

There's nothing worse than getting to the end of an interview and finding the candidate has no questions. Be different and ask imaginative questions, make someone want to hire you over the competition.

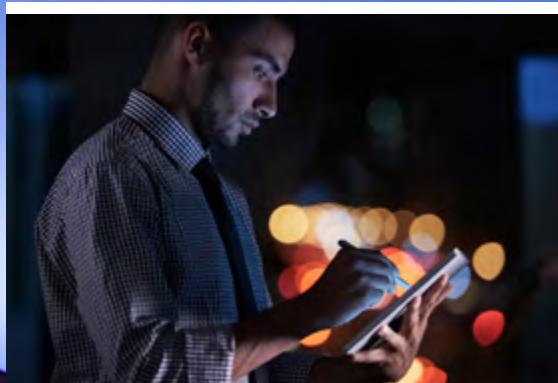
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THRIVE IN ALL CONDITIONS

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Whether it's a Skype interview with the line manager or an in-person interview with the HR manager, every situation is different. It's important to be well prepared so you can thrive in all conditions.

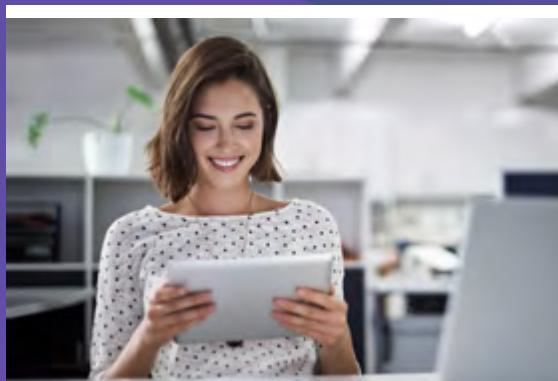
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MAKING THAT SKYPE INTERVIEW COUNT

Most of us use Skype as a way to stay in touch with family and friends, so we think of it as a relaxed, social form of communication. However this is not the case when it comes to Skype interviews – you need to treat them with the same professionalism as an in-person interview.

For example, make sure you dress professionally (and fully), as you never know when you may need to get up during the interview and you don't want to have your pyjama bottoms on display.



PREPARE YOUR SPACE

You wouldn't expect to attend an interview in a badly lit, noisy room filled with distractions, so why do it for a Skype interview? It's much easier for an interviewer to concentrate on you if they can see and hear you clearly, without distractions or interruptions.

Here are top tips from our experts on preparing your interview space:

Tidy up – Make sure your background is clean, tidy and uncluttered, as interviewers will look at your environment to get clues about who you are. The interviewer doesn't want to see your laundry in the background.

Light it up – You won't come across as your best self if your face is in the shadows. Ideally choose a room with a lot of natural light, but if that's not possible, then put a lamp

beside your laptop and adjust it until your face is illuminated on the screen.

Shut it up – Turn off your mobile phone and shut doors and windows to block out background noise. It's also worth telling people in your vicinity that you're being interviewed and you don't want to be interrupted. Try to avoid having people walking behind you during the interview, as this is an unnecessary distraction that takes the attention away from you.

TECHNICAL CHECKS

Skype interviews require extra preparation as you need to ensure all the technology is working. Knowing that you've tested everything in advance will reduce your stress on the day and ensure you don't become easily flustered.

Here are a few things to bear in mind:

Ask for a trial – Wherever possible, test the Skype connection with the company beforehand to ensure the visuals and sound are working.

Share your Skype address – Many people forget to send their Skype address which means the interview starts late and gets off on the wrong foot.

Find somewhere stable – Prop up your tablet or mobile phone so that you can sit with good posture for the interview as you would in person. Avoid holding your device and ensure your face is in the centre of the picture. “I had one candidate lie down for a Skype interview – she completely missed the point that it was still a formal interview!”

Is there strong wifi? –

Remember this is your responsibility. If you've committed to an interview, then you need to ensure in advance that the connection is strong enough to support a Skype video call. Call a friend to test the connection once you have the interview date.

Speak slowly – Interviewers need more time to take in your answers over video, so make it easy for them by talking at a slower pace than usual. At the end of every question, because it's difficult to read the body language nuances, always ask ‘have I answered your question correctly and do you need more information?’

If you follow these tips for Skype interviews you will definitely be a cut above the rest.

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Don't assume a Skype interview will be more casual. You'll need to work even harder than usual, as it's difficult to read people over video.

”

UNDERSTAND YOUR INTERVIEWER



UNDERSTAND YOUR INTERVIEWER

Most companies' recruitment processes involve interviews with both a line manager and a human resources professional. But what's the difference and how do you flex your interview style accordingly?

Generally speaking, an interview with the line manager will focus on the technical aspects of the role – they'll want to know about your previous experience, skills and achievements. Be prepared to talk about how your skills match the job description.

On the other hand, an interview with the HR manager will focus on the company culture and finding out if you are a good cultural fit. This is a good opportunity to show off what you know about the company and how you share its values.

It's important to remember that the HR manager has the ability to halt the interview process. So don't be fooled into under preparing for this interview – make sure you understand what the values and pillars of the company are.

FAST FACTS

- Talk to the HR manager about how your values match the company's own values and culture
- Be prepared to discuss your technical skills and experience with the line manager
- Stay confident when faced with unconscious bias
- Find common ground and build rapport with the interviewer

OVERCOMING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

While companies strive to make the interview process fair and objective, it's an unfortunate reality that interviewers are human and all carry with them some assumptions about different types of people.

This is called 'unconscious bias' and it is the tendency we all have to favour those who look and act like us, as well as those we consider to be charming and attractive. However don't be discouraged, there are many ways to ensure an interviewer doesn't apply their unconscious biases to you.

Here are a few tips:

Mirror speech and behaviours – Knowing that we tend to favour those who act like us, it's a good idea to match the way you speak and behave in an interview to your interviewer. For example, if they

speak very formally, then you should do the same.

Address the bias – Don't be afraid to mention a particular bias you faced in a previous role and how you overcame it. For example, your age may have led people to overlook you for promotion, so talk about what you did to address this. However, be careful not to insinuate that the interviewer is biased against you.

Build rapport – Look for opportunities to form a personal connection with the interviewer. This can often be done when you talk about your hobbies and interests, or when making small talk. If you notice something sparks their interest, then delve deeper into this topic. You can also ask them what they like about working at the company to learn more about their motivations and find a point of potential connection.

OVERCOMING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS



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TAIWAN
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UK
USA
VIETNAM

Commonly Asked Interview Questions (and Answers)

It is virtually impossible to predict exactly what will be asked on an interview but there are a few answers that you can prepare ahead of time. Use this chart to practice your answers to these questions. Be sure to prepare your questions for the interviewer. (listed beneath)

QUESTION	EXAMPLE	YOUR ANSWER
"Tell me about yourself." <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ 1-2 minutes spoken✓ Your background: academic, work experience, extra curriculars—as they pertain to this job!✓ Why you are there and what you can bring to the job.✓ Your personal brand✓ Practice, practice, practice	(interviewing for an entry level position in a non-profit organization) <i>"My name is Jennifer Smith. I graduated from ABC University with a degree in women's studies. I started at ABC with a major in biology, thinking I was going to pursue a career in environmental protection. But then, two things happened. First, I realized that I was more interested in environmental policy rather than the scientific aspect. Then I took an elective in women's rights and a light went on for me. I had always supported women's rights and was amazed that it continues to be an issue in this day and age. Since that time, I have been able to volunteer and work on behalf of women's rights, both for abused women as well as homeless women. I am here today because I believe my demonstrated passion for women's rights as well as my experience in non-profit organizations will be beneficial to your organization."</i>	
Can you tell me a little about your strengths and weaknesses? <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Identify 3 strengths—as they pertain to this job✓ Identify one weakness and how you	<i>"My interpersonal skills probably top the chart of my strengths. I thrive on approaching people I don't know and quickly establishing rapport. I can think on my feet and I manage stress well. One area that challenges me is</i>	

manage it	<p><i>that of delegating. It's hard for me to delegate to other people, whether it be a team project for school or on the baseball field. I know this is a problem so I have trained myself to make a list of those things I have to do myself and those things that can be passed on. It's still not easy for me but I have found that when I consciously make that determination, I actually get more done and the quality is better."</i></p>	
<p>Can you tell me about your leadership experience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ This can be direct leadership—of a student organization ✓ Can also be indirect leadership—although not specifically designated a leader, maybe you assumed leadership in a certain situation—a class project, working with a group to plan an event; a recognized leader. <p>Be sure to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overview of the situation 2. Obstacles or challenges 3. End result 	<p>SITUATION <i>"I was in charge of the committee that was asked to revise our school's vision as they were transitioning to a co-ed school.</i></p> <p>OBSTACLES <i>There were some issues because not all of the faculty agreed with the transition and we had to get their buy-in within a pretty tight time frame.</i></p> <p>END RESULT <i>I quickly realized that I had to include my advisor on each step we took and each meeting we held to communicate the changes. We were able to come to agreement and meet the deadline. I learned the importance of ongoing communication."</i></p>	
<p>Tell me about a time when you were asked to complete a task but didn't have the information you needed. What did you do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They are trying to assess your ability to self manage 	<p>SITUATION When I started my summer internship at XYZ Online Marketing, I quickly realized that it was a small organization which meant that I was left to my own devices. I had to figure things out on my own.</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be sure to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Situation 2) Obstacles 3) End result 	<p>OBSTACLES</p> <p>There was one instance in particular when I had to rely on myself to get the job done. The sales people were at an off site conference. When the sales manager called in to get the latest sales figures, I realized I didn't know how to use that system.</p> <p>END RESULT</p> <p>I knew I could access our prospective client database but I didn't know if that would give me access to the sales figures. After manipulating the data I could access, I was able to call him back to give him the information he wanted."</p>	
<p>Where do you want to be in 5 years?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A dreaded question but frequently asked. ✓ Be honest but keep in mind that most entry-level positions don't provide much autonomy. 	<p><i>"Simply put, my ideal job at this stage in my career is one in which I can learn the products and industry and I can contribute to your success. Eventually, I'd like a job that gives me control over my day but I know I am not in that position right now and it will take some time to get there."</i></p>	
<p>Tell me about a time when you failed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They are trying to see how you would handle it when a mistake is made on the job. ✓ Be sure to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Situation 2) Obstacles 3) End result: what you learned... 	<p><i>"When I was a freshman, I had a great on-campus job, probably one of the best. Unfortunately, I didn't take it seriously. I showed up late, not properly dressed and probably showed some attitude. What a shock when I wasn't hired back the next year. It forced me to take a good, hard look at myself and where I was headed. I made the conscious decision to turn my grades and</i></p>	

	<i>attitude around. I soon discovered that it felt good to do good and everything was on the upswing from there. I was young but was able to turn myself around."</i>	
Why should I hire you over the next person?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Opportunity to remind them why you are unique and the best person for the job. ✓ Sell yourself again. ✓ Be sure to relate your qualities to the position you are interviewing for! <p><i>"You mentioned that they most important skills you are looking for are the ability to communicate with diverse groups of people, solve problems as well as a developed business acumen. My experience at the admissions office required that I field answers quickly to prospective students, parents and administrators. When the admissions requirements were changed, I was on the committee to communicate the new requirements to new and existing students so that it was understandable and accepted with a minimum of problems. This has enabled me to work with diverse groups of people as well as solve their problems. Finally, my internship at XYZ taught me how a business runs... The nuts and bolts of profit, revenue as well as expenses. As soon as I start here, I will do my best to complete the reports and analysis on time and in such a way as to make them as user friendly and informative as possible."</i></p>	

QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER:

Prepare two questions ahead of time:

- 1) The job
- 2) The organization

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- 1) How will you know you've hired the right person in 3 (or 6) months' time?
- 2) Where do you see the organization in 2-3 years?

Interview Guide



How to use this guide

Congratulations... you've been invited to interview for a position! Whether this is your very first formal interview or you just want to brush up on your interviewing skills, this guide covers preparation tips and more nuanced advice for specific types of interviews.

We encourage you to read the basic principles of interviewing section below, then review the section(s) of this guide that you believe will be most helpful in helping you present your best self to prospective employers.

If you are...	Start with the...	On page...
New to interviewing	Basic Principles of Interviewing	2
Wondering about how organizations conduct interviews	Career Readiness Competencies The Interview Process: Before/During/After Methods of Interviewing Types of Interview Questions	3 4 5 6
Ready to start practicing for an upcoming interview	Decoding Interview Questions Researching the Organization Interview Rubric	8-9 10 11

Basic Principles of Interviewing

1

Preparation is key

- Set aside time to prepare for each interview.
- Practice answers to common questions.
- Understand the types of interviews and questions – specific to the industry or job function for which you are interviewing.
- Develop three-to-five go-to stories you can share in your interview that speak to both general career readiness competencies (see page 3) and specific skills and traits of the position for which you are interviewing.

2

No matter the specific questions they ask, interviewers are looking for the same general things

- Do you have the skills, knowledge and experience to perform the job and contribute to the organization?
- Are you motivated and enthusiastic about the position and the organization?
- Would you work well within the culture of the organization and with your prospective team members, clients and coworkers?
- Can you manage your time well, attempt to resolve problems on your own, accept responsibility for your mistakes and ask for help when needed?

3

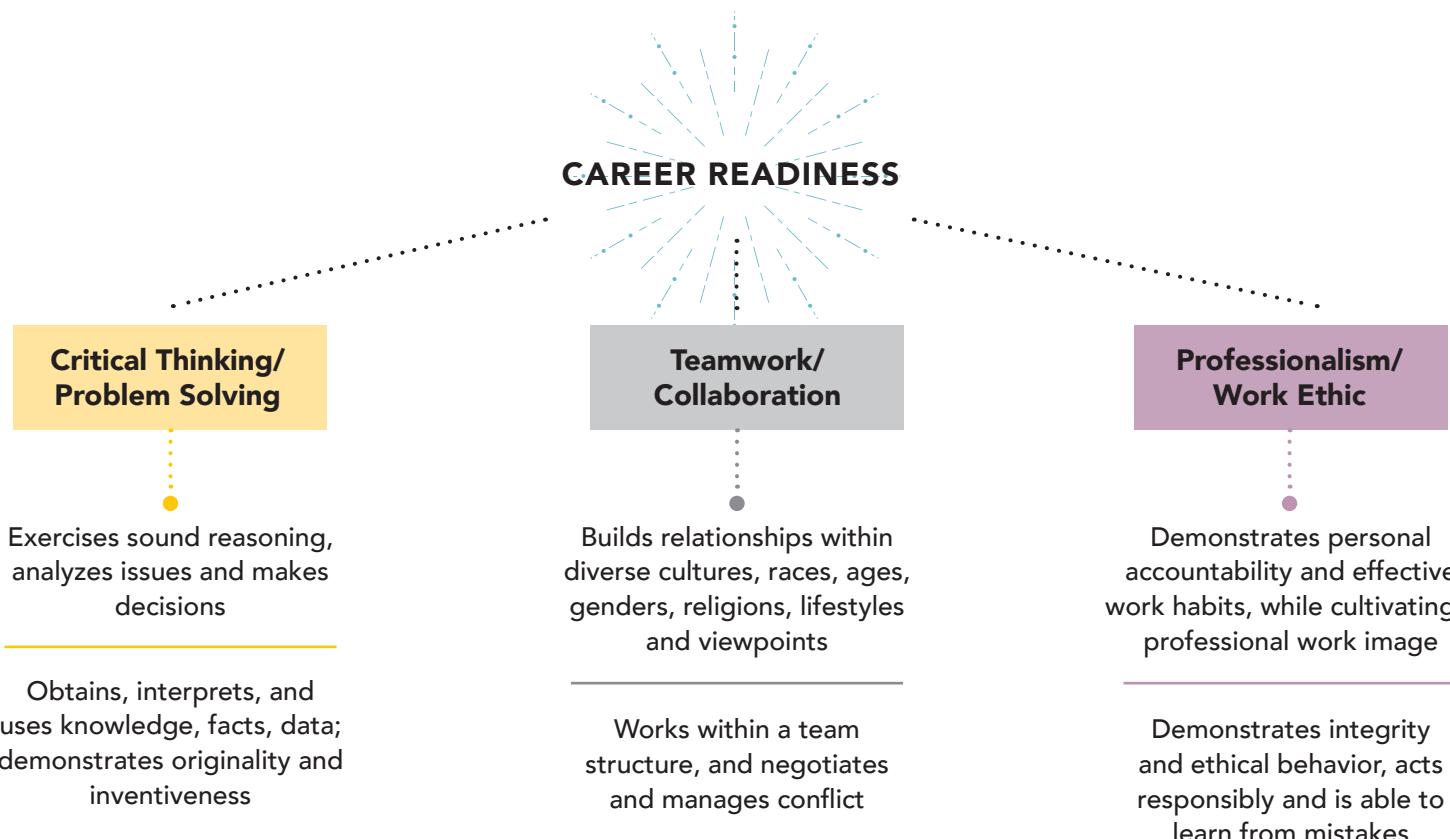
The most successful interview candidates are skilled communicators

- Highlight your strengths and experiences as they align with the position.
- Convey an understanding of the role and conviction of your enthusiasm for the work and the organization.
- Emphasize your fit: how your personality aligns with the culture of the organization.
- Demonstrate skills, professionalism and initiative throughout the interview process including the initial contact, multiple rounds of interviews, tailored outreach and followup.

Career Readiness: Competencies Employers Value Most

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), a preeminent professional organization in the career development field, established a set of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace. Outlined below are the three most valued competencies per a recent survey of employers.

<https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness>



What this Means for Interview Preparation

Preparing for an interview is more than memorizing answers to a list of potential questions. It is being able to look at your experiences – in the classroom, on the field, in a club or on your own – through the lens of common competencies in the professional workplace and specific to the position for which you are interviewing.



The Interview Process

Interviewing is more than just being ready to answer questions. There are several steps to take before, during and after your interview to increase your likelihood of getting an offer:

BEFORE

- Generate a list of likely interview questions based on the knowledge, skills and responsibilities on the position description. For example, if the position description states applicants, "Must have strong organization skills with exceptional attention to detail," you should practice answering the question, "Tell me about a time you had to be highly organized and detail-oriented."
- Write out potential answers and record yourself answering them. Knowing your experience is not the same as articulating it. Use the interview rubric (p. 11) to gauge how you're doing.
- Self-identify to your interview coordinator if you have visual, hearing or mobility disabilities that require accommodation for the interview. Otherwise, there is no need to make any such disclosure at this time. Future accommodation conversations could take place once you have received an offer.
- Plan to pay for travel expenses - do not assume employer will pay or reimburse you. If not given instructions, politely ask the interviewer if travel expenses are covered.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask your interviewer(s) that:
 - » yield more information about the role, expectations and the organization's culture.
 - » elicit insights about the work environment and how you would contribute to their work, rather than focus on benefits/rewards you might receive (save those for when you receive an offer).
 - » convey to the interviewer that you are thoughtful about this organization and how you can support its mission/growth.

DURING

- Ask if you can take notes and/or refer back to notes you prepared in advance.
- Consider what the interviewer needs to know about you by the time the interview ends to be confident that you are the right fit for the role and organization.
- Ask thoughtful questions that demonstrate you were listening throughout the interview.
- Leave the interview knowing these three important pieces of information: how to get back in touch with your interviewer; the next step in the recruiting process; and the anticipated timeframe before the next step.

AFTER

- Send tailored thank you notes to your interviewers that:
 - » Summarize strengths and elements of the conversation that will help interviewer remember you
 - » Introduce traits/qualifications that perhaps you were not quite able to convey initially
 - » Express continued interest in the role and the organization
- Understand that recruitment processes are not standardized, and that you may have to decide on one opportunity before hearing back from another. There is a line between being proactive and being a pest that if crossed could undermine your chances of getting an offer. **Contact the Center for Career Development** for advice on professionally asking for an expedited interview process or for more time to weigh your options.
- Express thanks and politely ask for feedback if you are not selected to move forward. Not all interviewers will share a concrete assessment, but every bit helps you do better next time, or may help the organization keep you top-of-mind when new roles open up.

Interview Formats

Reaching a wider applicant pool, reducing bias, saving time and money and modeling a work setting are among the reasons for several different interview formats. Some of the most common formats and tips for success in each are outlined below.

Contact the Center for Career Development to reserve a room for a virtual or phone interview:

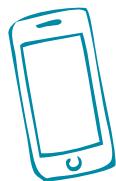
<https://careerdevelopment.princeton.edu/news/reserve-virtual-interview-room>

PHONE SCREEN/INITIAL INTERVIEW

Typically a 15-60 min. one-on-one conversation to gauge interest, clarify qualifications and occasionally discuss salary expectations.

Tips for Success

- Arrange for a quiet space at a table or desk with strong cell phone reception.
- Ensure your phone is fully charged.
- Know if the interviewer is calling you or if you will be calling in.
- Have a copy of your resume, key notes, questions to ask your interviewer and paper and pen nearby. Use these as guides, but avoid reading/shuffling pages.
- Dress like you would for an in-person interview to help project a confident voice.
- Listen carefully. It takes extra attention to focus on the call, avoid distractions and gauge length of responses.



RECORDED VIDEO/TIMED TEST

Typically a 30-60 min. self-directed assessment of interest, skills or personality. Generally not designed to start-and-stop, so it's important to set proper time and space aside.



Tips for Success

- Get comfortable talking out loud and focusing on your laptop camera. Set your camera at eye level.
- Consider the lighting and background.
- Review instruction and listen to prompts carefully.

Timed Test

- Commonly used for coding/software development, but may be used more broadly to assess personality, work styles or general aptitude.
- Take practice tests when available in advance to feel comfortable with process.
- Ensure your laptop is fully charged and your internet connection is strong and steady.

VIDEO CHAT

Often used to save employers time and expense, video chat interviews are typically 30-60 minutes in length. They may be one-on-one or multi-party.



Tips for Success

- Arrange for a quiet space at a table or desk.
- Use a laptop, tablet or desktop, not cell phone.
- Ensure your device is fully charged and your internet connection strong and steady.
- Review interview instructions and download/install necessary apps ahead of time.
- Consider your lighting and background.
- Position the computer and yourself so you are looking straight at the camera – not up or down at the screen.
- Get comfortable with talking out loud and focusing on your computer's camera.
- Have your resume, questions and key notes handy, out of camera sight. Use these as guides, but avoid reading/shuffling pages.
- Maintain your focus - your every move can be seen.

IN-PERSON

Used for on-campus recruiting and later rounds on site. Can range from 30 mins. to a full day, involving multiple interviews, group activities, meals and tours.



What to Wear

- A business suit is the most common attire.
- Depending on industry/site, you might wear business casual attire or need special clothing (e.g., lab coat, closed-toe shoes).

What to Bring

- A padfolio with printed copies of your resume, a notepad, pen and questions to ask.
- The name/contact info of the person(s) you are meeting.
- Your prox or other photo ID.

What to Do

- Arrive early and anticipate a security screening.
- Turn off your phone.
- Greet everyone politely and professionally.
- Stay energized, especially in back-to-back interviews.
- Observe work space setup, demeanor of staff and demographics /diversity of workforce.

Types of Interview Questions

Interviewers use a variety of techniques aligned with organizational culture and job function specifics to gauge the interests and qualifications of applicants.

Resume-Based and Traditional

These are general questions prompting you to elaborate on the information provided in your resume. All interviews typically include at least one or two of these questions even if the interview is based primarily on a different question type.

With these questions, expect to:

- Tell the interviewer something about yourself they can't read in your resume.
- Talk about your strengths and areas in which you could improve.
- Express what appeals to you about doing this job and/or working for this organization.
- Share how you might handle hypothetical situations in the workplace.



Behavioral or Situational

These are based on the premise that how you handled situations in the past – solving a complex problem, dealing with a difficult person or catching a mistake – suggests how you will respond to similar situations in the future.

To prepare for questions, reflect on your experiences and the context around them. Create a mental “library” of stories that capture you at your best or at a moment of significant learning. The key to answering these storytelling questions is through the **STAR** approach:

SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULT
• Context for your story: when it took place, who was involved, where it occurred and what it was for.	• What had to get done? • What goal did you have to reach? • What obstacles were in the way?	• Steps you took. • How you took them. • Why you took them.	• What happened? • Was it the result you wanted/expected? • What might you change if faced with the same situation

Tips: Be concise and include a clear beginning, middle and end to your stories. Set the stage (situation and task) quickly, and focus the bulk of your story on the actions and results. If the story involves being part of a group, be careful not to overuse “we” - focus most of your response on your individual role/contributions.

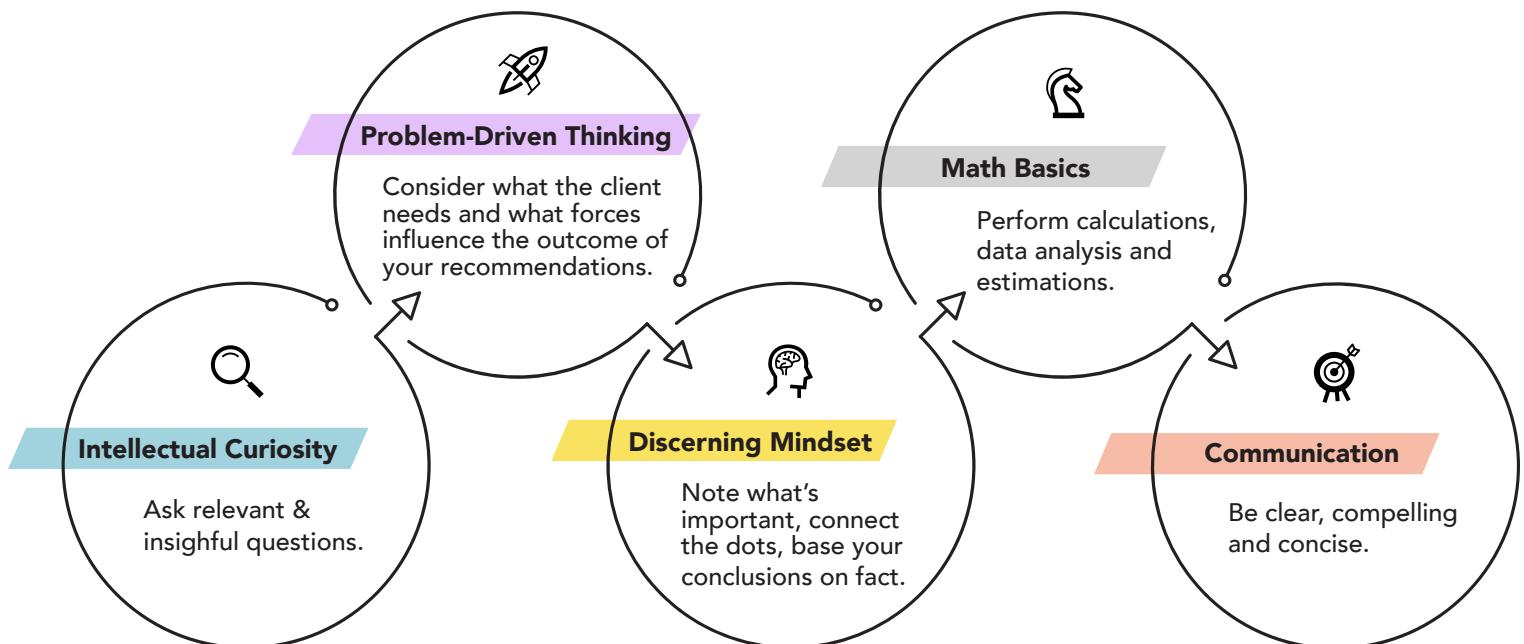
Case Study

Most commonly used in consulting, these interviews assess analytical skills, critical thinking and problem-solving through the examination of a real business issue and the expectation that you can develop a solution on the spot.

Case interviewing is not about having the "right" answer, it is about having the best answer you can with the information you are given.

As part of this process, you are expected to

- Think out loud
- Gather pertinent information
- Make logical assumptions
- Develop a recommendation or solution
- Treat your interviewer as your client



Brain Teaser

For analytical and technical roles, interviewers seek to assess an applicant's logic, math, critical thinking and creativity, as well as the ability to perform under pressure. Brain teasers often don't have a right answer - it's the logic the candidate applies to finding an answer that counts!



There are different types of brain teaser questions and several websites that provide examples of each.

- **Visualization:** How many tennis balls fit in an airplane?
- **Quick math:** What is the sum of the numbers from 1 to 100?
- **Why things are the way they are:** Why are manhole covers round?
- **Explain a concept:** Explain the internet to someone who has just come out of a 30-year coma.
- **Solve a mystery:** You have a 3-cup jug and a 5-cup jug. How do you measure one cup of water?
- **Manage an unlikely problem:** How would you test a calculator?

Decoding Interview Questions

While each interview is different, there are common questions interviewers ask. Understanding why they ask them and what kind of information they're really looking for are the keys to standing out as a valuable candidate.

What They Ask	Why They Ask It	How to Respond
"Tell me about yourself."	It gives you chance to ease into the interview and provide context to the experiences outlined in your resume.	Briefly summarize the past few years in 2-3 themes related to the role and organization. Provide context around your work, like how much time went into a project or the level of autonomy and responsibility you had.
"Why do you want to work for this organization?"	To listen for more than a quote from the firm's website or generalities about the industry as a whole. Not being able to convey sentiments pertinent to the organization may signal you're not really interested in working there.	Share what intrigues you from conversations you had with alumni or others who work there or from what you read. Note admiration for the organization's growth or your desire to support its mission.
"Tell me about your senior thesis."	Independent research like senior thesis is uncommon in undergraduate education elsewhere, so interviewers may be intrigued by the process as well as the content of your study.	Speak concisely about why you chose this topic and summarize the major steps you took and research sources you used. Quantify the length or scope of your project and plans to publish and/or present your findings to a broader audience.
"Tell me about a conflict you had with a supervisor or other person in a position of authority."	Disagreements happen, so interviewers want to know how you handle them. Avoiding conflict may mean you lack the courage of your own convictions, but just blaming the other party doesn't put you in the best light.	Be honest. Provide some detail and context, but focus primarily on the resolution and lessons learned rather than belaboring the conflict itself.
"Why did you change majors/career paths?"	This might be a sensitive topic (e.g., poor GPA, didn't get a return offer), but the interviewer just wants to know you can connect what you've done in the past with what you want to be doing in the future.	Craft a narrative of how the transition came about, what draws you to this new opportunity and some takeaways from previous roles that are transferable to this new setting.
"What are your greatest strengths?"	A way to assess your familiarity with the nature of the job or organization by the strengths you highlight. It is also a test of your confidence – if you don't believe in yourself, neither will your interviewer!	Reflect on what you've been recognized for by supervisors or peers. Provide examples: If you say you have strong time management skills, highlight how you plan out your day, week, and semester.
"What is your greatest weakness?"	No candidate is perfect, but interviewers want employees who can honestly assess what they still need to learn and can demonstrate a plan to learn it.	For example, there may be a certain technology they use that you haven't; demonstrate a situation in which you previously had to learn a new technology quickly to complete a project or task.
"Describe how you handled a team or group project when one member wasn't carrying their weight."	Collaboration is essential in most work environments, but it doesn't always go smoothly. Interviewers are looking for how you position yourself in the group, how you communicate with your peers, and how you embrace or resolve conflict.	Frame the story with the context of the group's goals and your individual role in the group. Display empathy for the team member who held up the project or take ownership if it was you. Outline how the issue was resolved and lessons you learned from the experience.

What They Ask	Why They Ask It	How to Respond
"Where do you see yourself in 5 years?"	The interviewer wants a sense of how you view career progression and perhaps if you understand how advancing at their organization works.	Be honest about future goals, but be vague enough so as not to imply you're already planning your exit. It's also OK to say that you're not quite sure what the future holds, but that you see this experience playing an important role in helping you make that decision.
"Tell me about your hobbies and interests / something not on your resume?"	We (your interviewers included!) are all more than our work. This question helps the interviewer get to the core of your personality.	Strike a balance between personal interests and professional context. Share hobbies from which you derive joy and satisfaction, that complement your career interests or that broaden your perspective/outlook.
"Can you describe a time when your work was unfairly criticized?"	As with other negative questions, interviewers are trying to gauge both your reaction and your response. Most roles are colleague- or client-facing, so accepting and responding to criticism is not uncommon in the workplace.	Describe the situation, the critique and the circumstances around it. Demonstrate recognition of why the critique occurred and how it might have gone differently or what you learned. Avoid harsh criticisms or personal judgements of others.
"What other organizations are you interviewing with?"	In corporate environments especially, it is not uncommon for interviewers to want to gauge the competition or be on par with others' recruitment timelines.	You are under no obligation to disclose your job search details to an interviewer, though providing some context is good to avoid sounding defensive. You can talk in generalities about exploring a range of opportunities or share a specific response timeline to an offer you received if the current interview is for a position you want more.
"What are your salary requirements?"	Organizations know what they can/want to offer. The question is designed to gauge if you researched the average salary for that type of role in that type of organization, and know your own worth in relation to that average.	Prior to your interview, check O*NET, Payscale, Salary.com or other sites to triangulate a salary range. Provide that range and your justification based on the value you'll add to the organization with the experience, education and skills you bring to the organization.
"Do you have any questions for me?"	This is to gauge if you have done research about the organization and to assess your listening skills within the interview.	Ask questions to which you genuinely want an answer. Use your questions to convey your enthusiasm for the role/organization. Ask for your interviewer's business card/contact information, what the next step in the hiring process is and the expected recruitment timeline.
"Is there anything else you'd like us to know?"	Just like the opening "Tell me about yourself" question, this one is intentionally open-ended, giving you the chance to make one last pitch for your candidacy.	Ahead of time, think of 3-4 key points you want to get across about yourself during your interview. Use this question as the opportunity to convey key points that hadn't yet come up or to recap your interest in and qualifications for this role.

Researching the Organization

"Why do you want to work here?" is one of the most common interview questions, yet job seekers often struggle to come up with an answer. Preparation is key to being able to answer this question effectively.

Before your first – and every – interview, review the job description and highlight how your skills and experiences match. Gather background information about the organization. Some pieces are more difficult to find than others, but it's crucial to build a solid understanding of the organization so you are prepared to both answer and ask questions about the organization – the signal of your genuine interest in the opportunity.

- Search Vault, Glassdoor, LinkedIn and similar sites for an organization's profile, industry record and background information on your interviewer.
- Visit the organization's website and look at it from the perspective of a potential customer or client.
- Locate articles in trade or business publications for a third-party view on the organization.
- Connect with alumni who work at this organization.



TOPICS TO COVER

Mission and history of the organization

Products/services this organization provides and its clients/customers

How this organization stands out from its competitors

In the news (e.g., mergers, acquisitions, product launches, new leadership, etc.)

Civic engagement, employee development or other programs that appeal to me

Traits that characterize the environment, pace of work, staff and clientele

Background info on my interviewer(s)

Interview Rubric

No matter how much you have thought about answers to interview questions, the best preparation is practicing your answers out loud. Whether with a career adviser, friend or by recording yourself and viewing it later, use the rubric below to assess and enhance your performance so you are confident going into that interview.

	1 = Needs Improvement	2 = Developing	3 = Good	4 = Excellent
Verbal Communication	Too fast or too slow; Too many fillers and slang; Too loud or too quiet - not natural	Some fillers; Adequate speed/pitch/volume, though may need improvement; Frequent use of casual language	Adequate speed, pitch and volume; Minimal fillers; Minimal use of informal or casual language	Natural speed, pitch and volume; Speaks clearly, articulately and concisely
Nonverbal Communication (not every component is available through virtual interviews)	Poor posture; Poor eye contact; Limp handshake; Fidgeting; Checks phone; Plays w/ objects on table; Extremely nervous	Little eye contact, facial expression or emotion; Some slouching; Appears a bit nervous/uneasy but mostly maintains composure	Natural eye contact, facial expression and posture; Demonstrates confidence and professionalism	Relaxed but calm, professional demeanor; Shows confidence, sincerity and excitement
Listening & Interpersonal Skills	Frequently interrupts interviewer; Minimally engaged in the conversation	Occasionally interrupts interviewer; Starts answering before fully listening to entire questions	Adequately engages in conversation and listens carefully	Actively listens and engages in conversation; Asks questions when clarification or more info is needed
Answering Questions (in general)	Does not answer the question; Rambles for a lengthy amount of time	Answers the question minimally	Answers with relevant examples, transferable skills and attributes	Offers solid, relevant examples; Keeps the needs and interests of interviewer in mind
Behavioral Questions (STAR)	Does not answer; Lacks specific examples that demonstrate the intended behavior	Answers with an example describing the behavior but does not elaborate	Answers with a relevant example using the STAR method	Uses STAR to answer with thorough stories; Connects answers with the position
Preparation and Interests	Unprepared; Does not display enthusiasm for the position; Offers generic answer or vague interests	Indicates minimal preparation; Offers brief answer to indicate interests	Demonstrates knowledge about the position and organization; States some interests	Demonstrates thorough preparation and knowledge of the position and organization; Provides personal, thoughtful, interests
Asking Questions (at the end of the interview)	Does not ask any questions	Asks questions that suggest a lack of research on the role or organization before the interview	Asks questions clearly prepared in advance based on research on position and/or organization	Questions go beyond surface knowledge of the position and/or organization

Interview Preparation

A job interview is a two-way process between you and the interviewer. Your goals:

- To convince the employer that you are the best person for the job.
- To determine if this position and organization would be a good fit for you!

Planning and research are the keys to a successful interview experience. Good preparation will place you miles ahead of the other candidates and give you an opportunity to showcase your best strengths. Planning and practice will not only enhance your chances to respond to the interviewer's questions but also allow you to best present yourself and your career goals with confidence. Your Career Center may have already helped you with the self assessment process. If not, you should be prepared to answer the following questions....

Questions to Ask Yourself...

1. What are my academic accomplishments, leadership qualities, activities, etc?
2. What transferable skills can I offer (e.g. organizational, analytical, problem solving, financial, communications skills)?
3. What knowledge base skills do I possess (e.g. languages, computer programs, math skills)?
4. What are my personal traits (e.g. flexibility, dependability, creativity, enthusiasm)?
5. What values are most important to me in the workplace?
6. What are my career goals?

HOW TO BE AS SUCCESSFUL AS POSSIBLE IN YOUR INTERVIEW

- Come to your interview about 10 minutes early.** This will allow you to be available should they be running a little early. It will also give you time to catch your breath and calm yourself. If you need to park your car, allow plenty of time.
- Check your interview time and location.** They are always posted by Monday morning for the whole week, however, circumstances sometimes force us to change the location at the last minute.
- Look prepared.** Ladies, make sure your hair is combed neatly or pulled back from your face. What is appropriate for classroom or social events is not necessarily correct for the interview. Watch the hemline on your skirt. If you are wearing slacks and a shirt, rather than a suit, you should have a jacket to coordinate the outfit. Shoes need to be polished. Nordstrom shines shoes for about \$2 – treat yourself! Ladies and gentlemen: shirts and blouses must be ironed, with collars lying flat against the jacket.
- Make sure the objective on your resume matches the job you are interviewing for.** If you need to switch resumes because of new information, please do so at least two days before the interview. This allows us to fax the correct resume, if requested, and to prepare the interview folder in advance. You can always have more than one type of resume in your file – just “tag” it with a Post-It note to alert us.
- Know your company.** Come in a couple of days before the interview and check the resource library for information. Also, look on the Internet and network with fellow interviewees.
- Prepare a few questions to ask at the end of the interview.** It shows you are interested.
- Know your short-term and long-term goals.**

TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PERSONAL

These questions are less directed at behavioral characteristics and aim more specifically at interests, hobbies, and future plans. Answer briefly and in context with the available job.

1. Tell me about yourself. *Usually, a warm-up question, so do not ramble. Cover education, work history, and recent college and career experiences.*
2. Are you applying to other companies? *If you are, say so. You will be perceived as honest and more in demand.*
3. What are your career goals? *Relate goals to company you are interviewing..: "in a firm like yours..."*
4. What do you want to be doing five years from now? *Let them know you'd like to be productive and increase your skills and then review your new options within the organization. This also is a version of #3.*
5. What are your interests outside of work? *Leisure activities and hobbies complete your profile. Highlight but do not overstate.*

RESEARCH

Answers to these questions convey your interest, knowledge of, and enthusiasm about working for the particular company with which you are interviewing.

1. Why would you like to work for us?
2. What do you know about your organization?
3. What do you find most attractive about this position? *What seems least attractive? List three or four attractive factors, and mention a single, minor unattractive item.*
4. What do you look for in a job? *Focus answer towards opportunities available rather than your personal security.*

FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. Please tell me about your experience in this field.
3. What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in your field?
4. Why are you interested in this position?
5. What kind of boss do you prefer?
6. Can you take instruction without feeling upset?
7. How did your previous employers treat you?
8. What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?
9. Hypothetical situations that test a person's job knowledge and judgment, e.g. "What would you do if ...?"
10. Please tell me something about your own special abilities.
11. Why should we hire you for this job rather than someone else?
12. What are your long-range career objectives?
13. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
14. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
15. What one (or three) words would you use to describe yourself?
16. In what type of position are you most interested?
17. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
18. What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?
19. What job have you liked most? Least? Why?
20. Which of your job supervisors have you liked most? Least? Why?
21. Why do you think you would like this particular kind of job?
22. What are the most satisfying aspects of your present job? The most frustrating?
23. Describe a time when you felt ineffective in your job, why you felt ineffective, and what you did about it. What was the outcome?
24. Describe a time when you felt particularly effective.
25. Were your assignments handled individually or were they a team effort?

Personal Traits & Attitudes

Personal traits and attitudes are personality characteristics which describe your own personal style. Which ones do you have? Check all that apply to you. When writing letters and preparing for the interview, you will want to select the best words that fit with the job objective. Example:

Accountant: thorough, detailed, accurate, precise

Sales: self motivated, energetic, confident, competitive

Teacher: patient, resourceful, organized, creative

Accurate	Dependable	Initiative	Productive
Adaptive	Detailed	Innovative	Punctual
Adventurous	Determined	Intelligent	Reliable
Alert	Diplomatic	Logical	Resourceful
Ambitious	Direct	Loyal	Responsible
Analytical	Disciplined	Methodical	Results
Artistic	Efficient	Non-	Oriented
Articulate	Empathetic	judgmental	Risk-Taking
Assertive	Energetic	Objective	Secure
Athletic	Enthusiastic	Open-minded	Self-Motivated
Calm	Facilitative	Optimistic	Sensitive
Clear-headed	Fair-minded	Orderly	Spontaneous
Competitive	Flexible	Organized	Stable
Confidant	Friendly	Patient	Sympathetic
Considerate	Genuine	Perceptive	Talented
Conscientious	Honest	Perfectionist	Thorough
Cooperative	Humorous	Persistent	Trustworthy
Courageous	Imaginative	Personable	Willing to
Creative	Independent	Practical	Learn
Decisive	Industrious	Precise	

Optional Exercise: Copy this form and ask two or three friends and colleagues to provide their feedback on your personality. Helpful in clarifying your impact on others.

ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENTS (EXAMPLES)

You want to create stories that highlight your skills. These stories become your "Kodak moments." Consider the job you are seeking and select the important factors – what it would take to get the job done.

Use the **PAR** (**P**roblem, **A**ction, and **R**esult) method to write stories illustrating your successes. Focus on the requirements of the position you are seeking.

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT: One sentence description of how skill was used.

Wrote articles for school newspaper.

PROBLEM (SITUATION or TASK): Describe the situation or task in two or three sentences.

Student dance club needed to promote membership and raise awareness of
dance performances.

ACTION: Key transferable and personality skills used.
[Describe what you did and how you did it.]

Determined various media exposure opportunities requiring little or no
club funding. Researched readership needs and writing style to best capture
reader interest. Gathered human interest stories, edited content and
organized newspaper placement.

RESULT: Describe how your actions solved the problem. Quantify or qualify results.
This should always be a **positive outcome**.

Articles increased student membership by 25% within first semester.

Dance recitals performed to sold-out audiences during winter events.

ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENTS

You want to create stories that highlight your skills. These stories become your “Kodak moments.” Consider the job you are seeking and select the important factors – what it would take to get the job done.

Use the **PAR** (Problem, Action, and Result) method to write stories illustrating your successes. Focus on the requirements of the position you are seeking.

The Accomplishment: One sentence description of how skill was used.

PROBLEM (SITUATION or TASK): Describe the situation or task in two or three sentences.

ACTION: Key transferable and personality skills used.
[Describe what you did and how you did it.]

RESULT: Describe how your actions solved the problem. Quantify or qualify results. This should always be a **positive outcome**.

Questions To Ask In Interviews

Spend some time thinking about what additional information you need about the company/agency and the position, and write them in question form. Good questions are ones that have been formulated through your own insight. ***Be sure, however, that your questions are not answered somewhere in the company literature or the job description.*** If the interviewer answers all the questions you were prepared to ask, when asked if you have any questions, let the person know your questions were already answered during the interview. Prepare five good questions the night before the interview and write them out and keep them in your binder.

Here are a few sample questions ...

1. What qualities do you look for in people who join this company?
2. What are the main responsibilities of this job?
3. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this company?
4. Could you describe the type of training provided for this position? Do you have a formal training program?
5. How would my performance be evaluated, and how often?
6. What would be a typical career path for an employee like me entering your organization?
7. To whom would I report? Under whose supervision would I be assigned?
8. What is the management style of the department/area where I'll be assigned?
9. Does this position require much travel?
10. Would I be working independently or as part of a team?
11. How is the current economic situation affecting your organization?
12. What are your plans for expansion in terms of product lines, new branches, services?
13. How would you differentiate your company from your major competitors?
14. What do you consider to be the major problems facing this industry today?
15. How do you reward your successful employees?

* *Do not ask questions regarding salary. All questions about compensation should be discussed in final interviews after you have been offered the job.*

Research Pays Off During An Interview

By Rob Kallick

Looking fort a sure-fire way to nail a job interview? Try showing the interviewer that you know the company inside and out.

Candidates who can differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack will have the most success in a challenging job market. Researching a company is an essential step to the job search" and should be done prior to the interview and before accepting a job offer.

Best foot forward

"When people go into a company and show that they've done the research, it puts them in a very positive position," says Dr. Judith T. Evans, vice president of Right Management Consultants in New York. "This is a very difficult job market and it's important to have candidates who are well-grounded. Doing research needs to be a habit."

Evans says a recent client hers was able to secure a job, with a pharmaceutical company by demonstrating knowledge that went beyond the norm. "He went to the library and looked up the drugs that the company had in its pipeline," Evans says. "When he went into the interview, it turned out he actually knew some things about the company the interviewer didn't even know."

Take advantage of resources

Job candidates who interview without researching the company put themselves at an unnecessary disadvantage, especially when you consider how easy it has become to find out a company's essential information. In some cases, learning more about a company can be as easy as checking a few sites on the internet.

"Type the name of a company into a search engine and you'll get zillions of articles related to the company," says Don Sutaria, founder, president and career counselor for CareerQuest, an executive coaching firm in Union, N.J. "If someone really wants to study a hard copy, he or she can call the company ahead of time and request an annual report." Annual reports are sometimes available at East Bay libraries or on a company's Web site.

Information into action

Once you've learned the necessary information, be sure to find a way to demonstrate that knowledge during the interview. In fact, talking like an insider during the interview is a great way to make a strong impression.

"Know the products, the dollar volume in sales and names of key executives," Sutaria says. "Know what the previous five years were like and what the company's mission is. Get familiar with the products. That way, you can also make a few suggestions."

After the job offer

While it's necessary to familiarize yourself with a company before the interview, it's just as important to continue your research if you receive a job offer.

Evans says job seekers should learn the name of their new manager and then research his or her qualifications by using the Web, trade journals or word-of mouth communication.

Also, research the company to get an idea of its corporate culture before making your final decision. How much overtime is expected? Is there a work-at-home policy? Are employees happy to work there?

If you do it discreetly, you can ask current workers for an opinion of their employer. "Ask them what it's like to work there," says Sutaria. "You want to know what you're getting into. You can't know 100 percent, but you want to know as much as humanly possible." Evans says that talking to people at the company can be beneficial in a financial way as well.

"I know someone who networked within the company and as a result was able to negotiate a higher salary," she says. "He found someone who said, 'This is what we pay in that spot.' You can find out who held the position before you and talk to them."

In a difficult market, it's important to cover every angle. Researching a company is one angle that shouldn't be missed. "Don't ever walk into an interview without doing your research," says Sutaria. And if you haven't had a chance to brief yourself on the company's products, accomplishments and goals? "Make any excuse possible to postpone the interview if you haven't done the research," Sutaria says. "It's that important."

Draw attention to yourself with essential information

Before stepping into an interview with a new company, you should be able to answer all of these questions:

- Is it a domestic or international company?
- What is the total sales volume?
- What are the profit margins?
- How many employees are there?
- Are you familiar with the products?
- Have you read the president's report?
- What are the names of the key executives?
- What were the company's previous five years like?
- What is the company's mission?

—Source: Don Sutaria,
CareerQuest

WRITING A THANK YOU

A thank you letter should be sent after any professional contact has been made. Whether you are writing to express your appreciation for being given an interview for a job opportunity or just an informational interview, thank you notes are a very important step in your job search. Thank you letters should be written and mailed the day of the interview; it should be brief and personalized. Keep in mind the following as you create your letter:

- Express your appreciation for the time and consideration given to you by the interviewer.
- Emphasize significant information which might have been shared during the interview. Restate ideas or examples you shared in the interview that were well received. This helps the interviewer remember you. (Remember, they may have interviewed several candidates!)
- Your thank you letter is an additional sample of your communication and writing ability.
- Reiterate your interest in the position! Tell them specifically what impressed you about the position and organization.
- Take this opportunity to mention anything you may have overlooked in the interview. (You know, those things that occur to you in the car on the way home after the interview!)

DID YOU KNOW...

Only 36% of students ever follow up an interview with any type of formal business communication. Recruiters tell us that a well-crafted and sincere thank you letter sent after an interview is always appreciated. More importantly, it also sets you apart from other candidates and can influence a hiring decision in your favor.

Do I have to write a letter to everyone I interviewed with?

Yes! Each of these individuals plays a role in the hiring decision. This is your opportunity to follow up with each of them.

Here is an outline to help you organize your thoughts:

Opening Paragraph

Thank the interviewer and re-emphasize your interest in the position.

Middle Paragraph

Remind the employer why you are a great candidate for the position. Try to remember something specific about the interview to mention. Also, use this paragraph to mention additional qualifications you may have failed to discuss during the interview.

Closing Paragraph

Thank the employer and express your interest in learning of their decision. If you haven't already done so, offer to provide any additional information they may need to make the hiring decision (references, transcripts, etc.).

Do I have to type my letter?

A laser-printed letter on resume quality paper is standard for business communication.

If your contact is of a more personal nature, a handwritten note on a businesslike, simple note-card is acceptable.

POST-INTERVIEW SELF-EVALUATION

Rate Yourself:

	<u>Could Be Better</u>			<u>Perfect</u>	
Preparation	1	2	3	4	5
Appearance	1	2	3	4	5
Hand Shake	1	2	3	4	5
Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5
Sincerity	1	2	3	4	5
Interest	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of company	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Qualifications	1	2	3	4	5
How well did I answer questions?	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Performance	1	2	3	4	5

What did I like about the interview?

What could I have done, asked or said differently?

What improvements do I need to make for the next interview?

On the back, jot down as many questions you can remember from the interview.

How to Answer The 64 Toughest Interview Questions

THIS BOOK IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE ACCURATE INFORMATION ON THE SUBJECTS COVERED. HOWEVER, IT IS DONE WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING OR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF LEGAL ADVICE OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL ASSSTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT, PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. ANY NAMES USED IN THE TEXT ARE FICTITIOUS AND FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY. ANY RESEMBLANCE TO ACTUAL PERSONS OR COMPANIES IS PURELY COINCIDENTAL AND UNINTENTIONAL.

Dedication:

This report is dedicated to courage and knowledge,
the two qualities most needed
to succeed in any human challenge,
especially a job search.

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Question 64 On a scale of one to ten, rate me as an interviewer.

General Guidelines in Answering Interview Questions

Everyone is nervous on interviews. If you simply *allow* yourself to feel nervous, you'll do much better. Remember also that it's difficult for the interviewer as well.

In general, be upbeat and positive. Never be negative.

Rehearse your answers and time them. Never talk for more than 2 minutes straight.

Don't try to memorize answers word for word. Use the answers shown here as a guide only, and don't be afraid to include your own thoughts and words. To help you remember key concepts, jot down and review a few key words for each answer. Rehearse your answers frequently, and they will come to you naturally in interviews.

As you will read in the accompanying report, the single most important strategy in interviewing, as in all phases of your job search, is what we call: "*The Greatest Executive Job Finding Secret.*" And that is...

Find out what people want, than show them how you can help them get it.

Find out what an employer wants most in his or her ideal candidate, then show how you meet those qualifications.

In other words, you must match your abilities, with the needs of the employer. *You must sell what the buyer is buying.* To do that, before you know what to emphasize in your answers, you must find out what the buyer is buying... what he is looking for. And the best way to do that is to ask a few questions yourself.

You will see how to bring this off skillfully as you read the first two questions of this report. But regardless of how you accomplish it, you must remember this strategy above all: *before blurting out your qualifications, you must get some idea of what the employer wants most.* Once you know what he wants, you can then present your qualifications as the perfect "key" that fits the "lock" of that position.

- Other important interview strategies:
- Turn weaknesses into strengths (You'll see how to do this in a few moments.)
- Think before you answer. A pause to collect your thoughts is a hallmark of a thoughtful person.

As a daily exercise, practice being more optimistic. For example, try putting a positive spin on events and situations you would normally regard as negative. This is not meant to turn you into a Pollyanna, but to sharpen your selling skills. The best salespeople, as well as the best liked interview candidates, come off as being naturally optimistic, "can do" people. You will dramatically raise your level of attractiveness by daily practicing to be more optimistic.

Be honest...never lie.

Keep an interview diary. Right after each interview note what you did right, what could have gone a little better, and what steps you should take next with this contact. Then take those steps. Don't be like the 95% of humanity who say they will follow up on something, but never do.

About the 64 questions...

You might feel that the answers to the following questions are "canned", and that they will seldom match up with the exact way you are asked the questions in actual interviews. The questions and answers are designed to be as specific and realistic as

possible. But no preparation can anticipate thousands of possible variations on these questions. What's important is that you thoroughly familiarize yourself with the *main strategies* behind each answer. And it will be invaluable to you if you commit to memory a few key words that let you instantly call to mind your best answer to the various questions. If you do this, and follow the principles of successful interviewing presented here, you're going to do very well.

Good luck...and good job-hunting!

Question 1 *Tell me about yourself.*

TRAPS: Beware, about 80% of all interviews begin with this "innocent" question. Many candidates, unprepared for the question, skewer themselves by rambling, recapping their life story, delving into ancient work history or personal matters.

BEST ANSWER: Start with the present and tell why you are well qualified for the position. Remember that the key to all successful interviewing is to match your qualifications to what the interviewer is looking for. In other words *you must sell what the buyer is buying. This is the single most important strategy in job hunting.*

So, before you answer this or *any* question it's imperative that you try to uncover your interviewer's greatest need, want, problem or goal.

To do so, make you take these two steps:

1. Do all the homework you can before the interview to uncover *this person's* wants and needs (not the generalized needs of the industry or company)
2. As early as you can in the interview, ask for a more complete description of what the position entails. You might say: "I have a number of accomplishments I'd like to tell you about, but I want to make the best use of our time together and talk directly to your needs. To help me do, that, could you tell me more about the most important priorities of this position? All I know is what I (heard from the recruiter, read in the classified ad, etc.)"

Then, *ALWAYS follow-up with a second and possibly, third question*, to draw out his needs even more. Surprisingly, it's usually this *second or third question* that uncards what the interviewer is *most* looking for.

You might ask simply, "And in addition to that?..." or, "Is there anything else you see as essential to success in this position?:

This process will not feel easy or natural at first, because it is easier simply to answer questions, but only if you uncover the employer's wants and needs will your answers make the most sense. Practice asking these key questions before giving your answers, the process will feel more natural and you will be light years ahead of the other job candidates you're competing with.

After uncovering what the employer is looking for, describe why the needs of this job bear striking parallels to tasks you've succeeded at before. Be sure to illustrate with specific examples of your responsibilities and especially your achievements, all of which are geared to present yourself as a perfect match for the needs he has just described.

Question 2 *What are your greatest strengths?*

TRAPS: This question seems like a softball lob, but be prepared. You don't want to come across as egotistical or arrogant. Neither is this a time to be humble.

BEST ANSWER: You know that your key strategy is to first uncover your interviewer's greatest wants and needs before you answer questions. And from Question 1, you know how to do this.

Prior to any interview, you should have a list mentally prepared of your greatest strengths. You should also have, a specific example or two, which illustrates each strength, an example chosen from your most recent and most impressive achievements.

You should have this list of your greatest strengths and corresponding examples from your achievements so well committed to memory that you can recite them cold after being shaken awake at 2:30AM.

Then, once you uncover your interviewer's greatest wants and needs, you can choose those achievements from your list that best match up.

As a general guideline, the 10 most desirable traits that all employers love to see in their employees are:

1. A proven track record as an achiever...especially if your achievements match up with the employer's greatest wants and needs.
2. Intelligence...management "savvy".
3. Honesty...integrity...a decent human being.
4. Good fit with corporate culture...someone to feel comfortable with...a team player who meshes well with interviewer's team.
5. Likeability...positive attitude...sense of humor.
6. Good communication skills.
7. Dedication...willingness to walk the extra mile to achieve excellence.
8. Definiteness of purpose...clear goals.
9. Enthusiasm...high level of motivation.
10. Confident...healthy...a leader.

Question 3 What are your greatest weaknesses?

TRAPS: Beware - this is an eliminator question, designed to shorten the candidate list. Any admission of a weakness or fault will earn you an "A" for honesty, but an "F" for the interview.

PASSABLE ANSWER: Disguise a strength as a weakness.

Example: "I sometimes push my people too hard. I like to work with a sense of urgency and everyone is not always on the same wavelength."

Drawback: This strategy is better than admitting a flaw, but it's so widely used, it is transparent to any experienced interviewer.

BEST ANSWER: (and another reason it's so important to get a thorough description of your interviewer's needs *before* you answer questions): Assure the interviewer that you can think of nothing that would stand in the way of your performing in this position with excellence. Then, quickly review your strongest qualifications.

Example: "Nobody's perfect, but based on what you've told me about this position, I believe I'd make an outstanding match. I know that when I hire people, I look for two things most of all. Do they have the *qualifications* to do the job well, and the *motivation* to do it well? Everything in my background shows I have both the qualifications and a strong desire to achieve excellence in whatever I take on. So I can say in all honesty that I see nothing that would cause you even a small concern about my ability or my strong desire to perform this job with excellence."

Alternate strategy (if you don't yet know enough about the position to talk about such a perfect fit):

Instead of confessing a weakness, describe what you *like most* and *like least*, making

sure that what you like most matches up with the most important qualification for success in the position, and what you like least is not essential.

Example: Let's say you're applying for a teaching position. "If given a choice, I like to spend as much time as possible in front of my prospects selling, as opposed to shuffling paperwork back at the office. Of course, I long ago learned the importance of filing paperwork properly, and I do it conscientiously. But what I really love to do is sell (if your interviewer were a sales manager, this should be music to his ears.)

Question 4 *Tell me about something you did – or failed to do – that you now feel a little ashamed of.*

TRAPS: There are some questions your interviewer has no business asking, and this is one. But while you may feel like answering, "*none of your business*," naturally you can't. Some interviewers ask this question on the chance you admit to something, but if not, at least they'll see how you think on your feet.

Some unprepared candidates, flustered by this question, unburden themselves of guilt from their personal life or career, perhaps expressing regrets regarding a parent, spouse, child, etc. All such answers can be disastrous.

BEST ANSWER: As with faults and weaknesses, *never confess a regret*. But don't seem as if you're stonewalling either.

Best strategy: Say you harbor no regrets, then add a principle or habit you practice regularly for healthy human relations.

Example: Pause for reflection, as if the question never occurred to you. Then say, "You know, I really can't think of anything." (Pause again, then add): "I would add that as a general management principle, I've found that the best way to avoid regrets is to avoid causing them in the first place. I practice one habit that helps me a great deal in this regard. At the end of each day, I mentally review the day's events and conversations to take a second look at the people and developments I'm involved with and do a doublecheck of what they're likely to be feeling. Sometimes I'll see things that do need more follow-up, whether a pat on the back, or maybe a five minute chat in someone's office to make sure we're clear on things...whatever."

"I also like to make each person feel like a member of an elite team, like the Boston Celtics or LA Lakers in their prime. I've found that if you let each team member know you expect excellence in their performance...if you work hard to set an example yourself...and if you let people know you appreciate and respect their feelings, you wind up with a highly motivated group, a team that's having fun at work because they're striving for excellence rather than brooding over slights or regrets."

Question 5 *Why are you leaving (or did you leave) this position?*

TRAPS: Never badmouth your previous industry, company, board, boss, staff, employees or customers. This rule is inviolable: *never be negative*. Any mud you hurl will only soil your suit.

Especially avoid words like "personality clash", "didn't get along", or others which cast a shadow on your competence, integrity, or temperament.

BEST ANSWER:

(If you have a job presently)

If you're not yet 100% committed to leaving your present post, don't be afraid to say so.

Since you have a job, you are in a stronger position than someone who does not. But don't be coy either. State honestly what you'd be hoping to find in a new spot. Of course, as stated often before, you answer will all the stronger if you have already uncovered what this position is all about and you match your desires to it.

(If you do not presently have a job.)

Never lie about having been fired. It's unethical – and too easily checked. But do try to deflect the reason from you personally. If your firing was the result of a takeover, merger, division wide layoff, etc., so much the better.

But you should also do something totally unnatural that will demonstrate consummate professionalism. Even *if it hurts*, describe your own firing – candidly, succinctly and without a trace of bitterness – from the company's point-of-view, indicating that you could understand why it happened and you might have made the same decision yourself.

Your stature will rise immensely and, most important of all, you will show you are healed from the wounds inflicted by the firing. You will enhance your image as first-class management material and stand head and shoulders above the legions of firing victims who, at the slightest provocation, zip open their shirts to expose their battle scars and decry the unfairness of it all.

For all prior positions:

Make sure you've prepared a brief reason for leaving. *Best reasons:* more money, opportunity, responsibility or growth.

Question 6 The "Silent Treatment"

TRAPS: Beware – if you are unprepared for this question, you will probably not handle it right and possibly blow the interview. Thank goodness most interviewers don't employ it. It's normally used by those determined to see how you respond under stress. Here's how it works:

You answer an interviewer's question and then, instead of asking another, he just stares at you in a deafening silence.

You wait, growing a bit uneasy, and there he sits, silent as Mt. Rushmore, as if he doesn't believe what you've just said, or perhaps making you feel that you've unwittingly violated some cardinal rule of interview etiquette.

When you get this silent treatment after answering a particularly difficult question, such as "tell me about your weaknesses", its intimidating effect can be most disquieting, even to polished job hunters.

Most unprepared candidates rush in to fill the void of silence, viewing prolonged, uncomfortable silences as an invitation to clear up the previous answer which has obviously caused some problem. And that's what they do – ramble on, sputtering more and more information, sometimes irrelevant and often damaging, because they are suddenly playing the role of someone who's goofed and is now trying to recoup. But since the candidate doesn't know where or how he goofed, he just keeps talking, showing how flustered and confused he is by the interviewer's unmovable silence.

BEST ANSWER: Like a primitive tribal mask, the Silent Treatment loses all its power to frighten you once you refuse to be intimidated. If your interviewer pulls it, keep quiet yourself for a while and then ask, with sincere politeness and not a trace of sarcasm, "*Is there anything else I can fill in on that point?*" That's all there is to it.

Whatever you do, don't let the Silent Treatment intimidate you into talking a blue streak, because you could easily talk yourself out of the position.

Question 7 Why should I hire you?

TRAPS: Believe it or not, this is a killer question because so many candidates are unprepared for it. If you stammer or adlib you've blown it.

BEST ANSWER: By now you can see how critical it is to apply the overall strategy of uncovering the employer's needs *before* you answer questions. If you know the employer's greatest needs and desires, this question will give you a big leg up over other candidates because you will give him better reasons for hiring you than anyone else is likely to...reasons tied directly to his needs.

Whether your interviewer asks you this question *explicitly* or not, this is the most important question of your interview because he *must* answer this question favorably in his own mind before you will be hired. So *help him out!* Walk through each of the position's requirements as you understand them, and follow each with a reason why you meet that requirement so well.

Example: "As I understand your needs, you are first and foremost looking for someone who can manage the sales and marketing of your book publishing division. As you've said you need someone with a strong background in trade book sales. This is where I've spent almost all of my career, so I've chalked up 18 years of experience exactly in this area. I believe that I know the right contacts, methods, principles, and successful management techniques as well as any person can in our industry."

"You also need someone who can expand your book distribution channels. In my prior post, my innovative promotional ideas doubled, then tripled, the number of outlets selling our books. I'm confident I can do the same for you."

"You need someone to give a new shot in the arm to your mail order sales, someone who knows how to sell in space and direct mail media. Here, too, I believe I have exactly the experience you need. In the last five years, I've increased our mail order book sales from \$600,000 to \$2,800,000, and now we're the country's second leading marketer of scientific and medical books by mail." *Etc., etc., etc.*

Every one of these selling "couplets" (his need matched by your qualifications) is a touchdown that runs up your score. IT is your best opportunity to outsell your competition.

Question 8 Aren't you overqualified for this position?

TRAPS: The employer may be concerned that you'll grow dissatisfied and leave.

BEST ANSWER: As with any objection, don't view this as a sign of imminent defeat. It's an invitation to teach the interviewer a new way to think about this situation, seeing advantages instead of drawbacks.

Example: "I recognize the job market for what it is – a marketplace. Like any marketplace, it's subject to the laws of supply and demand. So 'overqualified' can be a relative term, depending on how tight the job market is. And right now, it's very tight. I understand and accept that."

"I also believe that there could be very positive benefits for both of us in this match."

"Because of my unusually strong experience in _____, I could start to contribute right away, perhaps much faster than someone who'd have to be brought along more slowly."

"There's also the value of all the training and years of experience that other companies have invested tens of thousands of dollars to give me. You'd be getting all the value of that without having to pay an extra dime for it. With someone who has yet to acquire that experience, he'd have to gain it on *your nickel*."

"I could also help you in many things they don't teach at the Harvard Business School. For example... (how to hire, train, motivate, etc.) When it comes to knowing how to work well with people and getting the most out of them, there's just no substitute for what you learn over many years of front-line experience. Your company would gain all this, too."

"From my side, there are strong benefits, as well. Right now, I am unemployed. I want to work, *very much*, and the position you have here is exactly what I love to do and am best at. I'll be happy doing this work and that's what matters most to me, a lot more than money or title."

"Most important, I'm looking to make a long term commitment in my career now. I've had enough of job-hunting and want a permanent spot at this point in my career. I also know that if I perform this job with excellence, other opportunities cannot help but open up for me right here. In time, I'll find many other ways to help this company and in so doing, help myself. I really am looking to make a long-term commitment."

NOTE: The main concern behind the "overqualified" question is that you will leave your new employer as soon as something better comes your way. Anything you can say to demonstrate the sincerity of your commitment to the employer and reassure him that you're looking to stay for the long-term will help you overcome this objection.

Question 9 Where do you see yourself five years from now?

TRAPS: One reason interviewers ask this question is to see if you're settling for this position, using it merely as a stopover until something better comes along. Or they could be trying to gauge your level of ambition.

If you're too specific, i.e., naming the promotions you someday hope to win, you'll sound presumptuous. If you're too vague, you'll seem rudderless.

BEST ANSWER: Reassure your interviewer that you're looking to make a long-term commitment...that this position entails exactly what you're looking to do and what you do extremely well. As for your future, you believe that if you perform each job at hand with excellence, future opportunities will take care of themselves.

Example: "I am definitely interested in making a long-term commitment to my next position. Judging by what you've told me about this position, it's exactly what I'm looking for and what I am very well qualified to do. In terms of my future career path, I'm confident that if I do my work with excellence, opportunities will inevitable open up for me. It's always been that way in my career, and I'm confident I'll have similar opportunities here."

Question 10 *Describe your ideal company, location and job.*

TRAPS: This is often asked by an experienced interviewer who thinks you may be overqualified, but knows better than to show his hand by posing his objection directly. So he'll use this question instead, which often gets a candidate to reveal that, indeed, he or she is looking for something other than the position at hand.

BEST ANSWER: The only right answer is to describe what this company is offering, being sure to make your answer believable with specific reasons, stated with sincerity, why each quality represented by this opportunity is attractive to you.

Remember that if you're coming from a company that's the leader in its field or from a glamorous or much admired company, industry, city or position, your interviewer and his company may well have an "Avis" complex. That is, they may feel a bit defensive about being "second best" to the place you're coming from, worried that you may consider them bush league.

This anxiety could well be there even though you've done nothing to inspire it. You must go out of your way to assuage such anxiety, even if it's not expressed, by putting *their* virtues high on the list of exactly what you're looking for, providing credible reason for wanting these qualities.

If you do not express genuine enthusiasm for the firm, its culture, location, industry, etc., you may fail to answer this "Avis" complex objection and, as a result, leave the interviewer suspecting that a hot shot like you, coming from a Fortune 500 company in New York, just wouldn't be happy at an unknown manufacturer based in Topeka, Kansas.

Question 11 *Why do you want to work at our company?*

TRAPS: This question tests whether you've done any homework about the firm. If you haven't, you lose. If you have, you win big.

BEST ANSWER: This question is your opportunity to hit the ball out of the park, thanks to the in-depth research you should do before any interview.

Best sources for researching your target company: annual reports, the corporate newsletter, contacts you know at the company or its suppliers, advertisements, articles about the company in the trade press.

Question 12 *What are your career options right now?*

TRAPS: The interviewer is trying to find out, "How desperate are you?"

BEST ANSWER: Prepare for this question by thinking of how you can position yourself as a desired commodity. If you are still working, describe the possibilities at your present firm and why, though you're greatly appreciated there, you're looking for something more (challenge, money, responsibility, etc.). Also mention that you're seriously exploring opportunities with one or two other firms.

If you're not working, you can talk about other employment possibilities you're actually exploring. But do this with a light touch, speaking only in general terms. You don't want to seem manipulative or coy.

Question 13 *Why have you been out of work so long?*

TRAPS: A tough question if you've been on the beach a long time. You don't want to seem like damaged goods.

BEST ANSWER: You want to emphasize factors which have prolonged your job search by your own choice.

Example: "After my job was terminated, I made a conscious decision not to jump on the first opportunities to come along. In my life, I've found out that you can always turn a negative into a positive IF you try hard enough. This is what I determined to do. I decided to take whatever time I needed to think through what I do best, what I most want to do, where I'd like to do it...and then identify those companies that could offer such an opportunity."

"Also, in all honesty, you have to factor in the recession (consolidation, stabilization, etc.) in the (banking, financial services, manufacturing, advertising, etc.) industry."

"So between my being selective and the companies in our industry downsizing, the process has taken time. But in the end, I'm convinced that when I do find the right match, all that careful evaluation from both sides of the desk will have been well worthwhile for both the company that hires me and myself."

Question 14 *Tell me honestly about the strong points and weak points of your boss (company, management team, etc.). . .*

TRAPS: Skillfull interviewers sometimes make it almost irresistible to open up and air a little dirty laundry from your previous position. DON'T

BEST ANSWER: Remember the rule: Never be negative. Stress only the good points, no matter how charmingly you're invited to be critical.

Your interviewer doesn't care a whit about your previous boss. He wants to find out how loyal and positive you are, and whether you'll criticize him behind his back if pressed to do so by someone in this own company. This question is your opportunity to demonstrate your loyalty to those you work with.

Question 15 *What good books have you read lately?*

TRAPS: As in all matters of your interview, never fake familiarity you don't have. Yet you don't want to seem like a dullard who hasn't read a book since *Tom Sawyer*.

BEST ANSWER: Unless you're up for a position in academia or as book critic for *The New York Times*, you're not expected to be a literary lion. But it wouldn't hurt to have read a handful of the most recent and influential books in your profession and on management.

Consider it part of the work of your job search to read up on a few of these leading books. But make sure they are *quality* books that reflect favorably upon you, nothing that could even remotely be considered superficial. Finally, add a recently published bestselling work of fiction by a world-class author and you'll pass this question with flying colors.

Question 16 Tell me about a situation when your work was criticized.

TRAPS: This is a tough question because it's a more clever and subtle way to get you to admit to a weakness. You can't dodge it by pretending you've never been criticized. Everybody has been. Yet it can be quite damaging to start admitting potential faults and failures that you'd just as soon leave buried.

This question is also intended to probe how well you accept criticism and direction.

BEST ANSWERS: Begin by emphasizing the extremely positive feedback you've gotten throughout your career and (if it's true) that your performance reviews have been uniformly excellent.

Of course, no one is perfect and you always welcome suggestions on how to improve your performance. Then, give an example of a not-too-damaging learning experience from early in your career and relate the ways this lesson has since helped you. This demonstrates that you learned from the experience and the lesson is now one of the strongest breastplates in your suit of armor.

If you are pressed for a criticism from a *recent* position, choose something fairly trivial that in no way is essential to your successful performance. Add that you've learned from this, too, and over the past several years/months, it's no longer an area of concern because you now make it a regular practice to...etc.

Another way to answer this question would be to describe your intention to broaden your master of an area of growing importance in your field. For example, this might be a computer program you've been meaning to sit down and learn... a new management technique you've read about...or perhaps attending a seminar on some cutting-edge branch of your profession.

Again, the key is to focus on something *not essential* to your brilliant performance but which adds yet another dimension to your already impressive knowledge base.

Question 17 What are your outside interests?

TRAPS: You want to be a well-rounded, not a drone. But your potential employer would be even more turned off if he suspects that your heavy extracurricular load will interfere with your commitment to your work duties.

BEST ANSWERS: Try to gauge how this company's culture would look upon your favorite outside activities and be guided accordingly.

You can also use this question to shatter any stereotypes that could limit your chances. If you're over 50, for example, describe your activities that demonstrate physical stamina. If you're young, mention an activity that connotes wisdom and institutional trust, such as serving on the board of a popular charity.

But above all, remember that your employer is hiring you for what you can do *for him*, not your family, yourself or outside organizations, no matter how admirable those activities may be.

Question 18 The "Fatal Flaw" question

TRAPS: If an interviewer has read your resume carefully, he may try to zero in on a "fatal flaw" of your candidacy, perhaps that you don't have a college degree...you've been out of the job market for some time...you never earned your CPA, etc.

A fatal flaw question can be deadly, but usually only if you respond by being overly defensive.

BEST ANSWERS: As every master salesperson knows, you will encounter objections (whether stated or merely thought) in every sale. They're part and parcel of the buyer's anxiety. The key is not to exacerbate the buyer's anxiety but *diminish* it. Here's how...

Whenever you come up against a fatal flaw question:

1. Be completely honest, open and straightforward about admitting the shortcoming. (Showing you have nothing to hide diminishes the buyer's anxiety.)
2. Do *not* apologize or try to explain it away. You know that this supposed flaw is nothing to be concerned about, and this is the attitude you want your interviewer to adopt as well.
3. Add that as desirable as such a qualification might be, its lack has made you work all the harder throughout your career and has not prevented you from compiling an outstanding track record of achievements. You might even give examples of how, through a relentless commitment to excellence, you have consistently outperformed those who do have this qualification.

Of course, the ultimate way to handle "fatal flaw" questions is to *prevent them from* arising in the first place. You will do that by following the master strategy described in Question 1, i.e., uncovering the employer's needs and them matching your qualifications to those needs.

Once you've gotten the employer to start talking about his most urgently-felt wants and goals for the position, and then help him see in step-by-step fashion how perfectly your background and achievements match up with those needs, you're going to have one very enthusiastic interviewer on your hands, one who is no longer looking for "fatal flaws".

Question 19 How do you feel about reporting to a younger person (minority, woman, etc)?

TRAPS: It's a shame that some interviewers feel the need to ask this question, but many understand the reality that prejudices still exist among some job candidates, and it's better to try to flush them out beforehand.

The trap here is that in today's politically sensitized environment, even a *well-intentioned* answer can result in planting your foot neatly in your mouth. Avoid anything which smacks of a patronizing or an insensitive attitude, such as "I think they make terrific bosses" or "Hey, some of my best friends are..."

Of course, since almost anyone with an IQ above room temperature will at least try to steadfastly affirm the right answer here, your interviewer will be judging your *sincerity* most of all. "*Do you really feel that way?*" is what he or she will be wondering.

So you must make your answer believable and not just automatic. If the firm is wise enough to have promoted people on the basis of ability alone, they're likely quite proud of it, and prefer to hire others who will wholeheartedly share their strong sense of fair play.

BEST ANSWER: You greatly admire a company that hires and promotes on merit alone and you couldn't agree more with that philosophy. The age (gender, race, etc.) of the person you report to would *certainly* make no difference to you.

Whoever has that position has obviously earned it and knows their job well. Both the person and the position are fully deserving of respect. You believe that all people in a company, from the receptionist to the Chairman, work best when their abilities, efforts and feelings are respected and rewarded fairly, and that includes you. That's the best type of work environment you can hope to find.

Question 20 *On confidential matters...*

TRAPS: When an interviewer presses you to reveal confidential information about a present or former employer, you may feel it's a no-win situation. If you cooperate, you could be judged untrustworthy. If you don't, you may irritate the interviewer and seem obstinate, uncooperative or overly suspicious.

BEST ANSWER: Your interviewer may press you for this information for two reasons. First, many companies use interviews to research the competition. It's a perfect set-up. Here in their own lair, is an insider from the enemy camp who can reveal prized information on the competition's plans, research, financial condition, etc.

Second, the company may be testing your integrity to see if you can be cajoled or bullied into revealing confidential data.

What to do? The answer here is easy. Never reveal anything truly confidential about a present or former employer. By all means, explain your reticence *diplomatically*. For example, "I certainly want to be as open as I can about that. But I also wish to respect the rights of those who have trusted me with their most sensitive information, just as you would hope to be able to trust any of your key people when talking with a competitor..."

And certainly you can allude to your finest achievements in specific ways that don't reveal the combination to the company safe.

But be guided by the golden rule. If you were the owner of your present company, would you feel it ethically wrong for the information to be given to your competitors? If so, steadfastly refuse to reveal it.

Remember that this question pits your desire to be cooperative against your integrity. Faced with any such choice, *always choose integrity*. It is a far more valuable commodity than whatever information the company may pry from you. Moreover, once you surrender the information, your stock goes down. They will surely lose respect for you.

One President we know always presses candidates unmercifully for confidential information. If he doesn't get it, he grows visibly annoyed, relentlessly inquisitive, *It's all an act*. He couldn't care less about the information. This is his way of testing the candidate's moral fiber. Only those who hold fast are hired.

Question 21 *Would you lie for the company?*

TRAPS: This another question that pits two values against one another, in this case loyalty against integrity.

BEST ANSWER: Try to avoid choosing between two values, giving a positive statement which covers all bases instead.

Example: "I would never do anything to hurt the company.."

If aggressively pressed to choose between two competing values, *always choose personal integrity*. It is the most prized of all values.

Question 22 *Looking back, what would you do differently in your life?*

TRAPS: This question is usually asked to uncover any life-influencing mistakes, regrets, disappointments or problems that may continue to affect your personality and performance.

You do not want to give the interviewer anything negative to remember you by, such as some great personal or career disappointment, even long ago, that you wish could have been avoided.

Nor do you wish to give any answer which may hint that your whole heart and soul will not be in your work.

BEST ANSWER: Indicate that you are a happy, fulfilled, optimistic person and that, in general, you wouldn't change a thing.

Example: "It's been a good life, rich in learning and experience, and the best is yet to come. Every experience in life is a lesson in its own way. I wouldn't change a thing."

Question 23 *Could you have done better in your last job?*

TRAPS: This is no time for true confessions of major or even minor problems.

BEST ANSWER: Again never be negative.

Example: "I suppose with the benefit of hindsight you can always find things to do better, of course, but off the top of my head, I can't think of anything of major consequence."

(If more explanation seems necessary)

Describe a situation that didn't suffer because of you but from external conditions beyond your control.

For example, describe the disappointment you felt with a test campaign, new product launch, merger, etc., which looked promising at first, but led to underwhelming results. "I wish we could have known at the start what we later found out (about the economy turning, the marketplace changing, etc.), but since we couldn't, we just had to go for it. And we did learn from it..."

Question 24 *Can you work under pressure?*

TRAPS: An easy question, but you want to make your answer believable.

BEST ANSWER: Absolutely... (then prove it with a vivid example or two of a goal or project accomplished under severe pressure.)

Question 25 *What makes you angry?*

TRAPS: You don't want to come across either as a hothead or a wimp.

BEST ANSWER: Give an answer that's suited to both your personality and the management style of the firm. Here, the homework you've done about the company and its style can help in your choice of words.

Examples: If you are a reserved person and/or the corporate culture is coolly professional:

"I'm an even-tempered and positive person by nature, and I believe this helps me a great deal in keeping my department running smoothly, harmoniously and with a genuine *esprit de corps*. I believe in communicating clearly what's expected, getting people's commitment to those goals, and then following up continuously to check progress."

"If anyone or anything is going off track, I want to know about it early. If, after that kind of open communication and follow up, someone isn't getting the job done, I'll want to know why. If there's no good reason, then I'll get impatient and angry...and take appropriate steps from there. But if you hire good people, motivate them to strive for excellence and then follow up constantly, it almost never gets to that state."

If you are feisty by nature and/or the position calls for a tough straw boss.

"You know what makes me angry? People who (the fill in the blanks with the most objectionable traits for this type of position)...people who don't pull their own weight, who are negative, people who lie...etc."

Question 26 Why aren't you earning more money at this stage of your career?

TRAPS: You don't want to give the impression that money is not important to you, yet you want to explain why your salary may be a little below industry standards.

BEST ANSWER: You like to make money, but other factors are even more important.

Example: "Making money is very important to me, and one reason I'm here is because I'm looking to make more. Throughout my career, what's been even more important to me is doing work I really like to do at the kind of company I like and respect.

(Then be prepared to be specific about what your ideal position and company would be like, matching them as closely as possible to the opportunity at hand.)

Question 27 Who has inspired you in your life and why?

TRAPS: The two traps here are unpreparedness and irrelevance. If you grope for an answer, it seems you've never been inspired. If you ramble about your high school basketball coach, you've wasted an opportunity to present qualities of great value to the company.

BEST ANSWER: Have a few heroes in mind, from your mental "Board of Directors"—Leaders in your industry, from history or anyone else who has been your mentor.

Be prepared to give examples of how their words, actions or teachings have helped inspire your achievements. As always, prepare an answer which highlights qualities that would be highly valuable in the position you are seeking.

Question 28 *What was the toughest decision you ever had to make?*

TRAPS: Giving an unprepared or irrelevant answer.

BEST ANSWER: Be prepared with a good example, explaining why the decision was difficult...the process you followed in reaching it...the courageous or effective way you carried it out...and the beneficial results.

Question 29 *Tell me about the most boring job you've ever had.*

TRAPS: You give a very memorable description of a very boring job. Result? You become associated with this boring job in the interviewer's mind.

BEST ANSWER: You have never allowed yourself to grow bored with a job and you can't understand it when others let themselves fall into that rut.

Example: "Perhaps I've been fortunate, but that I've never found myself bored with any job I have ever held. I've always enjoyed hard work. As with actors who feel there are no small parts, I also believe that in every company or department there are exciting challenges and intriguing problems crying out for energetic and enthusiastic solutions. If you're bored, it's probably because you're not challenging yourself to tackle those problems right under your nose."

Question 30 *Have you been absent from work more than a few days in any previous position?*

TRAPS: If you've had a problem, you can't lie. You could easily be found out. Yet admitting an attendance problem could raise many flags.

BEST ANSWER: If you have had *no* problem, emphasize your excellent and consistent attendance record throughout your career.

Also describe how important you believe such consistent attendance is for a key executive...why it's up to you to set an example of dedication...and why there's just no substitute for being there with your people to keep the operation running smoothly, answer questions and handle problems and crises as they arise.

If you *do* have a past attendance problem, you want to minimize it, making it clear that it was an exceptional circumstance and that its cause has been corrected.

To do this, give the same answer as above but preface it with something like, "Other than being out last year (or whenever) because of (your reason, which is now in the past), I have never had a problem and have enjoyed an excellent attendance record throughout my career. Furthermore, I believe, consistent attendance is important because..." (Pick up the rest of the answer as outlined above.).

Question 31 *What changes would you make if you came on board?*

TRAPS: Watch out! This question can derail your candidacy faster than a bomb on the tracks – and *just as you are about to be hired*.

Reason: No matter how bright you are, you cannot know the right actions to take in a position before you settle in and get to know the operation's strengths, weaknesses key

people, financial condition, methods of operation, etc. If you lunge at this temptingly baited question, you will probably be seen as someone who shoots from the hip.

Moreover, no matter how comfortable you may feel with your interviewer, you are still an *outsider*. No one, including your interviewer, likes to think that a know-it-all outsider is going to come in, turn the place upside down and with sweeping, grand gestures, promptly demonstrate what jerks everybody's been for years.

BEST ANSWER: You, of course, will want to take a good hard look at everything the company is doing before making any recommendations.

Example: "Well, I wouldn't be a very good doctor if I gave my diagnosis *before* the examination. Should you hire me, as I hope you will, I'd want to take a good hard look at everything you're doing and understand why it's being done that way. I'd like to have in-depth meetings with you and the other key people to get a deeper grasp of what you feel you're doing right and what could be improved."

"From what you've told me so far, the areas of greatest concern to you are..." (name them. Then do two things. First, ask if these are in fact his major concerns. If so then reaffirm how your experience in meeting similar needs elsewhere might prove very helpful).

Question 32 *I'm concerned that you don't have as much experience as we'd like in...*

TRAPS: This could be a make-or-break question. The interviewer *mostly* likes what he sees, but has doubts over one key area. If you can assure him on this point, the job may be yours.

BEST ANSWER: This question is related to "The Fatal Flaw" (Question 18), but here the concern is not that you are *totally missing* some qualifications, such as CPA certification, but rather that your experience is *light* in one area.

Before going into any interview, try to identify the weakest aspects of your candidacy from this company's point of view. Then prepare the best answer you possible can to shore up your defenses.

To get past this question with flying colors, you are going to rely on your master strategy of *uncovering the employer's greatest wants and needs and then matching them with your strengths*. Since you already know how to do this from Question 1, you are in a much stronger position.

More specifically, when the interviewer poses as objection like this, you should...

1. Agree on the importance of this qualification.
2. Explain that your strength may be indeed be greater than your resume indicates because...
3. When this strength is added to your other strengths, it's really your *combination* of qualifications that's most important.

Then review the areas of your greatest strengths that match up most favorably with the company's most urgently-felt wants and needs.

This is powerful way to handle this question for two reasons. First, you're giving your interviewer more ammunition in the area of his concern. But more importantly, you're shifting his focus away from this one, isolated area and putting it on the *unique combination* of strengths you offer, strengths which tie in perfectly with his greatest wants.

Question 33 *How do you feel about working nights and weekends?*

TRAPS: Blurt out "no way, Jose" and you can kiss the job offer goodbye. But what if you have a family and want to work a reasonably normal schedule? Is there a way to get both the job and the schedule you want?

BEST ANSWER: First, if you're a confirmed workaholic, this question is a softball lob. Whack it out of the park on the first swing by saying this kind of schedule is just your style. Add that your family understands it. Indeed, they're happy for you, as they know you get your greatest satisfaction from your work.

If however, you prefer a more balanced lifestyle, answer this question with another: "What's the norm for your best people here?"

If the hours still sound unrealistic for you, ask, "Do you have any top people who perform exceptionally for you, but who also have families and like to get home in time to see them at night?" Chances are this company does, and this associates you with this other "top-performers-who-leave-not-later-than-six" group.

Depending on the answer, be honest about how you would fit into the picture. If all those extra hours make you uncomfortable, say so, but phrase your response positively.

Example: "I love my work and do it exceptionally well. I think the results speak for themselves, especially in ... (mention your two or three qualifications of greater interest to the employer. Remember, this is what he wants most, not a workaholic with weak credentials). Not only would I bring these qualities, but I've built my whole career on working not just hard, but smart. I think you'll find me one of the most productive people here."

I do have a family who likes to see me after work and on weekends. They add balance and richness to my life, which in turn helps me be happy and productive at work. If I could handle some of the extra work at home in the evenings or on weekends, that would be ideal. You'd be getting a person of exceptional productivity who meets your needs with strong credentials. And I'd be able to handle some of the heavy workload at home where I can be under the same roof as my family. Everybody would win."

Question 34 *Are you willing to relocate or travel?*

TRAPS: Answer with a flat "no" and you may slam the door shut on this opportunity. But what if you'd really prefer not to relocate or travel, yet wouldn't want to lose the job offer over it?

BEST ANSWER: First find out where you may have to relocate and how much travel may be involved. Then respond to the question.

If there's no problem, say so enthusiastically.

If you do have a reservation, there are two schools of thought on how to handle it.

One advises you to keep your options open and your reservations to yourself in the early going, by saying, "no problem". Your strategy here is to get the best offer you can, then make a judgment whether it's worth it to you to relocate or travel.

Also, by the time the offer comes through, you may have other offers and can make a more informed decision. Why kill off this opportunity before it has chance to blossom into something really special? And if you're a little more desperate three months from now, you might wish you hadn't slammed the door on relocating or traveling.

The second way to handle this question is to voice a reservation, but assert that you'd be open to relocating (or traveling) for the right opportunity.

The answering strategy you choose depends on how eager you are for the job. If you want to take no chances, choose the first approach.

If you want to play a little harder-to-get in hopes of generating a more enticing offer, choose the second.

Question 35 Do you have the stomach to fire people? Have you had experience firing many people?

TRAPS: This "innocent" question could be a trap door which sends you down a chute and lands you in a heap of dust outside the front door. Why? Because its real intent is not just to see if you've got the stomach to fire, but also to uncover *poor judgment in hiring* which has caused you to fire so many. Also, if you fire so often, you could be a tyrant.

So don't rise to the bait by boasting how many you've fired, unless you've prepared to explain why it was beyond your control, and not the result of your poor hiring procedures or foul temperament.

BEST ANSWER: Describe the rational and sensible management process you follow in both hiring and firing.

Example: "My whole management approach is to hire the best people I can find, train them thoroughly and well, get them excited and proud to be part of our team, and then work with them to achieve our goals together. If you do all of that right, especially hiring the right people, I've found you don't have to fire very often."

"So with me, firing is a last resort. But when it's got to be done, it's got to be done, and the faster and cleaner, the better. A poor employee can wreak terrible damage in undermining the morale of an entire team of good people. When there's no other way, I've found it's better for all concerned to act decisively in getting rid of offenders who won't change their ways."

Question 36 Why have you had so many jobs?

TRAPS: Your interviewer fears you may leave this position quickly, as you have others. He's concerned you may be unstable, or a "problem person" who can't get along with others.

BEST ANSWER: First, before you even get to the interview stage, you should try to minimize your image as job hopper. If there are several entries on your resume of less than one year, consider eliminating the less important ones. Perhaps you can specify the time you spent at previous positions in *rounded years* not in months and years.

Example: Instead of showing three positions this way:

6/1982 – 3/1983, Position A;
4/1983 – 12/1983, Position B;
1/1984 – 8/1987, Position C;

...it would be better to show simply:

1982 – 1983, Position A;
1984 – 1987 Position C.

In other words, you would drop Position B altogether. Notice what a difference this makes in reducing your image as a job hopper.

Once in front of the interviewer and this question comes up, you must try to reassure him. Describe each position as part of an overall pattern of growth and career destination.

Be careful not to blame other people for your frequent changes. But you can and should attribute certain changes to conditions beyond your control.

Example: Thanks to an upcoming merger, you wanted to avoid an ensuing bloodbath, so you made a good, upward career move before your department came under the axe of the new owners.

If possible, also show that your job changes were more frequent in your younger days, while you were establishing yourself, rounding out your skills and looking for the right career path. At this stage in your career, you're certainly much more interested in the best *long-term* opportunity.

You might also cite the job(s) where you stayed the longest and describe that this type of situation is what you're looking for now.

Question 37 *What do you see as the proper role/mission of...*

- ...a good (job title you're seeking);*
- ...a good manager;*
- ...an executive in serving the community;*
- ...a leading company in our industry; etc.*

TRAPS: These and other "proper role" questions are designed to test your understanding of your place in the bigger picture of your department, company, community and profession....as well as the proper role each of these entities should play in its bigger picture.

The question is most frequently asked by the most *thoughtful* individuals and companies...or by those concerned that you're coming from a place with a radically different corporate culture (such as from a big government bureaucracy to an aggressive small company).

The most frequent mistake executives make in answering is simply not being prepared (seeming as if they've never giving any of this a thought.)...or in phrasing an answer best suited to their *prior* organization's culture instead of the hiring company's.

BEST ANSWER: Think of the most essential ingredients of success for each category above – your job title, your role as manager, your firm's role, etc.

Identify at least three but no more than six qualities you feel are most important to success in each role. Then commit your response to memory.

Here, again, the more information you've already drawn out about the greatest wants and needs of the interviewer, and the more homework you've done to identify the culture of the firm, the more on-target your answer will be.

Question 38 *What would you say to your boss if he's crazy about an idea, but you think it stinks?*

TRAPS: This is another question that pits two values, in this case loyalty and honesty, against one another.

BEST ANSWER: Remember the rule stated earlier: In any conflict between values, always choose *integrity*.

Example: I believe that when evaluating anything, it's important to emphasize the positive. What do I like about this idea?"

"Then, if you have reservations, I certainly want to point them out, as specifically, objectively and factually as I can."

"After all, the most important thing I owe my boss is *honesty*. If he can't count on me for that, then everything else I may do or say could be questionable in his eyes."

"But I also want to express my thoughts in a constructive way. So my goal in this case would be to see if my boss and I could make his idea even stronger and more appealing, so that it effectively overcomes any initial reservation I or others may have about it."

"Of course, if he overrules me and says, 'no, let's do it my way,' then I owe him my full and enthusiastic support to make it work as best it can."

Question 39 *How could you have improved your career progress?*

TRAPS: This is another variation on the question, "If you could, how would you live your life over?" Remember, you're not going to fall for any such invitations to rewrite person history. You can't win if you do.

BEST ANSWER: You're generally quite happy with your career progress. Maybe, if you had known something earlier in life (impossible to know at the time, such as the booming growth in a branch in your industry...or the corporate downsizing that would phase out your last job), you might have moved in a certain direction sooner.

But all things considered, you take responsibility for where you are, how you've gotten there, where you are going...and you harbor no regrets.

Question 40 *What would you do if a fellow executive on your own corporate level wasn't pulling his/her weight...and this was hurting your department?*

TRAPS: This question and other hypothetical ones test your sense of human relations and how you might handle office politics.

BEST ANSWER: Try to gauge the political style of the firm and be guided accordingly. In general, fall back on universal principles of effective human relations – which in the end, embody the way you would like to be treated in a similar circumstance.

Example: "Good human relations would call for me to go directly to the person and explain the situation, to try to enlist his help in a constructive, positive solution. If I sensed resistance, I would be as persuasive as I know how to explain the benefits we can all gain from working together, and the problems we, the company and our customers will experience if we don't."

POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: And what would you do if he still did not change his ways?

ANSWER: "One thing I wouldn't do is let the problem slide, because it would only get worse and overlooking it would set a bad precedent. I would try again and again and again, in whatever way I could, to solve the problem, involving wider and wider circles of people, both above and below the offending executive and including my own boss if necessary, so that everyone involved can see the rewards for teamwork and the drawbacks of non-cooperation."

"I might add that I've never yet come across a situation that couldn't be resolved by harnessing others in a determined, constructive effort."

Question 41 *You've been with your firm a long time. Won't it be hard switching to a new company?*

TRAPS: Your interviewer is worried that this old dog will find it hard to learn new tricks.

BEST ANSWER: To overcome this objection, you must point to the many ways you have grown and adapted to changing conditions at your present firm. It has *not* been a static situation. Highlight the different responsibilities you've held, the wide array of new situations you've faced and conquered.

As a result, you've learned to adapt quickly to whatever is thrown at you, and you thrive on the stimulation of new challenges.

To further assure the interviewer, describe the similarities between the new position and your prior one. Explain that you should be quite comfortable working there, since their needs and your skills make a perfect match.

Question 42 *May I contact your present employer for a reference?*

TRAPS: If you're trying to keep your job search private, this is the last thing you want. But if you don't cooperate, won't you seem as if you're trying to hide something?

BEST ANSWER: Express your concern that you'd like to keep your job search private, but that in time, it will be perfectly okay.

Example: "My present employer is not aware of my job search and, for obvious reasons; I'd prefer to keep it that way. I'd be most appreciative if we kept our discussion confidential right now. Of course, when we both agree the time is right, then by all means you should contact them. I'm very proud of my record there."

Question 43 *Give me an example of your creativity (analytical skill...managing ability, etc.)*

TRAPS: The worst offense here is simply being unprepared. Your hesitation may seem as if you're having a hard time remembering the last time you were creative, analytical, etc.

BEST ANSWER: Remember from Question 2 that you should commit to memory a list of your greatest and most recent achievements, ever ready on the tip of your tongue.

If you have such a list, it's easy to present any of your achievements in light of the quality the interviewer is asking about. For example, the smashing success you orchestrated at last year's trade show could be used as an example of creativity, or analytical ability, or your ability to manage.

Question 44 Where could you use some improvement?

TRAPS: Another tricky way to get you to admit weaknesses. Don't fall for it.

BEST ANSWER: Keep this answer, like all your answers, positive. A good way to answer this question is to identify a cutting-edge branch of your profession (one that's not essential to your employer's needs) as an area you're very excited about and want to explore more fully over the next six months.

Question 45 What do you worry about?

TRAPS: Admit to worrying and you could sound like a loser. Saying you never worry doesn't sound credible.

BEST ANSWER: Redefine the word 'worry' so that it does not reflect negatively on you.

Example: "I wouldn't call it worry, but I am a strongly goal-oriented person. So I keep turning over in my mind anything that seems to be keeping me from achieving those goals, until I find a solution. That's part of my tenacity, I suppose."

Question 46 How many hours a week do you normally work?

TRAPS: You don't want to give a specific number. Make it too low, and you may not measure up. Too high, and you'll forever feel guilty about sneaking out the door at 5:15.

BEST ANSWER: *If you are in fact a workaholic and you sense this company would like that:* Say you are a confirmed workaholic, that you often work nights and weekends. Your family accepts this because it makes you fulfilled.

If you are not a workaholic: Say you have always worked hard and put in long hours. It goes with the territory. In one sense, it's hard to keep track of the hours because your work is a labor of love, you enjoy nothing more than solving problems. So you're almost always thinking about your work, including times when you're home, while shaving in the morning, while commuting, etc.

Question 47 What's the most difficult part of being a (job title)?

TRAPS: Unless you phrase your answer properly, your interviewer may conclude that whatever you identify as "difficult" is where you are weak.

BEST ANSWER: First, redefine "difficult" to be "challenging" which is more positive. Then, identify an area everyone in your profession considers challenging and in which you excel. Describe the process you follow that enables you to get splendid results... and be specific about those results.

Example: "I think every sales manager finds it challenging to motivate the troops in a recession. But that's probably the strongest test of a top sales manager. I feel this is one area where I excel."

"When I see the first sign that sales may slip or that sales force motivation is flagging because of a downturn in the economy, here's the plan I put into action immediately..." (followed by a description of each step in the process...and *most importantly*, the exceptional results you've achieved.).

Question 48 The "Hypothetical Problem"

TRAPS: Sometimes an interviewer will describe a difficult situation and ask, "How would you handle this?" Since it is virtually impossible to have all the facts in front of you from such a short presentation, don't fall into the trap of trying to solve this problem and giving your verdict on the spot. It will make your decision-making process seem woefully inadequate.

BEST ANSWER: Instead, describe the rational, methodical process you would follow in analyzing this problem, who you would consult with, generating possible solutions, choosing the best course of action, and monitoring the results.

Remember, in all such, "What would you do?" questions, always describe your *process or working methods*, and you'll never go wrong.

Question 49 What was the toughest challenge you've ever faced?

TRAPS: Being unprepared or citing an example from so early in your life that it doesn't score many points for you at this stage of your career.

BEST ANSWER: This is an easy question if you're prepared. Have a recent example ready that demonstrates either:

1. A quality most important to the job at hand; or
2. A quality that is *always* in demand, such as leadership, initiative, managerial skill, persuasiveness, courage, persistence, intelligence, etc.

Question 50 Have you consider starting your own business?

TRAPS: If you say "yes" and elaborate enthusiastically, you could be perceived as a loose cannon in a larger company, too entrepreneurial to make a good team player...or someone who had to settle for the corporate life because you couldn't make a go of your own business.

Also too much enthusiasm in answering "yes" could rouse the paranoia of a small company indicating that you may plan to go out on your own soon, perhaps taking some key accounts or trade secrets with you.

On the other hand, if you answer "no, never" you could be perceived as a security-minded drone who never dreamed a big dream.

BEST ANSWER: Again it's best to:

1. Gauge this company's corporate culture before answering and...
2. Be honest (which doesn't mean you have to vividly share your fantasy of the franchise or bed-and-breakfast you someday plan to open).

In general, if the corporate culture is that of a large, formal, military-style structure, minimize any indication that you'd love to have your own business. You might say, "Oh, I may have given it a thought once or twice, but my whole career has been in larger organizations. That's where I have excelled and where I want to be."

If the corporate culture is closer to the free-wheeling, everybody's-a-deal-maker variety, then emphasize that in a firm like this, you can virtually get the best of all worlds, the excitement of seeing your own ideas and plans take shape...combined with the

resources and stability of a well-established organization. Sounds like the perfect environment to you.

In any case, no matter what the corporate culture, be sure to indicate that any desires about running your own show are part of your past, not your present or future.

The last thing you want to project is an image of either a dreamer who failed and is now settling for the corporate cocoon...or the restless maverick who will fly out the door with key accounts, contacts and trade secrets under his arms just as soon as his bankroll has gotten rebuilt.

Always remember: Match what you want with what the position offers. The more information you've uncovered about the position, the more believable you can make your case.

Question 51 What are your goals?

TRAPS: Not having any...or having only vague generalities, not *highly specific* goals.

BEST ANSWER: Many executives in a position to hire you are strong believers in goal-setting. (It's one of the reason they've achieved so much). They like to hire in kind.

If you're vague about your career and personal goals, it could be a big turnoff to many people you will encounter in your job search.

Be ready to discuss your goals for each major area of your life: career, personal development and learning, family, physical (health), community service and (if your interviewer is clearly a religious person) you could briefly and generally allude to your spiritual goals (showing you are a well-rounded individual with your values in the right order).

Be prepared to describe each goal in terms of specific milestones you wish to accomplish along the way, time periods you're allotting for accomplishment, why the goal is important to you, and the specific steps you're taking to bring it about. But do this concisely, as you never want to talk more than two minutes straight before letting your interviewer back into the conversation.

Question 52 What do you look for when you hire people?

TRAPS: Being unprepared for the question.

BEST ANSWER: Speak your own thoughts here, but for the best answer weave them around the three most important qualifications for *any* position.

1. Can the person do the work (qualifications)?
2. Will the person do the work (motivation)?
3. Will the person fit in ("our kind of team player")?

Question 53 Sell me this stapler...(this pencil... this clock...or some other object on interviewer's desk).

TRAPS: Some interviewers, especially business owners and hard-charging executives in marketing-driven companies, feel that good salesmanship is *essential* for any key position and ask for an instant demonstration of your skill. Be ready.

BEST ANSWER: Of course, you already know the most important secret of all great salesmanship — “*find out what people want, then show them how to get it.*”

If your interviewer picks up his stapler and asks, “sell this to me,” you are going to demonstrate this proven master principle. *Here’s how:*

“Well, a good salesman must know both his product and his prospect before he sells anything. If I were selling this, I’d first get to know everything I could about it, all its features and benefits.”

“Then, if my goal were to sell it *you*, I would do some research on how you might use a fine stapler like this. The best way to do that is by asking some questions. May I ask you a few questions?”

Then ask a few questions such as, “Just out of curiosity, if you didn’t already have a stapler like this, why would you want one? And in addition to that? Any other reason? Anything else?”

“And would you want such a stapler to be reliable?...Hold a good supply of staples?” (Ask more questions that point to the features this stapler has.)

Once you’ve asked these questions, make your presentation citing all the features and benefits of this stapler and why it’s exactly what the interviewer just told you he’s looking for.

Then close with, “Just out of curiosity, what would you consider a reasonable price for a quality stapler like this...a stapler you could have *right now* and would (then repeat all the problems the stapler would solve for him)? Whatever he says, (unless it’s zero), say, “Okay, we’ve got a deal.”

NOTE: If your interviewer tests you by *fighting* every step of the way, denying that he even wants such an item, *don’t fight him*. Take the product away from him by saying, “Mr. Prospect, I’m delighted you’ve told me right upfront that there’s no way you’d ever want this stapler. As you well know, the first rule of the most productive salespeople in any field is to meet the needs of people who really *need and want* our products, and it just wastes everyone’s time if we try to force it on those who don’t. And I certainly wouldn’t want to waste your time. But we sell many items. Is there *any* product on this desk you would very much like to own...just one item?” When he points something out, repeat the process above. If he knows anything about selling, he may give you a standing ovation.

Question 54 “The Salary Question” – How much money do you want?

TRAPS: May also be phrases as, “*What salary are you worth?*”...or, “*How much are you making now?*” This is your most important negotiation. Handle it wrong and you can blow the job offer or go to work at far less than you might have gotten.

BEST ANSWER: For maximum salary negotiating power, remember these five guidelines:

1. Never bring up salary. Let the interviewer do it first. Good salespeople sell their products thoroughly before talking price. So *should you*. Make the interviewer want you first, and your bargaining position will be much stronger.
2. If your interviewer raises the salary question too early, before you’ve had a chance to create desire for your qualifications, *postpone* the question, saying something like, “Money is important to me, but is *not* my main concern. Opportunity and growth are far more important. What I’d rather do, if you don’t

mind, is explore if I'm right for the position, and then talk about money. Would that be okay?"

3. The #1 rule of any negotiation is: *the side with more information wins*. After you've done a thorough job of selling the interviewer and it's time to talk salary, the secret is to get the employer talking about what he's willing to pay *before* you reveal what *you're* willing to accept. So, when asked about salary, respond by asking, "I'm sure the company has already established a salary range for this position. Could you tell me what that is?" Or, "I want an income commensurate with my ability and qualifications. I trust you'll be fair with me. What does the position pay?" Or, more simply, "What does this position pay?"
4. Know beforehand what you'd accept. To know what's reasonable, research the job market and this position for any relevant salary information. Remember that most executives look for a 20-25%\$ pay boost when they switch jobs. If you're grossly underpaid, you may want more.
5. Never lie about what you currently make, but feel free to include the estimated cost of all your fringes, which could well tack on 25-50% more to your present "cash-only" salary.

Question 55 The Illegal Question

TRAPS: Illegal questions include any regarding your age...number and ages of your children or other dependents...marital status...maiden name...religion...political affiliation...ancestry...national origin...birthplace...naturalization of your parents, spouse or children...diseases...disabilities...clubs...or spouse's occupation...*unless any of the above are directly related to your performance of the job*. You can't even be asked about arrests, though you can be asked about convictions.

BEST ANSWER: Under the ever-present threat of lawsuits, most interviewers are well aware of these taboos. Yet you may encounter, usually on a second or third interview, a senior executive who doesn't interview much and forgets he can't ask such questions.

You can handle an illegal question in several ways. First, you can assert your legal right not to answer. But this will frighten or embarrass your interviewer and destroy any rapport you had.

Second, you could swallow your concerns over privacy and answer the question straight forwardly if you feel the answer could help you. For example, your interviewer, a devout Baptist, recognizes you from church and mentions it. Here, you could gain by talking about your church.

Third, if you don't want your privacy invaded, you can diplomatically answer the *concern* behind the question without answering the question itself.

Example: If you are over 50 and are asked, "*How old are you?*" you can answer with a friendly, smiling question of your own on whether there's a concern that your age may affect your performance. Follow this up by reassuring the interviewer that there's nothing in this job you can't do and, in fact, your age and experience are the most important *advantages* you offer the employer for the following reasons...

Another example: If asked, "*Do you plan to have children?*" you could answer, "I am wholeheartedly dedicated to my career", perhaps adding, "I have no plans regarding children." (You needn't fear you've pledged eternal childlessness. You have every right to change your plans later. Get the job first and then enjoy all your options.)

Most importantly, remember that illegal questions arise from fear that you won't perform well. The best answer of all is to get the job and perform brilliantly. All concerns and fears will then varnish, replaced by respect and appreciation for your work.

Question 56 The "Secret" Illegal Question

TRAPS: Much more frequent than the illegal question (see Question 55) is the *secret* illegal question. It's secret because it's asked only in the interviewer's mind. Since it's not even expressed to you, you have no way to respond to it, and it can there be most damaging.

Example: You're physically challenged, or a single mother returning to your professional career, or over 50, or a member of an ethnic minority, or fit any of a dozen other categories that do not strictly conform to the majority in a given company.

Your interviewer wonders, "Is this person really able to handle the job?" ... "Is he or she a 'good fit' at a place like ours?" ... "Will the chemistry ever be right with someone like this?" But the interviewer never raises such questions because they're illegal. So what can you do?

BEST ANSWER: Remember that just because the interviewer doesn't ask an illegal question doesn't mean he doesn't have it. More than likely, he is going to come up with his own answer. So you might as well help him out.

How? Well, you obviously can't respond to an illegal question if he hasn't even asked. This may well offend him. And there's always the chance he wasn't even concerned about the issue until you brought it up, and only then begins to wonder.

So you can't address "secret" illegal questions *head-on*. But what you can do is make sure there's enough *counterbalancing* information to more than reassure him that there's no problem in the area he *may* be doubtful about.

For example, let's say you're a sales rep who had polio as a child and you need a cane to walk. You know your condition has never impeded your performance, yet you're concerned that your interviewer may secretly be wondering about your stamina or ability to travel. Well, make sure that you hit these abilities very hard, leaving no doubt about your capacity to handle them well.

So, too, if you're in any different from what passes for "normal". Make sure, without in any way seeming *defensive* about yourself that you mention strengths, accomplishments, preferences and affiliations that strongly counterbalance any unspoken concern your interviewer may have.

Question 57 What was the toughest part of your last job?

TRAPS: This is slightly different from the question raised earlier, "*What's the most difficult part of being a (job title...)*" because this asks what you *personally* have found most difficult in your last position. This question is more difficult to redefine into something positive. Your interviewer will assume that whatever you found toughest may give you a problem in your new position.

BEST ANSWER: State that there was nothing in your prior position that you found overly difficult, and let your answer go at that. If pressed to expand your answer, you could describe the aspects of the position you *enjoyed* more than others, making sure that you express maximum enjoyment for those tasks most important to the open position, and you enjoyed least those tasks that are unimportant to the position at hand.

Question 58 *How do you define success...and how do you measure up to your own definition?*

TRAPS: Seems like an obvious enough question. Yet many executives, unprepared for it, fumble the ball.

BEST ANSWER: Give a well-accepted definition of success that leads right into your own stellar collection of achievements.

Example: "The best definition I've come across is that success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal."

"As to how I would measure up to that definition, I would consider myself both successful and fortunate..." (Then summarize your career goals and how your achievements have indeed represented a progressive path toward realization of your goals.)

Question 59 *"The Opinion Question" – What do you think about ...Abortion...The President...The Death Penalty...(or any other controversial subject)?*

TRAPS: Obviously, these and other "opinion" questions should never be asked. Sometimes they come up over a combination dinner/interview when the interviewer has had a drink or two, is feeling relaxed, and is spouting off about something that bugged him in today's news. If you give your opinion and it's the opposite of his, you won't change his opinions, but you could easily lose the job offer.

BEST ANSWER: In all of these instances, just remember the tale about student and the wise old rabbi. The scene is a seminary, where an overly serious student is pressing the rabbi to answer the ultimate questions of suffering, life and death. But no matter how hard he presses, the wise old rabbi will only answer each difficult question with a question of his own.

In exasperation, the seminary student demands, "*Why, rabbi, do you always answer a question with another question?*" To which the rabbi responds, "*And why not?*"

If you are ever uncomfortable with *any* question, asking a question in return is the greatest escape hatch ever invented. It throws the onus back on the other person, sidetracks the discussion from going into an area of risk to you, and gives you time to think of your answer or, even better, *your next question!*

In response to any of the "opinion" questions cited above, merely responding, "*Why do you ask?*" will usually be enough to dissipate any pressure to give your opinion. But if your interviewer again presses you for an opinion, you can ask another question.

Or you could assert a generality that almost everyone would agree with. For example, if your interviewer is complaining about politicians then suddenly turns to you and asks if you're a Republican or Democrat, you could respond by saying, "Actually, I'm finding it hard to find any politicians I like these days."

(Of course, your best question of all may be whether you want to work for someone opinionated.)

Question 60 *If you won \$10 million lottery, would you still work?*

TRAPS: Your totally honest response might be, "*Hell, no, are you serious?*" That might be so, but any answer which shows you as fleeing work if given the chance could make

you seem lazy. On the other hand, if you answer, "Oh, I'd want to keep doing exactly what I am doing, only doing it for your firm," you could easily inspire your interviewer to silently mutter to himself, "Yeah, sure. Gimme a break."

BEST ANSWER: This type of question is aimed at getting at your bedrock attitude about work and how you feel about what you do. Your best answer will focus on your positive feelings.

Example: "After I floated down from cloud nine, I think I would still hold my basic belief that achievement and purposeful work are essential to a happy, productive life. After all, if money alone bought happiness, then all rich people would be all happy, and that's not true.

"I love the work I do, and I think I'd always want to be involved in my career in some fashion. Winning the lottery would make it more fun because it would mean having more flexibility, more options...who knows?"

"Of course, since I can't count on winning, I'd just as soon create my own destiny by sticking with what's worked for me, meaning good old reliable hard work and a desire to achieve. I think those qualities have built many more fortunes than all the lotteries put together."

Question 61 Looking back on your last position, have you done your best work?

TRAPS: Tricky question. Answer "absolutely" and it can seem like your best work is behind you. Answer, "no, my best work is ahead of me," and it can seem as if you didn't give it your all.

BEST ANSWER: To cover both possible paths this question can take, your answer should state that you always try to do your best, and the best of your career is right now. Like an athlete at the top of his game, you are just hitting your career stride thanks to several factors. Then, recap those factors, highlighting your strongest qualifications.

Question 62 Why should I hire you from the outside when I could promote someone from within?

TRAPS: This question isn't as aggressive as it sounds. It represents the interviewer's own dilemma over this common problem. He's probably leaning toward you already and for reassurance, wants to hear what you have to say on the matter.

BEST ANSWER: Help him see the qualifications that *only* you can offer.

Example: "In general, I think it's a good policy to hire from within – to look outside probably means you're not completely comfortable choosing someone from inside.

"Naturally, you want this department to be as strong as it possibly can be, so you want the strongest candidate. I feel that I can fill that bill because...(then recap your strongest qualifications that match up with his greatest needs)."

Question 63 *Tell me something negative you've heard about our company...*

TRAPS: This is a common fishing expedition to see what the industry grapevine may be saying about the company. But it's also a trap because as an outsider, you never want to be the bearer of unflattering news or gossip about the firm. It can only hurt your chances and sidetrack the interviewer from getting sold on you.

BEST ANSWER: Just remember the rule – never be negative – and you'll handle this one just fine.

Question 64 *On a scale of one to ten, rate me as an interviewer.*

TRAPS: Give a perfect "10," and you'll seem too easy to please. Give anything less than a perfect 10, and he could press you as to where you're being critical, and that road leads *downhill* for you.

BEST ANSWER: Once again, *never be negative*. The interviewer will only resent criticism coming from you. This is the time to show your positivism.

However, don't give a numerical rating. Simply praise whatever interview style he's been using.

If he's been tough, say "You have been thorough and tough-minded, the very qualities needed to conduct a good interview."

If he's been methodical, say, "You have been very methodical and analytical, and I'm sure that approach results in excellent hires for your firm."

In other words, pay him a sincere compliment *that he can believe* because it's anchored in the behavior you've just seen.

Good luck in your job search!

The Editors



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

Interview preparation guide



Image credit: Lachlan Wyatt

The big picture

Be prepared

Our experience shows candidates who spend the time preparing well for their interviews consistently outperform those who don't prepare – even if they are potentially a stronger match on paper.

Preparation for an interview is critical. Nobody is so experienced that they don't require significant preparation for each interview they attend. Preparation for interview is not a quick flip through the potential employer's website and job specification.

Careful preparation for your interview will:

- lead to less nerves at interview
- increase your capacity to describe your experience in a structured, professional manner
- help you to relax in your interview and focus on listening and understanding questions
- allow you to better understand your next career move and will help you avoid making incorrect career choices
- maximise your chance for a successful interview.

Feel free to bring notes including any specific questions you need answered – this sort of preparation will be seen as an indicator of a strong potential hire for the employer.

Think about your audience

Critical to your preparation is understanding or predicting the needs of your audience.

Put yourself in their shoes

The interviewers are trying to uncover 3 key things:

- Can you do the job? Do you have the necessary skills, qualifications and experience?
- What is your motivation for doing the job? What is your attitude to work and what are your career goals?
- Will you fit into the team? Is there a culture match? Will you be someone they will enjoy working with? Are you someone that presents as a 'risk' to the harmony of their current team?

If you are prepared to answer these questions in your interview and can do it in a structured manner with relevant examples, you are heading towards becoming the preferred candidate.

Do your research

The best way to understand your audience is through thorough research. Your research should focus on:

- Who is your audience? What is their role? Where do they fit into the organisation? What are their professional backgrounds?
- What are they looking for? What are their expectations for the role?
- Why does the organisation need the role?

- What is the context surrounding the vacancy?

Personal and professional networks

Find out more about your potential employer and interviewers by calling and speaking with those most likely to be in the know.

Know your CV and career

Know your ‘story’ inside and out. Think through your experience and be able to articulate how you have come to this point in a manner that is positive and logical.

Be able to clearly articulate your own motivations and goals including for:

- previous job or career changes
- what you enjoy doing most and why; what motivates you
- what work you prefer doing and why.

It sounds counter-intuitive but knowing your work experience intimately is key to your success at interview. Rarely does everyone remember their past work experiences off by heart, and even more rarely are they able to describe these experienced with a structured, logical manner.

The world is at your fingertips online

We are often blessed with a huge amount of information online about local organisations particularly public sector organisations. Organisation websites, media releases, annual reports, published business plans...Google is your best friend when it comes to preparing for interviews.

Take advantage of this plethora of information so you can go into your interview with eyes open. But remember, the web is only one source of information – it is risky to rely solely on the internet for interview preparation.

Understand the job specification and selection criteria/core competencies

Study the job duties and prepare questions about aspects of the role that are not clear to you.

Draw parallels with examples from your own experience to each part of the job/criteria, and prepare detailed examples to demonstrate your competencies in performing these duties.

For roles where the critical requirements of the position are in a list of selection criteria or core competencies, it is essential you:

- prepare detailed examples relating to each criterion or competency using the STAR model
- know the selection criteria you wrote well
- steer interviewers to positive outcomes you have generated through your work with well chosen, targeted examples.

Be on time and know where you are going

Be 100% sure of the time, date and location of the interview and research travel times, public transport or parking well in advance. Always make sure you come to the interview ‘armed’ with all

relevant contact details ‘just in case’. This includes who will be there, their positions in the organisation, their phone numbers etc.

Any more than 10 minutes early is too early – if you arrive too early wait in the car or take a short walk to calm yourself. Anything later than the agreed interview time can be a black mark against your chances at interview.

Practice and rehearse

Practice your interview responses answers and consider running a ‘mock interview’ with a friend or colleague just as you would when preparing a presentation or similar.

Prepare specific responses to commonly asked questions

There are a wide range of commonly asked interview questions that when prepared for, can allow you to concentrate on more difficult questions or on building rapport with the interviewers.

Remember, just because the questions are common and ‘about you’ it does not mean they will be easy to answer so preparation is vital. And again, don’t forget to exemplify your responses.

Tell us about yourself...

Although this seems a simple question, many people find this one very difficult to respond to appropriately. Prepare a response as it is easy to get carried away and present a lot of irrelevant personal information or to ramble.

Your answer to this question needs to be specifically targeted to the job, selection criteria and the organisation.

- Set a framework – aim for three key points that have led you to this point in your career.
- Briefly convey a sense of who you are, and where you are going.
- Mention your previous career and how this prepares you for the role you are interviewing for (qualify with concrete examples, don’t go through a chronological history).
- Present just enough detail without getting into a lengthy autobiography. Two minutes is a good rule of thumb for this question.

Strengths and weaknesses

There are many ways interviewers assess how your interpretation of your strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- How would your referees describe you?
- What accomplishments are you most proud of?
- What achievements define your career to date?
- What will you bring to our organisation?
- What specific skills are you most proud of?

Remember to focus on providing a mix of personal and technical strengths – we recommend preparing a minimum of five overall with detailed examples to support your statements. Avoid self-qualifying statements. If it is a strength explain why referring to previous examples of how this strength has led to positive performance outcomes benefiting previous employers.

Make sure you:

- target your strengths to the role you are interviewing for
- avoid self-qualifying statements / self-affirmations if they are not supported by evidence
- provide a breadth of responses (e.g. not all personal strengths).

Weaknesses

- What weaknesses are there in your performance to date?
- Where do you feel you could improve your performance?
- In your last performance review what were the key areas for development raised?

When describing weaknesses, it is best to give only one or two examples. Describe your weakness as point for development you have identified, perhaps with the help of a previous manager, and describe constructively how you seek to address this. The interviewers are keen to see you demonstrate self-awareness and emotional maturity/intelligence. Honesty is always the best policy but make sure you frame your response in a positive or constructive light.

Remind them that when you identify a problem, you actively take actions to correct it, and that is how you do things.

Avoid answering with:

- cliché's like "I am a workaholic", "I take on too much", or "I am a perfectionist".
- listing a weakness that discounts your suitability for the core competencies of the role (e.g. "I am not strong with detail" if you are going for an accounting role)
- "I don't know..."

Other questions you may be very likely to be asked at interview include:

- What are your long- and short-term goals? What motivates and interests you?
- Why are you interested in this job? Why are you suitable for it?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What do you know about our organisation/team?

Make sure you are prepared for these standard questions as a minimum.

Behavioural and situational questions

The theory behind these kinds of questions is that your past performance is the best predictor of future achievements. These types of questions require you to give specific examples of work situations to illustrate your previous performance or behaviour. They are meant to be tough to answer and require significant preparation to answer them well.

Typically, these questions commence with:

- Tell me about a time when...
- Can you give me an example of when you have...

Following the initial prompting question, they are often followed up with guided prompts to steer you towards providing an answer that meets the requirements.

Typical prompts include:

- What action did you take?
- What were you responsible for?

- What were the consequences? What was the result?

This style of interview questioning can be used to assess any of the core competencies required for a particular position.

A useful approach to structuring your response to behavioural questions is the STAR model.

Structure your response around the following points:

- Situation – describe the circumstance where you used the skill and gained experience.
- Task – what was your role?
- Action – what did you do and how did you do it?

Result – what did you achieve? What was the outcome and how does it relate to the role you're applying for?

Do's and don'ts and curveballs

Don't:

- “oversell” yourself or embellish the truth.
- complain about / criticise former employers or managers – be careful here.
- over-answer questions. Keep answers informative but relatively brief. Monitoring your interviewer’s body language will give you clues as to whether you are talking too much.

Interview curve balls

Inexperienced interviewers

Prepare for inexperienced or nervous interviewers. Remember, many interviewers do not interview people regularly and many are not naturally very good at it. Often a short interview results from an inexperienced or unskilled interviewer rather than the candidate. By preparing questions and being able to volunteer structured information about your experience relevant to an opportunity you can help guide an interview without momentum to your advantage.

Nerves or not at your best

If despite all your best preparation and effort you are still very nervous, let the interviewer(s) know up front by plainly stating that: “I am experiencing some nerves and please excuse me until I am warmed up.”

Do not continue apologising throughout the meeting as this will create a lasting negative impression.

If you are ill and you still attend your interview, let the interviewer(s) know in advance so they are aware.

Finishing the interview

Aim to leave a positive impression by:

- being genuine and professional, but not overly familiar
- confirming your interest in the role and why – remember, many people are successful because they are clearly highly motivated to win the role

- addressing any possible shortcoming noting your awareness and putting a positive slant on this
- leaving the interviewer(s) with a strong impression of you – take the time to thank all attendees.



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment

Interview Preparation Guide

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Water Division



The big picture

Be prepared

- Our experience has shown that candidates who spend the time preparing well for their interviews, consistently outperform those who don't prepare - even if they are potentially a stronger match on paper!
- Preparation for an interview is critical. Nobody is so experienced that they don't require significant preparation for each interview they attend. Preparation for interview is not a quick flip through the potential employer's website and job specification!

Appropriate amounts of preparation for your interview will:

- Lead to less nerves at interview
- Increase your capacity to describe your experience in a structured, professional manner
- Leave you in a stronger position to relax at interview focusing on listening and understanding questions; and building rapport with interviewer(s)
- Allow you to better understand your next career move and will help you avoid making incorrect career choices
- Maximise your chance for a successful interview

Feel free to bring notes including any specific questions you need answered – this sort of preparation will be seen as an indicator of a strong potential hire for the employer.

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Critical to your preparation is understanding or predicting the needs of your audience.

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Remember: The interviewers are trying to uncover three key things:

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- Will you fit into the team? Is there a culture match? Will you be someone they will enjoy working with? Are you someone that presents as a 'risk' to the harmony of their current team?

If you are prepared to answer these questions for the client at interview and are able to do it in a structured manner with relevant examples, you are heading towards becoming the employee of choice.

Do your research

The best way to understand your audience is through thorough research. Your research should focus on:

- Who is your audience? What is their role? Where do they fit into the organisation? What are their professional backgrounds?
- What they are looking for? What are their expectations for the role?
- Why does the organisation need the role?
- What is the context surrounding the vacancy?

Personal and professional networks

Find out more about your new potential employer and interviewers by calling and speaking with those most likely to be in the know. Remember the degrees of separation in Canberra are minimal and it won't take many calls before you are much better informed. Don't be afraid to ask for a personal referral from your 'connection'. If used wisely a personal referral or recommendation can be a huge advantage at interview, however, if you are in doubt whether the referral connection is a sound one we recommend caution.

At HorizonOne we pride ourselves on having in-depth knowledge of our client's organisations and work cultures, often built over many years. Make sure you make the most out of this information by preparing for and questioning your consultant in detail prior to interview. If they don't have the information you need they are likely to know how to get it.

Know your CV and career

Know your 'story' inside and out. Think through your experience and be able to articulate how you have come to this point in a manner that is positive and logical.

Be able to clearly articulate your own motivations and goals including for:

- Previous job or career changes
- What you enjoy doing most and why; what motivates you
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There are a wide range of commonly asked interview questions that when prepared for, can allow you to concentrate on more difficult questions or on building rapport with the interviewers. Remember, just because the questions are common and ‘about you’ it does not mean they will be easy to answer so preparation is vital. And again, don’t forget to exemplify your responses!

Prepare answers to the most commonly asked ‘general’ interview questions

Tell me about yourself...

Although this seems a simple question, many people find this one very difficult to respond to appropriately. To get the most out of the situation you need to prepare a response as it is easy to get carried away and present a lot of irrelevant personal information or to ramble.

Your answer to this question needs to be specifically targeted to the job, selection criteria and the organisation.

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Strengths and weaknesses

There are many different ways interviewers seek to access your interpretation of your strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- How would your referees describe you?
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Make sure you:

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- Listing a weakness that discounts your suitability for the core competencies of the role (e.g. I am not strong with detail if you are going for an accounting role)
- "I don't know....."

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Typical prompts include:

- What action did you take?
- What were you responsible for?
- What were the consequences? What was the result?

This style of interview questioning can be used to assess any of the core competencies required for a particular position.

First impressions count!

Be well presented

This should be a no-brainer, but we are constantly receiving feedback from interviews where candidate's appearance has led to negative impressions and then outcomes.

Key things to remember are:

- Come dressed appropriately – if in doubt always wear a suit and tie
- If you come dressed smart/casual make sure you are 100% sure that this is in line with expectations
- Be clean shaven with neat hair
- Make sure your clothes are well ironed
- Do not come with sleeves rolled up, tie, fly or top button undone!
- Avoid strong applications of perfume or aftershave
- Do not smoke prior to your interview – it is guaranteed to 'turn off' two out of three interviewers
- Do not chew gum
- Avoid over applying make-up or wearing inappropriate or excessive jewelry
- Make sure your mobile phone is switched off!!!

Greet each interviewer with a firm, full hand handshake and make sure you keep good eye contact. Keep the interaction as genuine as possible and seek to establish rapport early – the first five minutes are vital! Avoid the appearance of your greeting being a rehearsed routine.

Be aware of your posture and body language during the interview – non-verbal cues are critical to interviewer impressions. Keep your body language positive and/or neutral, sitting upright in your chair with hands relaxed.

Prepare to be relaxed

- Centre yourself before the meeting and focus on your breathing to settle your nerves
- Be calm in the knowledge that you have prepared well
- Seek to engage the interviewers on a personal or social level as well as professionally to ease tensions and to maximise potential synergies

Practice and rehearse

Practice your interview responses answers and consider running a ‘mock interview’ with a friend or colleague just as you would when preparing a presentation or similar.

Prepare your approach to answering questions

The STAR method

There is endless material available online or otherwise about using the STAR technique to answer interview questions. The STAR technique - focuses your answers by giving them a framework

Situation – Set the context by describing the circumstance where you gained the experience.

Task – What was your role in addressing the requirement/problem?

Action – What specific action did you take? How did you do it and how did you make the outcome a positive one?

Result – What did you achieve? How was it measured? What was the feedback? How does it relate to the role you are applying for?

Do's & don'ts and curveballs

Interview DON'TS

- Don't "oversell" yourself or embellish the truth.
- Don't complain about / criticise former employers or managers – be VERY careful here.
- Don't over-answer questions. Keep answers informative but relatively brief. Monitoring your interviewer's body language will give you clues as to whether you are talking too much.
- Don't ask about every fine detail of personal benefits offered by an employer, it will leave you looking like a needy or difficult employee— wait until an offer is looking likely before you head down this road.
- Don't provide in sufficient detail in answers demonstrating your experience or abilities.

Interview curve balls

Inexperienced interviewers

Prepare for inexperienced or nervous interviewers. Remember, many interviewers do not interview people regularly and many are not naturally very good at it. Many a time we have heard from candidates leaving interviews bewildered after fifteen minutes wondering what they did wrong! More often than not a short interview results from an inexperienced or unskilled interviewer rather than the candidate. By preparing questions and being able to volunteer structured information about your experience relevant to an opportunity you can help guide an interview with momentum to your advantage.

Nerves or not at your best

If despite all your best preparation and effort you are still very nervous, let the interviewer(s) know up front by plainly stating that: “I am experiencing some nerves and please excuse me until I am warmed up.”

Do not continue apologising throughout the meeting as this will create a lasting negative impression.

If you are ill and you still attend your interview, let the interviewer(s) know in advance so they are aware.

What are your salary expectations?

Generally, this one is better handled in a second interview or conversation once the employer has clearly identified interest in employing you. If you are held to providing an answer we recommend only answering if you have a full understanding of the requirements of the position and wherever possible indicating a salary range.

Finishing the interview

Aim to leave a positive impression

- Be genuine and professional, but not overly familiar
- Confirm your interest in the role and why – remember, many people are successful because they are clearly highly motivated to win the role
- Address any possible shortcoming noting your awareness and putting a positive slant on this
- Aim to leave the interviewer(s) with a strong impression of you – take the time to shake the hands of all attendees



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment



Interview Preparation Guidance



No7 BEAUTY COMPANY





Congratulations, you've been invited for an interview!

So, you've made it to the next stage of the process.

Want to know more about what to expect and how to prepare?

We've created this guide to help you to be at your best during your interview - here you'll find frequently asked questions, interview tips and guidance on structuring your answers.

We wish you the best of luck and look forward to meeting you!

Boots & No7 Recruitment Team

What to expect at your interview

Where will the interview be held?

All location details can be found in your interview confirmation email.

What should I wear?

As you will be spending time on the shop floor, we recommend you wear professional clothing. Make sure you feel comfortable and confident in what you wear.

What will happen at my interview?

To find out more about you and your experience, we will ask you a series of competency-based questions (see page 4 for further help).

You may also spend time on the shop floor engaging with customers and products.

Where should I go when I arrive in store?

Please refer to your interview confirmation email to find out where to go on arrival.

How long will the interview last?

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. We recommend arriving at least 5 minutes beforehand to give yourself plenty of time.

Preparing your answers

Getting to know you

At the start of the interview, we will spend some time getting to know each other. This is also your opportunity to tell us about your recent work experience and ask us any questions.

Competency based interview questions

We ask these questions to find out how you have used specific skills in your previous experience and how you approach different problems, tasks and challenges. These questions will often start with the words “describe a time when” or “tell me about a time when”.

Structuring your answers

A good way to structure your answer is to use the **CAR** model. When answering, you should spend an equal amount of time talking through each of the steps below.

Context: Briefly describe the situation. What? Who? Where? When?

Action: Describe the actions you personally took to complete the task, why you took those actions and what your thought process was.

Result: What was the impact of your actions? What did you learn from this experience and what would you do differently, if anything?

Preparing your answers

Customer Engagement Task

You will get the opportunity to interact with our customers and products, and then we will ask you some follow up questions.

Structuring your answers

Although there is not one way to structure your answers, we would encourage you to:

- Consider body language and tone of voice
- Be curious about the customer and their needs
- Think about questions you would ask a customer or team member to find out more information
- Show enthusiasm and interest



Helpful tips for your interview

Before your interview

- **Accessibility** - Please let us know at least 48 hours before your interview if you require adjustments or assistance by contacting the store directly or emailing us at interviewbooking@boots.co.uk
- **Eligibility to work in the UK / Ireland** - Refer back to your interview confirmation email to ensure you can prove your eligibility to work in the UK or Ireland. Please note, if you do not have your documents with you on the day, we may not be able to go ahead with the interview
- **Job Description** – Head to the candidate zone on your www.Boots.jobs account to familiarise yourself with the job description
- **Why Boots** - Consider why you want to work for Boots and why you are interested in the role
- **Consider your Questions** - Think about any questions you would like to ask the interviewer about Boots or the role
- **Plan your journey** – Ensure you know where you are going and how you will get there. Aim to arrive in store at least 5 minutes early

On the day of your interview

- If you're running late, contact the store directly to let them know you're on your way
- Remember, you can take your time to think of your best example. You can also take notes with you into the interview.

After your interview

- Relax! You can be proud of yourself for getting this far in the process.
- We should be in touch with you within a couple of weeks by phone or email with the outcome of your interview.



No7 BEAUTY
COMPANY



Good Luck!

Take a look at our [FAQs](#).

If your question is not answered, you can email us at interviewbooking@boots.co.uk



55/REDEFINED
AGE INCLUSIVE
ACCREDITED



101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions

101 GREAT ANSWERS TO THE TOUGHEST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

25th Anniversary Edition

BY

RON FRY



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101 GREATEST ANSWERS TO THE TOUGHEST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

You Are in Charge

I started writing the first edition of this book in 1989, and the parallels with that year are a little eerie.

The unemployment rate then and now is 5.3% and, then and now, has fallen steadily for two years. The 1989 economy had recovered from a 1982 recession and falling oil prices, and weathered a 1987 market crash. Our “ho-hum economy,” as the *New York Times* recently characterized it, is still recovering from a 2008 market crash and the Great Recession. The price of oil has fallen precipitously.

Unemployment figures and pundits paint a contrasting picture—while the job market for current or recent college grads is considered the best in a decade or more, there are 6.5 million people “working part time for economic reasons.” In other words, 6.5 million people who would prefer to work full time but can’t find a full-time job.

Whether we are in a booming economy or a recession, most of the things you need to know and do during the interview process do not really change. In the 27 years since I wrote the first edition, an ever-changing job market has morphed from a seller’s (employee-friendly) market to a buyer’s (employer-friendly) market and back again. But in good times and bad, the power this book has given interviewees—whatever their ages, skills, or qualifications—has continued to grow.

I certainly couldn't boast of my own interviewing skills before I wrote this book. On the contrary, I had often *not* gotten jobs for which I was eminently qualified. So I spent quite a lot of time learning all the mistakes you could possibly make, having made each one of them—twice.

Now, as a veteran of the other side of the desk as well (I've hired hundreds and interviewed thousands), I can tell you that interviewing is more serious business than ever before.

Employers are looking for “self-managing” employees—people who are versatile, confident, ready and able to work with a team, and not afraid to roll up their sleeves, work long hours, and get the job done. “That’s me,” you chortle. Congratulations. But you won’t get the chance to prove yourself on the job without making it through the interview process.

You can't cheat on *these* tests

There has been one significant development since the last edition of this book. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, hundreds of companies—including 457 of the Fortune 500—are using some form of “personality” testing that aims to correlate specific personality traits with success in a particular job. One test vendor, Infor, claims to assess more than a million candidates a month.

While tests such as Myers-Briggs and the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) were popular during the 1960s and '70s, we are clearly in a new age that *Time* magazine recently noted “is being driven by a collision of two hot trends: Big Data and analytics...The result is a mostly unchallenged belief that lots of data combined with lots of analytics can optimize pretty much anything...even people. Hence, people analytics.”

You may now have to take the DISC Assessment, which will grade you in four areas—Dominance, Defiance, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. Or the Hogan Personality Inventory, which assesses five. The 16PF measures 16 “normal-range” personality traits and five “second-order” traits. The California Psychological Inventory uses 18 scales in four classes to determine what the test

taker will do in specific on-the-job situations. And the Caliper Profile will assess 25 personality traits related to job performance. The winner of this personality numbers game so far is Gallup's Clifton Strengthfinder, which measures 34 traits (but is most interested in your top five).

I know from experience that you cannot "beat" these tests. If you try to choose the answers you believe are "obviously" the ones showing your leadership, motivational, or team-building skills, you will not succeed. Since you can't really prepare for these tests, relax and try to answer the questions honestly. Most such tests are merely trying to identify the jobs for which your "personality type" is best suited. And at most companies, they are merely one component of the interview process.

I will leave it to others to argue whether it is possible (or desirable) to accurately test for job-specific "success traits." Whatever you believe about this new trend, it is clearly another obstacle many of you will need to hurdle.

Interviewing was never easy, and right now it is as hard as ever. Companies are taking far longer to make hiring decisions, and only after subjecting prospective employees to these tests and scheduling more and longer interviews.

But of all the tools in your professional arsenal, your ability to shine in that brief moment in time—your initial interview—can make or break your chances for a second go-around, and, ultimately, dictate whether you're even given a shot at the job.

Practice still makes perfect

Like playing the piano, interviewing takes practice, and practice makes perfect. The hours of personal interviewing experience—the tragedies and the triumphs—as well as my years as an interviewer are the basis for this book. I hope to spare you many of the indignities I suffered along the way, by helping you prepare for the interview of your worst nightmares—at a comfortable remove from the interviewer's glare.

Will you have to answer every question I've included? Certainly not—at least, not in a single interview. But chances are, the questions tomorrow's interviewer *doesn't* ask will be on the tip of the next interviewer's tongue. Why? It's a mystery.

I didn't realize 25 years ago that I would start a competitive publishing battle to see how many interview questions could be featured in a single book. There were always more than 101 questions in my book once one considered all the variations that I listed. But the success of that first edition led to an unfortunate numbers game. Soon there was a book touting 201 questions and answers, then 301, then 500, and, in a final burst of one-upmanship, 501.

These numbers really don't matter, especially if a single word change in one question magically transforms it into another. So please don't count the questions in this edition or worry that you need to look at these other books to get a more "complete" list. Believe me, the ones in this book will suffice!

Become an interview artist

Most interviewers are not trying to torture you for sport. Their motive is to quickly learn enough about you to make an informed decision—should you stay or should you go? By the same token, if you know what they're looking for, you can craft your answers accordingly (and reduce your own fear and anxiety at the same time).

I hope you'll take it a step further and use these questions as the basis for some thoughtful self-exploration. You'll need to be prepared to think for yourself—on your feet, not by the seat of your pants.

While it is certainly competitive, the interview process is not a competition. Rather than thinking of yourself as an athlete trying to "out-answer" the other candidates, consider an interview your chance to be an artist—to paint a portrait of the person you are, the candidate any company should like, respect...and want to hire.

Chapters 1 and 2 offer a detailed discussion of the work you need to do and the things you need to think about long before you strut into your first interview. Interviewing may not be 99 percent preparation, but it's certainly 50 percent.

In Chapters 3 through 10, we'll get into the meat of the book—the questions for which you must prepare and the answers most interviewers are hoping to hear. Each question is generally followed by one or more subheadings:

What do they want to hear?

(*What information is the interviewer seeking?*)



THUMBS UP
(What's a good answer?)



THUMBS DOWN
(What's a poor answer?)

I've listed the follow-up questions you should expect or variations an interviewer may substitute after many of the questions.

The questions in this book are grouped by type; they are not in some suggested order. Many of the questions in chapters 8 or 10, for example, may well be some of the first questions asked in every interview! So read the entire book and prepare for *all* of the questions in *any* order.

Despite the emphasis on “great answers,” I do *not* recommend rote memorization. Trotting out a staged, “textbook” answer to a question is not the point of the interview process... or of this book. It is actually more important to concentrate on the “What do they want to hear?” section after each question, to have an understanding of *why* the interviewer is asking a particular question and what you need to do to frame a winning answer.

The “thumbs down” after many of the questions indicate answers that will make the average interviewer cringe and the busy interviewer simply suggest you try another firm.

Oh, no, you didn't!

I'm going to assume that you have already been on enough interviews (or, if you're a recent graduate, read enough interviewing books), to know that there are rules to follow during interviews. So I'm not going to discuss most of them here.

But there is a list of "no-no's" that are so important, failing to avoid them can virtually doom *any* chance you have of securing the job before the interview even starts. Given their seriousness, I thought it prudent to remind you of them:

"What does this company do?"

A key part of the interview process is preparation—researching the company, industry, and position, preparing pertinent questions, being ready to sprinkle your knowledge into the conversation. So failing to do any of this will not impress most interviewers. I *have* had candidates ask me what exactly my company did.

The immediate and obvious answer: Not hire *them*.

On time and looking good

For many interviewers, **showing up late** is immediate cause for canceling the interview. It doesn't matter that traffic backed up, your cat threw up a hairball, or you just got lost in the elevator.

Being on time is not racing down the final corridor with moments to spare. Some interviewers agree with New York Giants football coach Tom Coughlin, who declared that team members were late for meetings if they didn't show up fifteen minutes *early*.

Poor grooming is a basic turnoff. Wearing so much perfume or cologne that a gasping interviewer lunges for the window isn't recommended. Nor is wearing more makeup than a runway model, clanking along with a pocketful of change or an armload of bangles and bells, or sporting an unkempt beard (or, for some interviewers, even fashionable stubble).

Given the tube tops, sneakers, short skirts, and patterned stockings I've seen waltz through my door (and all on one candidate!), some of you may need to review the **appropriate dress** for every interview.

While women no longer need to sport a black business suit and pearls, dressing tastefully in professional apparel is still a must. And that black suit will still work in most environments.

Men should wear a white or light blue shirt, conservative suit, silk tie, and shined dress shoes.

No one should think of wearing ties that glow in the dark, T-shirts advertising anything (but especially not X-rated), or any clothes even *you* know are totally unprofessional.

Lies, damn lies, and statistics

If you **lie about anything**—especially where and when you worked, what you did, where and when (or even if) you attended college—you will be caught. No matter how lowly the job, there are significant expenses involved with hiring someone to perform it. So companies will take the time to check out references. The higher up the food chain you climb, the more intense their scrutiny.

Even if the lie is inconsequential, the very fact that you lied will, in virtually all instances, be immediate grounds for dismissal. Lacking a particular skill or experience may not automatically exclude you from getting the job. Lying about it will. Just ask former NBC news anchor Brian Williams about the consequences of “shading” the truth or “misremembering” an experience.

While honesty may be the best (and only) policy, it is **not necessary to share anything and everything** with your interviewer. Anything you do in the privacy of your own home is not something you need to share.

And do be smart enough, when asked what interests you about the job, not to answer, “*Heck, I just need a job with benefits. I’m three months along and can’t wait until my maternity leave starts.*”

The eyes have it

Don't underestimate the effect of your own body language on the interviewer. While many people don't mean what they say or say what they mean, their nonverbal actions reveal *exactly* what they're feeling. According to studies, *more than half* of what we are trying to communicate is being received nonverbally.

To many interviewers, your **failure to "look them in the eye"** indicates you have something to hide, as does being overly fidgety or nervous. Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake, face him or her, sit straight up, and, of course, look them in the eye. *Breaking* eye contact occasionally is also a good idea. Staring without pause for more than a few seconds will make almost anyone nervous.

Likewise, interviewers are looking for people who are **enthusiastic** about what they do, so sighing, looking out the window, or checking your watch during a question will not create the right impression. If you don't seem interested in the job, why should they be interested in hiring you?

But **you can be too aggressive**. One candidate said to me, barely five minutes into our interview, "*I've got three other offers right now. What can you do for me?*"

I showed him where the exit was.

Yes, you need to be confident, enthusiastic, and cheerful (and brave and clean and reverent...), but, as this example clearly illustrates, you can overplay your hand.

Avoid becoming defensive when there doesn't appear to be a reason: The interviewer asks what she thinks is a simple question and you act as if she has accused you of a crime. You start to sweat, hem and haw, and try to change the subject.

What are you hiding? That's what the interviewer will be thinking. And if you aren't actually hiding anything, why are you acting so defensively?

Try to make every minute of your interview a positive experience—introducing negativity of any kind is virtually guaranteed

to dim your chances. (Which is why the *interviewer* may introduce negativity, just to see how you handle it.) So complaining about your last job, boss, duties...or even the elevator ride upstairs...is getting yourself off on the wrong foot.

...And this is my mom

There should be a new reality series featuring the **bizarre behavior** of some interviewees, as they chew, burp, scratch, swear, cry, laugh, and scream their way into our hearts. Interviewees have shown up drunk or stoned, brought their mothers with them, fallen asleep, even gone to the bathroom and never returned.

Keeping your cell phone on during the interview qualifies as inappropriate behavior. Actually receiving or making a call ranks as bizarre.

Remember what the interviewer is thinking: If this is your *best* behavior, what (*gasp!*) do I have to look forward to?

Eat, drink, go home

Interviewing over lunch is a situation fraught with potential dangers. Slurping spaghetti or soup or wiping barbeque sauce off your tie is simply not attractive, even if you are. Ordering the most (or least) expensive item on the menu sends an unwelcome message. And what happens when the French dish you didn't understand but ordered anyway turns out to be something you can't even look at, let alone eat?

If you can't avoid a lunch interview (and I would certainly try), use your common sense. Order something light and reasonably priced—you're not *really* there for the food, are you? Remember what Mom told you—keep your elbows off the table, don't talk with your mouth full, and put your napkin in your lap. Don't drink alcohol (even wine), don't smoke (even if your host does), don't complain about the food (even if it was lousy), and don't forget that this is still an interview!

“And then I worked for...oops!”

Throughout this book, I will attempt to give you the ability to formulate answers that respond to what the interviewer *really* wants to know. The more responsive your answer is to the interviewer’s stated (or unstated) needs, the better. Since the best answers are “customized” to fit the company’s needs and your qualifications, it’s often difficult, if not impossible, to say that a particular answer is “right” or “wrong.” But there are answers that *are* clearly wrong:

- ☒ Any answer, no matter how articulate and specific, that fails to actually answer the question asked.
- ☒ Any answer that reveals you are clearly unqualified for the job.
- ☒ Any answer that provides information that doesn’t jibe with your resume and/or cover letter. (Don’t laugh. I, for one, have proudly given details about a job I left off my resume. The interviewer didn’t laugh either.)
- ☒ Any answer that reveals an inability to take responsibility for failures, weaknesses, poor decisions, and bad results or that tries to take full credit for a project to which others clearly contributed.

Although many interviewers will not consider inappropriate dress, poor grooming, or a bit too much candor an automatic reason for dismissal, an accumulation of two or more such actions may force even the most empathetic to question your suitability. (Some items, of course, such as dishonesty, may well lead to an immediate and heartfelt, “Thank you...please leave.”)

Do your best Sherlock Holmes

You also need to always gauge the interviewer’s response to what you’re saying, not just the answers you’ve given but the questions you’ve asked. Listen for verbal clues and watch the body language

that will often tell you how you're *really* doing. Again, you don't want to kill a potential job because you were overly aggressive on the interview.

If you know what to look for, you'll get extra clues from the body language of an interviewer:

Lack of **eye contact** or "shifting" eyes are usually seen as a sign of dishonesty or, at best, discomfort: "*Mr. Interviewer, are you planning any more layoffs?*" {squint, shift, squirm, blink...) "Uh, no, Jim. So, how about dem Bears?"}

Raised eyebrows indicate disbelief or even mild distain, along the lines of "*Oh, really?*"/"*You don't mean that, do you?*"/"*Gee, how'd you figure that out?*"/"*You don't actually expect me to buy that, do you?*"

A smile at the wrong time can be a sign of discomfort or an indication of a complete lack of appropriate social skills.

A tightly **clenched jaw, pursed lips**, or a **forced smile** may indicate stress, anything from a boss's reprimand to an early morning fight with a spouse. While the cause is clearly not your problem, you need to make sure the effect does not become a distraction during your interview.

"Closed" positions of the **hands and arms**—clenched fists, arms folded across the body—are *not* positive. They may also indicate boredom or negativity.

An interviewer who is **slumping** or leaning back in his chair may be showing disrespect, arrogance, or disinterest. It is surely a sign that you have to ask a question to get him back into the conversation.

If the interviewer keeps **nodding rapidly** for an extended period of time while you are asking or answering a question, it may be shorthand for "Be quiet and let me say something now."

Doodling, chewing on a pencil, scratching, playing with one's hands, moving things around on a desk, or acting distracted are typical **signs of nervousness**. Don't interpret it as anything *more* than nerves unless something else tips you off. Again, ask a question to get the focus back on you or, even better, a question

about *her*. Most people like to talk about themselves, especially a not-too-experienced interviewer who seems to be nervous about interviewing *you*, believe it or not!

But don't overanalyze the situation. An interviewer vigorously rubbing her eyes may just be telling you she didn't get enough sleep last night or is suffering from allergies.

Let's get ready to rumble

Most job candidates think of the interview in completely the wrong way—as an interrogation or police lineup. And they see themselves as suspects, not as the key prospects they really are.

This book will show you that you are, to a very large degree, *in charge of the interview*. It will convince you that you are there not only to sell the company on *you*, but to make sure that *you* are sold on *them*. It will give you the powerful questions that will work whatever your age, whatever your experience, whatever your goals.

Despite my sterling reputation with employment offices, the first edition of this book became a bestseller. In fact, it continues to sell, year after year. I don't pretend to know why it has done as well as it has, but I will hazard a guess: It is simple, straightforward, practical, and written in a welcoming and humorous style. (Okay, I suppose that counts as four and a half guesses.)

And it has clearly helped literally hundreds of thousands of candidates prepare for every type of interview and every style of interviewer. I'm pleased and proud that this new edition will help many more of you!

It will *not*, however, spend very much time preparing you for the questions you need to *ask* during the interview. Luckily for you, I've already written the companion book to this one—*101 Smart Questions to Ask on Your Interview*—whose sole purpose is to do exactly that. And I have just revised it as well. Using these two books together, you will be amply armed for any interview and any interviewer.

—Ron Fry

CHAPTER 1

The Interview Process

You'll probably have to go through more interviews than your predecessors for the same job, no matter what your level of expertise. Knowledge and experience still give you an inside edge. But these days, you'll need stamina, too. Your honesty, your intelligence, your mental health—even the toxicity of your blood—may be measured before you can be considered fully assessed.

You may also have to tiptoe through a minefield of different types of interview situations.

Do all you can to remain confident and flexible and ready with your answers. No matter what kind of interview you find yourself facing, this approach should carry you through with flying colors.

Let's take a brief tour of the interview circuit.

Is this the person to whom I am speaking?

Telephone screening is an effective tactic used by many interviewers, but some rely on the strategy as a *primary* means of qualifying candidates. For many of these interviewers, the in-person interview is little more than an opportunity to confirm what they feel they've already learned on the phone.

Interviewers who typically fall into this category are entrepreneurs, CEOs, high-level executives, and others short on time

and long on vision. Their guiding philosophy could be summed up as: “I have a personnel problem to solve, and I don’t plan to waste my valuable time talking in person to anybody but the very best.”

A telephone screener is also often the dominant interviewer at small- to mid-size companies where no formal Human Resources (or Personnel) department exists or where such a department has only recently been created. The primary objective of the telephone screener is to *identify reasons to remove you from active consideration before scheduling an in-person meeting.*

Among the common reasons for abrupt removal from the telephone screener’s short list: evidence that there’s a disparity between your resume and actual experience, poor verbal communication skills, lack of required technical skills.

If you are expecting a call (or calls) from telephone screeners, make sure family members know how to answer the phone. Hint: A sullen “Huh?” from your teenage son or brother is not the best way. And by all means avoid cutesy answering machine tapes: “*Hi!*” [giggle, giggle] “*We’re upstairs getting nasty!*” [giggle, snort] “*So leave a message, dude.*”

What could be better than answering questions from the comfort of your own home?

For starters, conducting a telephone interview has cost you two valuable tools you can employ during in-person interviews: eye contact and body language. You’re left with your skills, the facts on your resume, and your ability to communicate verbally.

Don’t be discouraged. Always project a positive image through your voice and your answers. Don’t overdo it, but don’t let the telephone be your undoing either. If your confidence is flagging, try smiling while you listen and speak. Sure, it might look silly—but it absolutely changes the tone and timbre of one’s voice. I also like to stand, even walk around, during a telephone interview. It seems to simultaneously calm me down and give me more energy.

You have a right to be prepared for any interview. Chances are the interviewer will call you to set a time for the telephone

interview. However, if she fires a question at you as soon as you answer the phone, there's nothing wrong with asking her to call back at a mutually agreeable time. You need to prepare your surroundings for a successful interview.

Next to the phone, you'll want to have a copy of your resume (which you've quickly reviewed), the cover letter you sent or emailed, a list of questions *you've* prepared for *them*, a notepad, your research materials on that company, and a glass of water. You will also want to have already answered nature's call—you surely don't want to excuse yourself in the middle of the interview—and placed a "Do Not Disturb" sign on your door, so family members or roommates don't interrupt. You never want to put the interviewer on hold for any reason.

Are you wheat or chaff?

Many personnel professionals fall into a different category: human screens. For them, interviewing is not simply a once-a-quarter or once-a-month event, but rather a key part of their daily job descriptions. They meet and interview many people, and are more likely than a telephone screener to consider an exceptional applicant for more than one opening within the organization.

A primary objective of a human screen is to *develop a strong group of candidates for managers* (the third kind of interviewer) *to interview in person*. To do this, of course, they must fend off many applicants and callers—a daunting task, because the human screen or the department in which he works is often the only contact provided in employment listings or posts.

Among the most common reasons for removal from a human screen's "hot" list are: lack of the formal or informal qualifications outlined in the organization's job description; sudden changes in hiring priorities and/or personnel requirements; poor performance during the in-person interview itself; and inaction due to uncertainty about your current status or contact information. That last reason is more common than you might imagine. Human screens are usually swamped with phone calls, emails, texts, resumes, and

unannounced visits from hopeful applicants. Despite their best efforts, they sometimes lose track of qualified people.

Human screens excel at separating the wheat from the chaff. Because they are exposed to a wide variety of candidates on a regular basis, they usually boast more face-to-face interviewing experience than members of the other two groups. They may be more likely to spot inconsistencies or outright lies on resumes, simply because they've seen so many over the years that they know when a candidate's credentials for a given position don't quite pass the "smell test."

And while interviews with a telephone screener or the hiring manager may be rushed because of their hectic schedules, human screens are often able to spend a comparatively long amount of time with particularly qualified candidates.

Not surprisingly, human screens often react with a puzzled look if others ask them to offer their "gut reaction" to a particular candidate. Because they're generally operating a step removed from the work itself, their assessments of candidates may be more black and white than gray: Either the candidate *has* three years of appropriate experience or she *doesn't*. Either he *has* been trained in computer design or he *hasn't*. Of course, this analysis may overlook important interpersonal issues.

Why you should *avoid* Human Resources

There aren't many career books that will advise you to make a beeline for the Human Resources department of a company you've targeted. In fact, most, if not all, will tell you to avoid it like the plague if at all possible. What have these poor (formerly personnel) people done to generate such animosity?

Nothing at all. I'm sure many of them are very nice people who do their jobs very well. The problem is that their jobs have little to do with actually getting *you* a job. They are *not* seeking candidates to interview and hire; they are trying to maximize the number they can *eliminate*. They can say no. And they do. A lot. But they *can't* say yes.

In addition to not being able to actually offer you anything more than coffee or tea (and maybe a personality or drug test), many Human Resources departments may have (surprisingly) little idea about what hiring managers really want in job applicants. The more technical or specialized the field, the truer this statement.

I know of a Human Resources director who recommended a candidate for whom English was a second—and not very *good*—language for the top editorial post on a major association magazine. Another passed along a candidate who scored 55 (out of 100) on a spelling test for a proofreading position. Still another recommended someone whose resume was filled with rather obvious or easily discovered lies for a vice president of finance position.

At many organizations, even hiring managers make it a point to bypass their Human Resources departments—bringing candidates in, interviewing them, and only *then* passing them along so Human Resources can take care of the paperwork.

Make it easier for the hiring manager to do just that. Make every effort to get in touch with him or her directly, preferably by dropping the name of a “friend of a friend.”

If you *have* to go through Human Resources (and sometimes despite your best efforts you *will*), you can’t ignore their power: They’re the only ones who can get you to the next level—the real interview. So it certainly would be sensible to make friends with them and use them in whatever way you can.

Nevertheless, you will probably not go wrong if you presume that the Human Resources person conducting a screening interview has no time to become your best friend, knows little or nothing about the job you so desperately want, and knows even less about the hiring manager.

Meet your new boss

The hiring manager may not be the person for whom you will be working, but probably will be. Even where others have strong

input, most companies still allow managers to hire their own staff, within certain parameters. He is probably a supervisor who has chosen (or is required) to shoehorn in-person interviews into his busy workdays. (In smaller companies especially, the president may be the ultimate decision maker, even if you won't be reporting to her.) A manager who has worked with a number of previous employees who held the same position will bring a unique perspective to the proceedings.

What's different about interviewing with the hiring manager as opposed to your time with a recruiter or headhunter or even Human Resources? This is the person you actually have to impress, the only one who can say those magic words, "You're hired. When can you start?"

The hiring manager's primary objective is to *evaluate your skills and measure your personal chemistry on a firsthand basis*. These interviewers want to get to know everything they can about the people with whom they'll be working closely. (As we've seen, the telephone screener may well be an entrepreneur who delegates heavily and interacts only intermittently with new hires. And the human screen usually has nothing to do with the day-to-day operation of the company.)

Common reasons for being dropped from a hiring manager's hot list include: lack of personal chemistry or rapport; poor performance during the interview itself; and her assessment that, although you're qualified and personable, you would simply not fit in well with the team.

Many hiring managers have a highly intuitive sense of who will (and won't) perform the job well and achieve a good "fit" with the rest of the work group. On the other hand, it sometimes comes as a surprise to applicants that excellent supervisors can be less than stellar interviewers. But a great many managers lack any formal training in the art of interviewing.

Of the three categories of interviewers, this is the group most likely to interpret the interview as an opportunity to "get

to know” more about you, rather than require specific answers to questions about your background, experience, outlook on work, and interpersonal skills.

The hiring interview

Your first interview with the person who will manage your prospective position is not likely to be a walk in the park. You may be stepping out of the range of the experience and interviewing talent of the Human Resources professional and into unknown territory.

And you could wander there for a while.

Why? Experienced interviewers are trained to stay in charge of the interview, not let it meander down some dead-end, non-productive track. There is a level of predictability to the way they conduct interviews, even if they utilize different techniques.

On the other hand, the hiring manager is sure to lack some or all of the screening interviewer’s knowledge, experience, and skill, making him an unpredictable animal.

Foiling the inept interviewer

A majority of corporate managers don’t know what it takes to hire the right candidate. Few of them have had formal training in conducting interviews of any kind. To make things worse, most managers feel slightly less comfortable conducting the interview than the nervous candidate sitting across their desks from them!

A manager might decide you are not the right person for the job, without ever realizing that the questions he asked were so ambiguous, so off the mark, that even the perfect candidate could not have stumbled on the “right” answers. No one monitors the performance of the interviewer. And the candidate cannot be a mind reader. So more often than is necessary, otherwise perfectly qualified candidates walk out the door for good...simply because *the manager failed at the interview!*

But that doesn't have to happen to you. You can—and should—be prepared to put your best foot forward, no matter what the experience or expertise of the manager interviewing you.

You'll be a step ahead of the game (and the other candidates) if you realize at the outset that the interviewer is after more than just facts about your skills and background. He is waiting for something more elusive to hit him, something he may not even be able to articulate: He wants to feel that, somehow, you "fit" the organization or department.

Knowing what you're up against is half the battle. Rather than sit back passively and hope for the best, you can help the unskilled interviewer focus on how your unique skills can directly benefit—fit—the department or organization by citing a number of specific examples.

What other unusual problems could you face during an interview?

Yada, yada, yada

Dwayne thinks he's a pretty good interviewer. He has a list of 15 questions he asks every candidate—same questions, same order, every time. He takes notes on their answers and asks an occasional follow-up question. He gives them a chance to ask questions. He's friendly, humorous, and excited about working at Netcorp.com...as he tells every candidate...in detail...for *hours*. Then he wonders why so many candidates decline additional interviews and only a small fraction of his hires pan out.

I've never really understood the interviewer who thinks telling the story of his or her life is pertinent. Why do some interviewers do it? Partly nervousness, partly inexperience, but mostly because they have the mistaken notion they have to sell *you* on the company, rather than the other way around. There *are* occasions when this *may* be necessary—periods of low unemployment, a glut of particular jobs and a dearth of qualified candidates, a candidate who's so desirable the interviewer feels, perhaps correctly, that he or she has to outsell and outbid the competition.

Under most circumstances, *you* should be expected to carry the conversational load, while the interviewer sits back and decides if he or she is ready to buy what you're selling.

Is it to your benefit to find yourself seated before Mr. Monologue? You might think so. After all, while he's waxing poetic about the new cafeteria, you don't have to worry about inserting your other foot in your mouth. No explaining that last firing or why you've had four jobs in three months. Nope, just sit back, relax, and try to stay awake.

But I don't believe Mr. M. is doing you any favors. Someone who monopolizes the conversation doesn't give you the opportunity *you* need to "strut your stuff." You may want to avoid leaving a bad impression, but I doubt you want to leave *no* impression at all. As long as you follow the advice in this book and, especially, this chapter, you should welcome the savvy interviewer who asks the open-ended, probing questions *he* needs to identify the right person for the job—the same questions *you* need to convince him it's *you*.

Let's all get stoned

Yes, interviewers have been known to be drunk, stoned, or otherwise incapacitated. Some have spent virtually the entire time allotted to a candidate speaking on the phone or browsing email. Others have gone off on tirades about interoffice disputes or turf wars.

If the interviewer treats you with such apparent indifference or disrespect before you're even hired, how do you expect him to act once you *are* hired?

There *is* a boss out there willing to treat you with the same respect she would expect from you—it's just not this one. Move on.

A pproach and be seated

There are a number of styles and guiding philosophies when it comes to person-to-person interviews. The overall purpose, of course, is to screen you out if you lack the aptitudes (and attitudes) the company is looking for.

Although experienced interviewers may use more than one strategy, it's essential to know which mode you're in at any given point—and what to do about it. Here's a summary of the methods and objectives of the most common approaches.

The behavioral interview

Your conversations with the interviewer will focus almost exclusively on your past experience as he tries to learn more about how you have already behaved in a variety of on-the-job situations. Then he will use this information to extrapolate your future reactions on the job.

How did you handle yourself in some really tight spots? What kinds of on-the-job disasters have you survived? Did you do the right thing? What were the repercussions of your decisions?

Be careful what you say. Every situation you faced was unique in its own way, so be sure the interviewer understands the specific limitations you had to deal with. Did you lack adequate staff? Support from management? Up-to-date software? If you made the mistake of plunging in too quickly, say so and admit that you've learned to think things through. Explain what you'd do differently the next time around.

Remember: Those interviewers using a behavioral interview are trying to ensure you can really walk the walk, not just talk the talk. So leave out the generalizations and philosophizing and don't get lost in the details. In other words, just tell them the problem you faced, the action you took, and the results you achieved, without exaggeration.

Which is why composing three, four, or more "stories"—actual experiences that illustrate your most important skills or qualifications—is important. Just make sure to structure them in "Problem-Solution-Action" format.

The competency-based interview

You will know you are facing a competency-based interview by the way the questions are structured. Instead of open-ended

questions, which give you virtually carte blanche to choose examples and target your answer the way *you* want to, you will face more specific questions, such as:

Tell me about the last time you missed a deadline.

Tell me about your most recent project that included a forensic audit.

Describe what you did the last time your boss rejected one of your ideas.

Give me a recent example of how you led a team to successfully complete a challenging task.

Describe a situation where you had to deal with a difficult client (customer, employee, team member).

How did you diffuse the situation?

Such questions are designed to measure your level of individual responsibility, decisiveness, independence, ambition, and initiative; analytical skills; “people” skills; and management and leadership skills, including your ability to plan, strategize, motivate, implement, and delegate.

Specific industries, companies, or departments will require specific skills or competencies, what they consider the key characteristics it takes to be successful in a particular position. A bank’s required competencies may range from auditing to securities law, from credit analysis to risk management. A large manufacturer may desire someone with skills in cost containment, inventory control, production processes, safety training, or other such areas.

A well-prepared interviewer will have a list of questions designed to elicit specific and detailed examples to prove you can do exactly what her company requires. And you should have identified the particular skills and abilities—your competencies—you know are required and have examples at the ready. If you lack a particular attribute, be prepared to explain why you are unable to cite a specific example that touts that competency.

(If you had been properly screened, of course, your lack of such a competency would have eliminated you from consideration right from the start.)

There is more information on how to handle competency-based questions in Chapter 6. For an even more detailed explanation of how to prepare for this kind of interview, I suggest Robin Kessler's book, *Competency-based Interviews*.

The team interview

Today's organizational hierarchies are becoming flatter. That means that people at every level of a company are more likely to become involved in a variety of projects and tasks, including interviewing *you*.

The team interview can range from a pleasant conversation to a torturous interrogation. Typically, you will meet with a group, or "team," of interviewers around a table in a conference room. They may be members of your prospective department or a cross section of employees from throughout the company. (A slightly less stressful variation is the "tag team" approach, in which a single questioner exits and is followed by a different questioner a few minutes [or questions] later.) Rarely will you be informed beforehand to expect a team interview.

The hiring manager or someone from Human Resources may chair an orderly session of question-and-answer—or turn the group loose to shoot questions at you like a firing squad. When it's all over, you'll have to survive the assessment of every member of the group.

Some hiring managers will consult with the group after the interview for an evaluation of your performance. Others determine their decision using group consensus. The good news is that you don't have to worry that the subjective opinion of just one person will determine your shot at the job. If one member of the group thinks you lacked confidence or came across as arrogant, others in the group may disagree. The interviewer who leveled the criticism will have to defend her opinion to the satisfaction of the group—or be shot down herself.

A group of people is also more likely (but not guaranteed) to ask you a broader range of questions that may uncover and underline your skills and expertise. Just take your time and treat every member of the team with the same respect and deference you would the hiring manager.

If you face a series of separate interrogations with a variety of interviewers and are asked many of the same questions, be sure to vary your answers. Cite different projects, experiences, successes, even failures. Otherwise, when they meet to compare notes, you'll come off as a "Johnny One Note."

The case (situational, hypothetical) interview

Our salespeople haven't met quota for the last three quarters.

We overcharged one of our biggest customers, who is now threatening to give all her business to our biggest competitor.

You caught your boss grossly padding his expense account.

What would you do?

Hypothetical ("what if...?") questions are the basis of a case or situational interview, in which the interviewer conjures up a series of situations, real or imaginary, in order to ascertain whether you have the resourcefulness, logic, creativity, and ability to think under pressure. Why apply such pressure? Even the best-prepared candidates can't prepare for *these* questions! If you are seeking a position at a consulting company, law firm or a counseling organization, you should expect to confront this type of interview.

What most interviewers want to see is a combination of real-world experience, inspired creativity, and the willingness to acknowledge when more information or assistance is in order. (Many interviewers will pose hypothetical questions designed to

smoke out people who find it difficult to reach out to other team members for help.) They want to understand how you approach a problem, the framework within which you seek a solution, and the thought process you utilize.

Situational interview questions can come in any shape or style. If you have a detailed description of the job you're applying for, use your imagination to try to anticipate a number of situations that might come up. You will have to devote a great deal of thought to each of these questions. If you find yourself caught in this snare, stay calm and use the homework you have done on your personal inventory to untangle yourself.

Here are some tips for confronting a case interview:

- ☒ Admit that a tough situation would make you nervous.
You might even panic momentarily. No interviewer is looking for a candidate bent on plunging right in, then flailing about without considering consequences or alternatives. Nervousness begets the adrenaline that often fuels creative strategies.
- ☒ Take a moment to think before you answer. This shows you are not likely to plunge into any situation with a hotheaded response. Rather, you are taking the time to weigh the alternatives and choose the best course of action. The more complicated the problem, the more time you're *expected* to take.
- ☒ Take notes on the problem that's presented. Ask questions about the details. Be aware that not all information is pertinent to the solution. (That wily interviewer!)
- ☒ Avoid generalizations. The interviewer will want to hear concrete steps that will lead to a solution, not your philosophy of how to approach the problem.
- ☒ Don't get lost in the details. The interviewer wants to see how you approach the broad problem, so set your sights on the most important factors.

- ☒ Ask questions.
- ☒ Share your thoughts—out loud. That’s really what the interviewer wants to hear.
- ☒ There’s nothing wrong with a creative approach, but it should always be set within a logical framework. No matter what the interview technique, quash the temptation to exaggerate or downright fabricate a response.
- ☒ Plan your answers to a number of different situations ahead of time. Assume that some of these questions will be about areas of knowledge and skill you have yet to develop, so learn as much as you can about what you don’t know. And have a strategy for finding the information or resources you currently lack.
- ☒ Ask questions!

While case interviews are geared to upper-echelon candidates, candidates for many different kinds of jobs may be given the opportunity to walk the walk—to show what they can actually do on the job: Clerks may be given typing or filing tests; copy editors given minutes to edit a magazine article or book chapter; a salesperson may be asked to telephone and sell a prospect; and a computer programmer may be required to create some code. The more technical the job, the more likely an interviewer will not simply “take you at your word” that you are capable of doing it.

The stress interview

Formal qualifications are important, but in some jobs, the emotional demands, sudden emergencies, and breakneck pace of work can be downright intimidating—not once in a while, but every day. Even a candidate who knows all the technical moves may wilt under the glare of an etiquette-challenged boss or crumble when inheriting a surrealistically compressed deadline.

When you’re interviewing for such a position—whether you’re seeking a job as a commodities trader, air traffic controller, or

prison guard—an interviewer may feel it's almost meaningless to determine if you are capable of performing the job under the *best* conditions. He may well try to assess how you will do under the very *worst* conditions. And that's where the stress interview comes in.

Anyone who's been through one of these never forgets it. A common enough question in this setting could sound gruff or rude, which is exactly how it's supposed to sound. Rather than a pleasant, "*So, tell me about yourself,*" a stress interviewer may snarl (literally), "*So, why the hell should I hire you for anything?*"

It's possible that the company is using this type of interview as a "covert" personality test. It may even be conducted by a psychologist or other professional who is *trying* to get you angry. Here are some techniques an interviewer may use:

- ☒ He ridicules everything you say and questions why you're even interviewing at his company.
- ☒ He says nothing when you walk into the room...and for five minutes afterward...then just stares at you after you answer his first question.
- ☒ She keeps you waiting past the scheduled time and then keeps looking at her watch as you answer questions.
- ☒ She stares out the window and seems to be completely uninterested in everything you have to say.
- ☒ He challenges every answer, disagrees with every opinion, and interrupts you at every turn.
- ☒ He doesn't introduce himself when you walk in, just hits you with a tough question.
- ☒ She takes phone calls, works on her computer, and/or eats lunch as you interview.
- ☒ You may be seated in a broken chair, directly in front of a high-speed fan, or next to an open window...in the dead of winter.

How do you deal with this kind of manufactured stress?

- ☒ *Never let them see you sweat.* No matter how stressful the situation, stay calm. When the interviewer finishes asking a question, take a few seconds to compose yourself and then, and only then, answer.
- ☒ *Recognize the situation for what it is.* It's nothing more than an artificial scenario designed to see how you react under pressure. The interviewer (probably) has nothing against you personally. *It's just a game*, though not a pleasant one for you.
- ☒ *Don't become despondent.* It's easy to think that the interviewer has taken a strong dislike to you and that your chances for completing the interview process are nil. That's not the case. The stress interview is designed to see if you will become depressed, hostile, or flustered when the going gets tough.
- ☒ *Watch your tone of voice.* It's easy to become sarcastic during a stress interview, especially if you don't realize what the interviewer is up to.

If you are subjected to a stress interview, you may well question seeking a job with a company that utilizes such techniques. If they think insulting and belittling you during the interview is acceptable, what's their management philosophy—gruel at nine, thumbscrews at two?

Don't confuse a stress interview with a *negative* interview. In the latter, the interviewer merely highlights the (supposedly) negative aspects of the job at every opportunity. He may even make some up: *"Would you have any problem cleaning the toilets every Saturday morning?"* or *"Is three hours of daily overtime a problem for you?"*

The brainteaser interview

Microsoft interviewers have famously been known to ask, "How would you move Mount Fuji?" The list of questions designed to assess how creatively you approach a problem—as

opposed to the logical approach case interviews are designed to highlight—are virtually unlimited:

- ☒ How many people still smoke in Finland?
- ☒ How many people surf in California at least once a month?
- ☒ How many acres of ranchland are there in Mexico?
- ☒ How many accountants are there in New York State?
- ☒ How would you build a better mousetrap?

Most of the same tips I gave you when approaching a case interview are still pertinent—take your time, ask pertinent questions, then talk through the approach you would take to answer the question. Make whatever statistical assumptions you need to make—the interviewer doesn’t care if you know the population of Finland, just how you would come up with an answer (which may have no relation to reality). She may not have any idea of the “correct” answer to such a question herself.

Don’t wear flip flops at a buttoned-down firm

Birds of a feather *do* flock together. And different companies tend to attract particular “species” of employees. A company’s physical environment, management attitude and policies, and the personality of the “birds” that predominate comprise its corporate culture. Is it a “loose” atmosphere with jean-clad creative types running amok? Or a buttoned-down, blue-suited autocracy with a long list of rules to follow during timed coffee breaks?

Some companies are dominated by a single personality—a still-active founder or an executive who has exerted a strong, long-lasting influence on policies and style. Think Steve Jobs at Apple, Bill Gates at Microsoft, or Larry Ellison at Oracle. While there are exceptions, such companies tend to be “closely held” fiefdoms whose every level reflects the “cult of personality.” If

that personality is a despot, benign or otherwise, even a decentralized management structure won't create a company everyone wants to work for.

Family-owned companies often pose similar problems. Your chances to make decisions and take responsibility may be tied to your last name. Barely competent family members may wind up with cushy jobs and high pay, while you and other "outsiders" do all the work. While many such firms are privately held, even publicly traded companies in which family members hold a significant block of stock (like Ford, Walton, or DuPont) may sometimes err on the side of nepotism.

Many larger, more decentralized companies will spread decision-making power and opportunities for advancement somewhat more evenly. However, such companies often encourage competition among workers rather than focusing their collective energies on competing organizations.

If managers regularly spend half their time politicking or writing self-serving memos to the boss, it's a survival-of-the-fittest (or survival-of-the-best-memo-writer) atmosphere. People attuned to corporate infighting might relish such a company; those who just want to do their jobs and be rewarded for the work they do will find it an unfriendly place to work.

Some companies are bursting with energy; their offices reverberate with a steady hum of activity. Such a high-key environment is right for aggressive go-getters who are unafraid of such a fast pace and more than ready, even eager, to jump into the fray. Other workplaces are calmer, quiet, almost studious in nature. Such low-key firms are probably better choices for those of you with more laid-back personalities.

While a high-energy or low-key atmosphere says little about a particular company's chances for success, it may have a lot to do with your own on-the-job performance, success, and happiness. Matching dissimilar corporate and individual personalities usually results in a new job search.

If you run across a company that seems to give off no signals at all, beware! This is usually the directionless organization, one that lacks both an agenda and dynamic leadership. Without such leadership, you can be certain that this organization will founder, usually when things start going wrong and the timely implementation of company-wide decisions is required.

The more you know about the companies you're considering, the better off you'll be.

D on't believe everything you read

And don't believe everything company representatives tell you. Just as employees have been known to "forget" a job when writing their resume and slightly exaggerate their responsibilities at others, employers have been known to tell attractive candidates what *they* want to hear. Except, unfortunately, for the one Neanderthal who just happens to be...your prospective boss.

Companies sometimes consciously misstate job requirements so as to attract, they believe, the "higher end" of the applicant pool.

If their gut feeling is that the job requires two years of experience, they may say three are required, expecting a higher grade of queries. They may also believe that the few people who do contact them with only two years of experience will likely be more motivated than the average applicant.

This is called an "enhanced excluder," a means of setting the bar *slightly* higher than they need to, knowing they can always ignore the standards they've set for the right candidate. Some companies use this method almost as a pre-interviewing technique, a way to see which applicants try to get around the announced requirements...and how compelling a case they can make for themselves.

If candidates absolutely, positively, *have* to have particular technical expertise, that requirement should be prominently, specifically, and emphatically featured in the job posting. This sounds self-evident, but you'd be surprised at the number of

hiring managers I've spoken to who *don't* specify particular skills they're seeking...and then complain about the experience levels of the candidates they interview. Ambiguous requirements like "good computer skills" will never help an employer attract the skilled people it is seeking. And they certainly won't help *you* figure out whether you're qualified for the position!

Are you overqualified?

This, of course, is a question you really should ask *yourself* before you go on *any* interview. It's essential to admit—at least to yourself—if you *are* seriously overqualified for a position. Many of you might think it's easier to get a job beneath your qualifications—to work as an accounting assistant when you've been a full-charge bookkeeper, to be a receptionist when you've been an office manager, to go back to sales after rising to sales manager.

It isn't. You may have more qualifications than the job requires, but you may no longer have the *specific* qualifications it *demands*. While you may have overseen a 20-person sales force and be known far and wide as an ace motivator, you will have trouble getting a job selling copy machines. Why? Because they don't *care* about your management and motivational credentials. Nor do they need them. They want to know how many copy machines you're capable of selling a month. And they *do* care that you've never sold one!

Employers may question the motivation of someone willing to "do almost anything." Will such an employee just show up, do what's asked but nothing more? What about someone willing to work "for almost nothing"? To quote another cliché: You get what you pay for. And that's exactly what "almost nothing" is worth.

Especially in lower-level jobs, employers want people happy to be doing what they were hired to do, not constantly pointing out that they could do the boss's job better than he could. The office manager wants to treat the receptionist as a receptionist, not someone who has been an office manager and may, indeed, know more than he does about running an office. Just as some

managers worry about hiring underlings who they fear may one day outshine them, many people worry about hiring people for low-level jobs who have already done what their boss is doing. It's disconcerting and, to many, highly threatening.

Is it okay to take notes?

Since it is okay for the interviewer to take notes, I believe it is fine, even encouraged, for you to do so.

Why? There are a few good reasons:

You should *walk in* with notes—the questions you intend to ask, specific points you want to remember, research data you want to incorporate in an answer or question. Getting the interviewer used to your “consulting my notes” makes it a lot easier to ask permission to take notes during the interview itself. But be careful. You don’t want to appear to be constantly referring to your notes every time the interviewer asks a question: “*Where did you go to college, Jim?*” “*Uh, just a minute, let me consult my notes.*”

You can’t possibly remember everything...no matter how good your memory. And yet you certainly want to remember what *you* said, what *he* said, what seemed *right*, what felt *wrong*, titles, numbers...all the myriad things that went on during the interview. As long as you ask permission first, I believe taking notes is an absolute requirement.

Third, it is essential for your follow-up. I encourage you to write brief individual notes or emails to *every* person you meet on an interview, from the receptionist to the person who got your coffee, and even more targeted and longer letters or emails to all the people with whom you actually interviewed. How can you be sure of the correct spelling of that many names, titles, and so on without good notes? How can you make sure to answer (again) the objection you know may be the key thing obstructing your hiring? How can you schmooze the colleague who seemed a little cold to your candidacy, perhaps jealous because *she* wanted (or expected) your job?

And last, you may need to use your notes in the interview itself—jotting down a question you don't want to forget (while the interviewer drones on), a point you want to raise, an example you want to emphasize. This will allow you to bring up a point when it's the right time, which may be quite awhile down the road, even at the very end of the interview.

Personally, I wouldn't want anything but an attractive notebook that is extracted from an equally professional looking briefcase, along with a quality pen (not a disposable). Most recent graduates might be more comfortable toting an iPad or other tablet, which I think most interviewers would now find acceptable.

Many if not most interviewers will interpret your note taking as a sign of professionalism and seriousness, as long as you don't keep your nose buried in your notebook or iPad the entire time.

Whatever you use, remember, the point of the interview is to listen, then talk. Write as little as you need. And if you aren't very good at note taking and listening at the same time (or taking notes while retaining eye contact), practice. No one wants to talk to your forehead.

D on't run away...yet

We've all been there—an interview that is obviously not working. Maybe it's the interviewer, maybe it's you, maybe it's the weather, maybe it's a cruel joke by the universe. In any event, the interview is clearly not going well and you are sorely tempted to get up, thank the interviewer, and run, not walk, to the safety of your bedroom.

Fight the impulse to flee. Excuse yourself, perhaps for a bathroom break. (Hey, I know it's not usually done, but right now we're trying to salvage an interview that's going down in flames.) Compose yourself. Give yourself a pep talk. Then go back in there and sell yourself.

How to “Ace” Any Interview

Relax! Think of it as an adventure (as opposed to a tribunal). Try to enjoy yourself. Imagine that the interviewer is a sports star, famous author, or movie celebrity you’ve always admired.

Keep smiling. No, not a fake grin, just maintain a pleasant, relaxed smile that is, hopefully, a by-product of your involvement in an interesting conversation. Put yourself in the interviewer’s place. Wouldn’t *you* want to work with such an agreeable person?

Be enthusiastic. About the position, your accomplishments, and what you know about the company. But don’t gush—if you’re not genuinely enthusiastic, you’ll come across as a phony.

Be honest. Lying about even the smallest or least important details could be grounds for immediate departure.

Make lots of eye contact. Have you ever known someone who wouldn’t look you in the eye? After a while, you probably started to wonder what that person had to hide. You don’t want your interviewer wondering anything of the sort. So meet his or her eyes while you’re shaking hands, then frequently throughout the interview. But don’t stare—unrelenting eye contact is worse than none at all.

Stay positive. As we’ll see when we discuss questions about your previous jobs, you must learn to put a positive spin on *everything*, but especially loaded issues, such as your reason for leaving a job, troubled relations with your superiors, or the lack of required qualifications.

Don’t let an unskilled interviewer trip you up. Make sure the preparation you’ve spent so much time on comes shining through, especially when a manager throws you a curve. If need be, your advance preparation should give you the power to take control of the interview, allowing you to emphasize the many ways in which you will benefit the prospective employer.

| *The Interview Process*

You may actually be completely wrong for the job, which is why the interview is not going well. But that doesn't mean there aren't other jobs at that company or jobs at other companies the interviewer knows. So hang in there a little longer.

And if you are rejected despite your best efforts, you may learn something—especially if you ask—that will improve your interviewing skills or performance.

Should you reject an actual offer out of hand because you've decided the job, company, or boss is completely wrong? I wouldn't. Take at least a night to think about any offer away from the stresses of the interview process. Your thinking may change.

CHAPTER 2

Who Are You?

The success or failure of many interviews will hinge on your ability to clearly define who you are, what you know, and what you can do. The interviewing process is a kind of sale. In this case, *you* are the product—and the salesperson. If you show up unprepared to talk about your unique features and benefits, you're not likely to motivate an interviewer to "buy."

The sad fact is that many job candidates *are* unprepared to talk about themselves. You may have produced a gorgeous resume and cover letter. You may be wearing the perfect clothes on the day of the interview. But if you can't convince the interviewer—face to face—that *you* are the right person for the job, you aren't likely to make the sale.

Too many candidates hesitate after the first open-ended question, then stumble and stutter their way through a disjointed litany of resume "sound bites." Other interviewees recite canned replies that only highlight their memory skills.

I am assuming that, like most people, you are a complex product made up of a unique blend of abilities, skills, and personal qualities and shaped by your own personal and professional history. Believe me, the time you spend outlining the details of your own life will pay off in interviews, and, ultimately, job offers. This chapter will guide you through the process.

What you should know about you

There are two steps you need to undertake. The first is to imitate the FBI and build a complete “dossier,” a factual record of everything you have done and accomplished in your life and career.

Your work experience

Start by preparing a separate sheet of paper or file for every full-time and part-time job you have ever held, no matter how short the tenure. (Yes, even summer jobs are important here. They demonstrate resourcefulness, responsibility, and initiative—that you were already developing a sense of independence while you were still living at home.) Whether you choose to include some, all, or none of these short-term jobs on your resume or to discuss them during your interview is a decision you will make later. For now, write down everything about *every* job. For each employer, include:

- ☒ Name, address, telephone number, and email address.
- ☒ The names of all of your supervisors and, whenever possible, where they can be reached.
- ☒ Letters of recommendation (especially if they *can't* be reached).
- ☒ The exact dates (month and year) you were employed.

For each job, include:

- ☒ Specific duties and responsibilities.
- ☒ Supervisory experience, noting the number of people you managed.
- ☒ Specific skills required for the job.
- ☒ Key accomplishments.
- ☒ Dates you received promotions.
- ☒ Any awards, honors, or special recognition you received.

For each part-time job, also include the number of hours you worked per week.

You don't need to write a *book* on each job, but do provide *specific data* (volume of work handled, problems solved, dollars saved) to paint a *detailed* picture of your abilities and accomplishments. These hard facts will add a powerful punch to your interview presentation.

Volunteer and internship experience

Whether you were paid as a volunteer or intern is unimportant. What is important is what you learned and accomplished in any such position. So, again, create a detailed record of your volunteer pursuits or internships, similar to those you just completed for each job you held. For each company or organization for which you volunteered or interned, include:

- Name, address, telephone number, and email address.
- Name of your supervisor or the director of the organization.
- Letter(s) of recommendation.
- Exact dates (month and year) of your involvement with the organization.

For each volunteer experience or internship, include:

- Approximate number of hours devoted to the activity each month.
- Specific duties and responsibilities.
- Skills required.
- Major accomplishments.
- Awards, honors, or special recognition you received.

Your educational achievements

For each school you have attended, whatever its level, include its name, address, and phone number; years attended; major area of study; important (relevant) courses; honors; and GPA and/or class rank if pertinent or available. Which courses did you enjoy most? Which least? Which were your strongest subjects? Which were your weakest?

If you're a recent college graduate or are still in college, you don't need to rehash your high school experiences. If you have a graduate degree or are a graduate student, however, you should list both graduate and undergraduate course work. If you're still in school and graduation is more than a year away, indicate the number of credits you've earned through the most recent semester completed.

Other activities, honors, and skills

I'm always interested in—and impressed by—candidates who talk about books they've read and activities they've enjoyed. So make a list of all the sports, clubs, and other activities in which you've participated, inside or outside of school. For each activity, club or group, include:

- ☒ Name and purpose.
- ☒ Offices you held; special committees you formed, chaired, or participated in; or specific positions you played.
- ☒ Duties and responsibilities of each role.
- ☒ Key accomplishments.
- ☒ Awards or honors you received.

I would separately list all the awards and honors you've received from school(s), community groups, church groups, clubs, and so on. You may include awards from prestigious high schools (prep or professional schools) even if you're in graduate school or long out of college.

Even if you're not applying for a job in the international arena, your ability to read, write, and/or speak additional languages can make you invaluable to employers in an increasing number of research and educational institutions and multinational companies. One year of college Russian won't cut it. But if you spent a year studying in Moscow—and can carry on a conversation like a native—by all means write it down.

Employers love veterans

Many employers are impressed by the maturity of candidates who have served in the armed forces—they consider military service excellent management training for many civilian jobs. So if you've served in the armed forces, even for a short time, make sure you can discuss your experiences and how they support your professional aspirations. Be sure to include:

- ☒ Final rank awarded.
- ☒ Duties and responsibilities.
- ☒ Citations and awards.
- ☒ Details on specific training and/or any special schooling.
- ☒ Special skills developed.
- ☒ Key accomplishments.

And now for something completely different

Recording and organizing all of this factual information about yourself is just the first step in “getting to know you.” It is also important to ask yourself some of the questions that an interviewer may well ask you, not to prepare a memorized answer but to get a better understanding of your own personality. In fact, you can count on most interviewers asking some or even most of these questions in order to figure out who you are. It would be nice if you figured that out first!

Answering these questions should enable you to define both short- and long-term goals—personal, professional, and financial—and could even help you develop a road map to reach those dreams. Additionally, it will help you assess the fit between a company’s culture, the job, the boss...and *you*. Unless you do this kind of analysis, on what basis will you evaluate job offers? As the old saying goes, if you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.

So let's do a few lists to help you assess who you are, what's important to you, and what this analysis should tell you about the kind of company you want to work for. You'll quickly see that this is a far more detailed and completely different assessment than you were advised to do when collecting data for your resume.

Write down your answers to the following questions, many of which you should expect an interviewer to ask:

Questions about you as a person

- Who are you? Describe your personality.
- What are your values? What is important to you?
- Which achievements did you enjoy most? Which are you proudest of? Be ready to tell the interviewer how these accomplishments relate to the position at hand.
- What in your personal life causes you the most stress (relationships, money, time constraints, and so on)? What gives you the most pleasure?
- What mistakes have you made? Why did they occur? What have you learned from them? What have you done to keep similar things from occurring again?
- How well do you interact with authority figures—bosses, teachers, parents? Be ready to furnish specific examples.
- What are your favorite games and sports? Are you overly competitive? Do you give up too easily? Are you a good loser or a bad winner? Do you rise to a challenge or back away from it?
- What kinds of people are your friends? Do you associate only with people who are like you? Do you enjoy differences in others—or merely tolerate them? What are some things that have caused you to end friendships? What does this say about you?
- If you were to ask a group of friends and acquaintances to describe you, what adjectives would they use? List

all of them—the good and the bad. Why would people describe you this way? Are there specific behaviors, skills, achievements, or failures that seem to identify you in the eyes of others? What are they?

Questions about you as a professional

- What kinds of people do you like working with? What kinds do you dislike working with?
- What are your goals and aspirations?
- What would it take to transform yourself into someone who's passionate about every workday?
- What *are* your passions?
- How can you make yourself more marketable in today's competitive job market?
- What are your major professional accomplishments? What competencies are your strongest calling cards?
- What are your most notable failures? What did you learn from each?
- What would your last boss say about your work ethic? What would your coworkers say about you? Your subordinates?
- What specific things do you require in the job you're seeking—adventure, glamour, a bigger office, more money?

Your strengths, abilities, and values

The following list of descriptive adjectives (on page 52) should help you further define who you are, both professionally and personally. Circle those words or phrases that you believe describe you, and keep them in mind when assessing any job offer or any company and its attendant culture.

These are all positive attributes, of one kind or another, to one company or another. After you've circled all of those you believe best describe you, ask your friends if they agree with your assessment—we aren't always the best judges of our own characters, are we?

101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions |

Active	Goal-oriented	Loves animals
Active in sports	Good delegating skills	Loves children
Active reader	Good leadership skills	Loyal
Active volunteer	Good listening skills	Makes friends easily
Adaptable	Good mathematical skills	Moral
Adventurous	Good negotiating skills	Musical
Ambitious	Good presentation skills	Neat
Artistic	Good public speaking skills	Obsessive
Attractive	Good sense of humor	Organized
Brave/heroic	Good team-building skills	Passionate
Calm	Good time management skills	Passive
Communicative	Good under pressure	Patient
Computer literate	Good written communicator	Perfectionist
Confident	Graceful	Performer
Courteous	Handles stress well	Physically strong
Creative	Hard-working	Precise
Decisive	High energy	Professional
Dedicated	Highly educated (level?)	Quick-thinking
Detail-oriented	Honest	Reacts well to authority
Directed	Introverted	Religious
Dynamic	Learns from mistakes	Responsible
Economical	Left-brained	Right-brained
Efficient	Like people	Risk averse
Empathetic	Likes to travel	Risk taker
Ethical	Logical	Sales personality
Excellent analytical skills		Self-motivated
Excellent math skills		Sports fan
Experienced		Strong-willed
Extroverted		Supportive of others
Flexible		Tenacious
Fluent in other languages		Welcomes change
Focused		Well-groomed

What's the point?

The better you know yourself, the better you can sell yourself to a prospective employer when you're on the spot in an interview. From everything you've written down, you can now compile a list of your best features under the following headings:

- ☒ My strongest skills.
- ☒ My greatest areas of knowledge.
- ☒ My greatest personality strengths.
- ☒ The things I do best.
- ☒ My key accomplishments.

Then you can transform them into benefits for your prospective company.

But you must also be ready to admit your shortcomings and what you are already doing about them. By answering some tough questions about the mistakes you have made—and the less-than-positive feedback you've gotten—you can locate areas that need improvement. Do you need to develop new skills? Improve your relations with those in authority? If you have been thorough and brutally honest (and it may feel brutal!), you may find out things about yourself that you never knew.

The more time and effort you invest in answering questions like these—while you have a cool head—the less you'll sweat once you're in the interviewer's hot seat. It's up to you.

The importance of goals

I've mentioned the importance of goals already. Now it's time to emphasize them. Short- and long-term goal setting must become a habit. Once a year, reevaluate not just the progress you're making toward your long-term goals, but whether they need to be tweaked, heavily modified, or even changed completely. Life is not static. Neither are your goals—they will (and should) change with circumstances, age, position, etc.

Remember that setting goals will not only help you define where you want to go, but what you need to know and do to get there. If you have decided that you eventually want to be Chief Financial Officer of a large corporation, you may well need an MBA or similar graduate degree. When do you plan to get it? Full or part time? If the latter, will the company allow a modified schedule so you can go to school while you work? Is there a tuition reimbursement plan? Is there already a program in place to which you can apply?

It's equally important to make your goals realistic. There is nothing wrong with reaching for the stars, providing you have the right-size stepstool. If you aren't a high school graduate, you *can* aspire to becoming chairman of IBM, but your short-term goals better include some serious additional education! If you want to be a prize-winning author, passing a creative writing class might be a nice first step. Goals are realistic if there is a clear-cut path that you can follow to reach them. It may be a hard and long road, but if you truly believe you can actually reach its end with sufficient effort, then the goal is realistic.

Even if a goal is completely *unrealistic*, I would not necessarily counsel you to drop it. First of all, who's to say it really *is* unrealistic? You may have little or no natural writing ability and couldn't draw a straight line if your life depended on it. Would I be willing to bet you probably *won't* become the creative director of one of the world's top three advertising agencies? Well, I'm a betting man, so I probably *would* take that bet. But the human spirit is an amazing thing. Who says with the right education, jobs, and practice that your goal, though seemingly unrealistic, couldn't eventually be realized? Even if it weren't, the additional educational and dedication certainly wouldn't hurt your career prospects!

What if the goal is realistic but you are simply unwilling or unable to do what's necessary to reach it? Change it. Why kid yourself? While luck plays a factor in many careers, it is certainly not the only factor. The one common denominator of virtually any success story is hard work. If you aren't willing to work hard, almost *any* goal may be unrealistic.

CHAPTER 3

So, Tell Me About Yourself

There it is—the granddaddy of all interview questions. And one that still—unbelievably—makes some of you stutter and stumble.

It's really more of a request than a question, but it can put you on the spot as no other question can. And if you're unprepared for such an open-ended prelude to the series of standard questions about your skills, background, and aspirations you've been expecting, it can stop you dead in your tracks and earn you an immediate one-way ticket out of the interview.

Why is this question a favorite of so many interviewers? Many consider it a nice icebreaker, giving them a chance to gauge initial chemistry, get a little insight into the cipher sitting before them (that would be you), and force *you* to do all the talking, for at least a couple of minutes.

Should this time-tested question catch you unprepared? Certainly not. I guarantee that this will be one of the first three questions asked, often the very first one. So what happens if you do hem and haw your way through a disjointed, free-associating discourse that starts somewhere in Mrs. Mahamita's kindergarten class and, 10 minutes later, is just getting into the details of those eighth grade cheerleader tryouts? You may well tie the record for the shortest interview of the week.

Is the interviewer seeking specific clues (key words, body language)? Or, as I have secretly suspected of many an unseasoned interviewer, is she simply looking for the easiest way to get the ball rolling?

It shouldn't matter to you. If you are prepared, you know this can be your golden opportunity to provide an answer that demonstrates four of the traits every interviewer is desperately searching for: intelligence, enthusiasm, confidence, and dependability.

GETTING READY FOR THE “KILLER QUESTION”	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Complete your personal inventory. If you bypassed the work in Chapter 2, go back and do it now.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Distill your personal inventory into a compelling opening. Use specifics to paint a short-and-sweet picture of “you,” in which you show yourself to be an enthusiastic and competent professional—the ideal candidate for the job.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don’t memorize it word for word. You want to sound fresh—not like you’re reading from a set of internal cue cards. So know the content. Record yourself speaking it until it sounds sincere but spontaneous.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include strong, positive phrases and words. You want to convey enthusiasm and confidence as well as knowledge and experience. What you don’t know, you’re eager to learn.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use it to set the course of the interview. Anticipate that the “killer” will surface early in the interview, so be prepared to use it as an opportunity to steer the interview in the direction <i>you</i> want it to go. Fine-tune your response to give a positive slant to any potential negatives, such as apparent job-hopping and lack of related experience. Think about particular skills or accomplishments you want to showcase during that interview and prepare at least one good example of each.
<input type="checkbox"/>	End with the ball in the interviewer’s court. By ending with a question, you get a much-deserved breather and, once again, demonstrate your involvement and enthusiasm.

So dig out the personal inventory you completed (I told you it would be an important prerequisite for making good use of this book) and study the items you listed under these headings:

- ☒ My strongest skills.
- ☒ My greatest areas of knowledge.
- ☒ My greatest personality strengths.
- ☒ The things I do best.
- ☒ My key accomplishments.

What do they want to hear?

From this information, you will now construct a well-thought-out, logically sequenced summary of your experience, skills, talents, and schooling. A plus? If this brief introduction clearly and succinctly relates your experience to the requirements of the position. But be sure to keep it tightly focused—about 250 to 350 words, chock-full of specifics. It should take you no more than two minutes to recite an answer that features the following information:

- ☒ Brief introduction.
- ☒ Key accomplishments.
- ☒ Key strengths demonstrated by these accomplishments.
- ☒ Importance of these strengths and accomplishments to the prospective employer.
- ☒ Where and how you see yourself developing in the position for which you're applying (tempered with the right amount of self-deprecating humor and modesty).

Again, we're not talking *War and Peace* here. Two-hundred-fifty to 350 words is about right (taking from 90 to 120 seconds to recite).



Here's how Barb, a recent college graduate applying for an entry-level sales position, answered this question:

“I’ve always been able to get along with different types of people. I think it’s because I’m a good talker and an even better listener. [Modestly introduces herself, while immediately laying claim to the most important skills a good salesperson should have.]

“During my senior year in high school, when I began thinking seriously about which careers I’d be best suited for, sales came to mind almost immediately. In high school and during my summer breaks from college, I worked various part-time jobs at retail outlets. [Demonstrates industriousness and at least some related experience.] *Unlike most of my friends, I actually liked dealing with the public.* [Conveys enthusiasm for selling.]

“However, I also realized that retail had its limitations, so I went on to read about other types of sales positions. I was particularly fascinated by what is usually described as consultative selling. I like the idea of going to a client you have really done your homework on and showing him how your products can help him solve one of his nagging problems, and then following through on that. [Shows interest and enthusiasm for the job.]

“After I wrote a term paper on consultative selling in my senior year of college, I started looking for companies at which I could learn and refine the skills shared by people who are working as account executives. [Shows initiative both in researching the area of consultative selling to write a term paper and in then researching prospective companies.]

“That led me to your company, Mr. Sheldon. I find the prospect of working with companies to increase the energy efficiency of their installations exciting. I’ve also learned some things about your sales training programs. They sound like they’re on the cutting edge. [Gives evidence that she is an enthusiastic self-starter.]

“I guess the only thing I find a little daunting about the prospect of working at Co-generation, Inc., is selling that highly technical equipment without a degree in engineering. By the way, what sort of support does your technical staff lend to the sales effort?” [Demonstrates that

she is willing to learn what she doesn't know and closes by deferring to the interviewer's authority. By asking a question the interviewer must answer, Barb has also given herself a little breather. Now the conversational ball sits squarely in the interviewer's court.]

Based on the apparent sincerity and detail of her answers, it's not a bad little "speech" of a mere 253 words, is it?



Lack of eye contact. The interviewer is asking this question to find a little "chemistry," so give her the reaction she's looking for.

- ☒ *Lack of strong, positive phrases and words.* It's the first question and, therefore, your first chance to get off on the right foot. Employ words that convey enthusiasm, responsibility, dedication, and success. If the very first answer is uninspired (especially an answer we all assume has been prepared and even rehearsed), I have almost never seen the interview improve very much. Many interviewers will simply cut their losses and move on to a more promising candidate.
- ☒ *A general, meandering response that fails to cite and highlight specific accomplishments.* It's a plus if you have been savvy enough to "edit" what we all know is a well-rehearsed set speech to ensure that it's relevant to the job at hand. Many interviewers *will* consider it a minus if all they've heard are a bunch of generalities and few (or no) actual specifics to back them up.
- ☒ *No relevance to job or company.* The interviewer did *not* ask you to tell her about your hobbies, dog, favorite ice cream flavor, or boy band. Some interviewers may give you the initial benefit of the doubt if your answer is too general or personal, but most will quickly probe for some job-related specifics.
- ☒ *Lack of enthusiasm.* If you don't seem excited about interviewing for the job, most interviewers will not assume you'll suddenly "get religion" once you're hired.

- ☒ *Nervousness.* Some people are naturally nervous in the artificial and intimidating atmosphere of an interview, and most experienced interviewers won't consider this an automatic reason to have their secretary buzz them about that "emergency conference." But they'll wonder what may be lurking—a firing, a sexual harassment suit, *something* that isn't going to make their day.
- ☒ *Someone who asks a clarifying question,* such as "What exactly do you want to know?" or "Which particular areas would you like me to talk about?" As I said earlier, I find it hard to believe anyone interviewing for anything has not anticipated that this question will be asked. What do you *think* the interviewer wants to know? Your opinion about Caitlyn Jenner's transition? She wants to know about your experience, skills, talents, and education, so answer the question, articulately and succinctly, and get ready for what comes next.

Variations

- | What makes you special (unique, different)?
- | What five adjectives describe you best?
- | Rate yourself on a scale of one to 10.
- | How would you describe your character?
- | How would you describe your personality?
- | Tell me something you really don't want me to know.

Despite the nuances, you should merely edit your "set piece" to respond to each of the first five questions in essentially the same way. So, although the first, fourth, and fifth questions appear to be more targeted, all five are really looking for the same information.

The sixth variation, of course, is one of those curveballs that you didn't anticipate (or, at the very least, never thought it would be the very first question asked!). You are certainly not going to admit to your secret Hello Kitty addiction (or worse), so take a moment to think about (or dream up) a minor, non-job-related "secret" you can reveal.

Variations

- | Why are you here?
- | Why should I hire you?
- | Why should I consider you a strong candidate for this position?
- | What's better about you than the other candidates I'm interviewing?
- | What can you do for us that someone else can't?

These are more aggressive questions, the tone of each a bit more forceful. An interviewer using one of these variations is clearly attempting to make you fully aware that you're on the hot seat. This may be a matter of his particular style, the introduction to his own brand of stress interview, or just a way to save time by seeing how you respond to pressure right from the get-go.

The interviewer has “set you up,” trying to separate the contenders from the also-rans with a single question. But he has actually given you a golden opportunity to display the extent of your pre-interview research. And if you haven’t *done* any, you may well find yourself in a sea of hot water.

Q: What are your strengths as an employee?

What do they want to hear?

To prepare for this question (as well as the variations just mentioned), pull out those sheets you labored over in Chapter 2 and write down the description of the position for which you’re interviewing. This will help you clarify each specific job requirement in your mind. Then, match your strengths and accomplishments directly to the requirements of the job.

Let’s presume you have a singular skill for meeting even the most unreasonable deadlines. You are tenacious. Nothing can stop you. If “meeting deadlines” is a key job requirement, be sure to cite two or three pertinent examples from your experience. The more outrageous the deadline and herculean your efforts, the more important it is to bring to the interviewer’s attention—at least twice.

Are there any gaps in your qualifications? Probably a few—especially if you’re reaching for the challenge at the next level of your career. So now it’s time to dig in and deal with the hard questions that you know will follow right on the tail of the ones above.

Q: How would your best friend (college roommate, favorite professor, favorite boss, mother, family, etc.) describe you?

What do they want to hear?

Personally, I would start with the “best friend” variation if I were interviewing someone. Supposedly, that’s who should know you best. So if you presented me with a half-baked picture of yourself, I’d shorten the interview—by about seven-eighths of an hour. Some interviewers prefer to ask you to describe your best friend and how you differ from one another. This is based on the untested but reasonable theory that if someone is your “best” friend, the two of you probably have quite a lot in common. Because you are supposedly describing your best friend, not yourself, some interviewers believe you may inadvertently reveal character insights (i.e., flaws) you would otherwise prefer to conceal. So, take pains to describe a person the interviewer would find it easy to hire.

All of the other variations on this question may be used by experienced interviewers to home in on specific times in your life and career (college, high school, last job) or just to get a fuller picture of you. What your mother or father would say, for example, may give the interviewer a clear illustration of the kind of environment in which you were raised.

Variations

| How would someone who doesn’t like you describe you?

You’re trying hard to avoid introducing any negatives, so your wonderful interviewer is offering a helping hand. Despite her offer to let you wallow in a pond of despair, just keep accentuating your positive qualities. You can always claim that the other person doesn’t like you because of *them*.

Q: What do you want to be doing five years from now?

What do they want to hear?

Are the company's goals and yours compatible? Are you looking for fast or steady growth in a position the interviewer knows is a virtual dead end? Are you requesting more money than he can ever pay? How have your goals and motivations changed as you have matured and gained work experience? If you've recently become a manager, how has that promotion affected your future career outlook? If you've realized you need to acquire or hone a particular skill, how and when are you planning to do so?

This question is not as popular as it once was, since the pace of change at many corporations continues to increase so rapidly. You are more likely to be asked to concentrate on a much tighter time frame: "What will you be able to accomplish during your first 90 (100, 180) days on the job?"



Naturally, you want a position of responsibility in your field. But you don't want to give the impression that you're a piranha waiting to feed on the guppies in your new department. So, start humbly:

"Well, that will ultimately depend on my performance on the job, and on the growth and opportunities offered by my employer."

Then toot your own horn a bit:

"I've already demonstrated leadership characteristics in all of the jobs I've held, so I'm very confident that I will take on progressively greater management responsibilities in the future. That suits me fine. I enjoy building a team, developing its goals, and then working to accomplish them. It's very rewarding."

In other words, you want "more"—more responsibility, more people reporting to you, more turf, even more money. A general answer (as above) is okay, but don't be surprised when an interviewer asks the obvious follow-up questions (using the answer to the above question as a guide):

- ☒ Tell me about the last team you led.
- ☒ Tell me about the last project your team undertook.
- ☒ What was the most satisfying position you've held, and why?
- ☒ If I told you our growth was phenomenal and you could go as far as your abilities would take you, where would that be, and how quickly?



If you answer "your job." Everyone is tired of that trite response by now.

If you refuse to offer more than a "general" answer—that is, no real specific goals—no matter how hard the interviewer probes for more. Your inability or unwillingness to cite specific, positive goals may give the impression, warranted or not, that you have not taken the time to really think about your future, which makes it impossible for the interviewer to assess whether there's a fit between his goals and yours.

If you insist you want to be in the same job for which you're applying. (Unless it is a dead-end job and the interviewer would be pleased as punch if someone actually stayed longer than three weeks, unlike the last 14 people to hold the position.)

Any answer that reveals unrealistic expectations. A savvy candidate should have some idea of the time it takes to climb the career ladder in a particular industry or even in a company. Someone hoping to go from receptionist to CEO in two years will, of course, scare off most interviewers, but *any* expectations that are far too ambitious could give them pause. If a law school grad, for example, seeks to make partner in four years—when the average for all firms is seven and, for this one, 10—it will make even novice interviewers question the extent and effectiveness of your pre-interview research.

There's nothing wrong with being ambitious and confident beyond all bounds, but a savvy interviewee should temper such

boundless expectations during the interview. Most interviewers are aware that some candidates do “break the rules” successfully, but they will get a little nervous around people exhibiting unbridled ambition!

If you have made an interviewer worry that her company couldn’t possibly deliver on the promises you seem to want to hear, you can expect a follow-up question: “How soon after you’re hired do you think you can contribute to our success?” Even someone with a tremendous amount of pertinent experience knows full well that each company has its own particular ways of doing things and that the learning curve may be days, weeks, or many months, depending on circumstances. So any candidate—but especially an overly ambitious young person—who blithely assures an interviewer she’ll be productive from day one is cause for concern. The interviewer is really trying to assess, in the case of an inexperienced person, how “trainable” you are, and you’ve just told him you think you already know it all! Not a good start.

For some reason, some applicants fail to remember that this is an interview, not a conversation in a bar or with friends. As a result, they rattle off some remarkable responses that can only be deemed “fantasies”—to be retired, own their own business, live on the beach, and so on—though why they would think these answers pertinent to their job search is beyond me. I would seriously discourage ever answering this question in such a manner.

Variations

- | What are your long-term goals?
- | Have you recently established any new objectives or goals?
- | What do you want to do with your life?
- | What do you want to be when you grow up?

These questions provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate how your goals and motivations have changed as you’ve matured and gained valuable work experience. If you’ve recently become a manager, talk about how that experience has affected

your career outlook for the future. If you've realized that you must sharpen a particular skill to continue growing, tell the interviewer what you're doing about it.

Q: If you could change one thing about your personality just by snapping your fingers, what would it be and why?

What do they want to hear?

That you have weaknesses—of course you do!—but none that are lethal. Conventional career advice has been to cite a “weakness” that you can easily show is really a strength: “You know, sir, I just work too hard. I have to take more time off than just Sunday from 5 to 7.” Sure you do.

An answer most interviewers would find acceptable would reveal a weakness *that you've already corrected* or, in a slight redirection of the question, a mistake you made in a previous job and the lesson(s) you learned from it. In both cases, you would be turning a negative question into a positive response.

My strategy was always to cite a particular skill or qualification that I obviously lacked...but one that wasn't remotely needed in the job I was interviewing for.



Identifying a weakness that is job-related or, worse, essential to the job at hand (for example, the inability to work with others when the job for which you are interviewing is highly team based).

Citing a weakness that is so basic or stupid that the interviewer has to wonder if that's the biggest thing (she did say *one* thing) you could change.

Variations

- | Tell me about the one thing in your life you're proudest of.
- | Tell me about the worst decision you ever made.
- | Tell me about the one thing in your life you're most ashamed of.
- | What's your greatest weakness?

The first puts you on comfortable turf—a positive question you can answer positively. The latter three questions force you to turn a negative question into a positive answer, and, because any negative question invites the unwary to descend into a sea of recriminations (“Working for that last jerk, let me tell you!”), it is a potential quagmire.

In all cases, the interviewer is inviting conversation but not as one way and open-ended as in earlier questions. These might well be follow-up questions if “Tell me about yourself” or something similar didn’t “open everything up” as much as the interviewer hoped it would. You should, therefore, take them as a sign that you’ve yet to tell the interviewer what he or she wants to hear.

Q: What does “success” mean to you?

What do they want to hear?

You should offer a balanced answer to this question, citing personal as well as professional examples. If your successes are exclusively job-related, an interviewer may wonder if you actually have a life. However, if you blather on about your personal goals and accomplishments, you may seem uncommitted to striving for success on the job.



Strike a balance and talk about success in terms such as these:

“I have always enjoyed supervising a design team. In fact, I’ve discovered that I’m better at working with other designers than designing everything myself. Unlike a lot of the people in my field, I’m also able to relate to the requirements of the manufacturing department.”

“So, I guess I’d say success means working with others to come up with efficient designs that can be up on the assembly line quickly. Of course, the financial rewards of managing a department give me the means to travel during my vacations. That’s the thing I love most in my personal life.”



If the interviewer identifies any of the following problems from your answer, you're already on thin ice and better race back to shore:

- ☒ Incompatibility of his or her goals and yours.
- ☒ Lack of focus in your answer.
- ☒ Too general an answer, with no examples of what successes you have already achieved.
- ☒ Too many personal examples.
- ☒ Too many job-related examples.

Q: What does “failure” mean to you?

What do they want to hear?

A specific example to demonstrate what *you* mean by “failure,” *not* a lengthy philosophical discussion more suited to a Bergman film than an interview. This question offers an experienced interviewer the opportunity to delve into mistakes and bad decisions, not a happy topic as far as you’re concerned. He is looking for honesty, a clear analysis of what went wrong, a willingness to admit responsibility (with a small plus if it’s obvious you’re taking responsibility for some aspects that *weren’t* your fault), and evidence that you are determined to change what caused it (or examples to show how it’s already been transformed).



“Failure is not getting the job done when I have the means to do so. For example, once I was faced with a huge project. I should have realized at the outset that I didn’t have the time. I must have been thinking there were 48 hours in a day! I also didn’t have the knowledge I needed to do it correctly. Instead of asking some of the other people in my department for help, I blundered through. That won’t ever happen to me again if I can help it!”



A noncommittal, nonspecific answer that forces the interviewer to ask more and more follow-up questions to get any kind of handle on what makes you tick.

Always remember why the interviewer is asking you such open-ended questions: to get you talking, hopefully so you reveal more than you would have if he or she had asked a more pointed question. So answer such questions clearly, succinctly, and specifically—but avoid any temptation to “confess” your many sins.

Variations

- | What does “achievement” mean to you?
- | What does “challenge” mean to you?
- | What does “problem” mean to you?
- | What does “impossible” mean to you?
- | What does “growth” mean to you?

Q: What would you say if I told you our interview is over?

Well, isn’t that a kick in the teeth? Maybe your first or second answers were so poor the interviewer is trying to save some time and just get you out the door. Maybe she is baiting you, giving you an opportunity to rise to the challenge of her rejection. Maybe she just wants to get back to work.

Whatever the reason, you must be prepared to confront her aggression with a calm question of your own: *“I’m sorry you feel that way. I thought I clearly expressed my passion for this position and why I believe I am very qualified for it. What part of my answer disappointed you?”*

Variations

- | What if I told you I thought this interview was off to a poor start?
- | Sorry, you haven’t convinced me you are remotely qualified for this position. We should end this interview now.
- | Would you like to start over? You’re not doing very well.
- | I only have five more minutes. Why should I hire you?

TIPS FOR CONVINCING THE INTERVIEWER YOU'RE A GREAT CATCH

- | | |
|--|---|
| TIPS FOR CONVINCING THE INTERVIEWER YOU'RE A GREAT CATCH | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Do your homework. Find out as much as you can about the company and how the position for which you're interviewing contributes to its goals. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Demonstrate experience—and exude confidence. Give the interviewer strong answers using concrete examples that are relevant to the position you are after. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Be humble. Convey the impression that you have the ability to succeed should opportunities present themselves. But avoid giving the impression that you're a fire-breathing workaholic ready to succeed no matter what (or whom) the cost. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Appear firm, but not dictatorial. When you talk about your management philosophy, let the interviewer know that you are able to delegate, keep track of each person's progress, and stay on top of your own work. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Talk about growth. Tell the interviewer how you've grown in each of the jobs you've held and how your career goals have changed as a result. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Admit your failures. Concentrate on what you've learned from past failures, using examples that show how you've changed as a result of them. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Showcase your successes. Make sure to position yourself as a professional with a satisfying personal life. |

MORE TIPS FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Think in terms of <i>what...and why</i>. As you trumpet your successes—or mumble about your failures—stress the positive lessons you learned from each situation and how you've already applied them (or plan to in your next position). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't exaggerate. Your accomplishments and responsibilities should speak for themselves. If you felt you lacked opportunities to make a mark in a past position, say so. But don't bend the truth—there are too many ways a savvy interviewer can unmask you. Don't learn the hard way—it will probably cost you the job! |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't appear desperate... even if your last job was months ago. Some interviewers will equate “desperate” with “cheap to hire,” presuming they want to hire you at all. But don't come across as smug either. Concentrate on expressing your genuine interest and enthusiasm for the opportunities inherent in the job on offer. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoid the negative. You want the interviewer to associate nothing but positive words, thoughts, and deeds with you. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Make the best of your current position. Convey that you are a positive person who always makes the best of <i>any</i> situation. The worse your actual situation, the better you'll look. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Build a vocabulary of action words and use them consistently in your resume, cover letter, follow-up letters and during interviews. (See page 73 for a full list.) |

TIPS FOR TOOTING YOUR OWN HORN

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| | TIPS FOR TOOTING YOUR OWN HORN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't get carried away. Only the most annoying people find it easy to talk about themselves in a flattering way. And that's what you'll be doing on the interview—constantly tooting your own horn, until even you will want to change the tune. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Stress the traits companies are looking for. I mean enthusiasm, confidence, energy, dependability, honesty. Formulate answers that suggest these characteristics. Think about what you would want in an ideal employee if you owned a company. Wouldn't you want a problem-solver? A team player? Someone who is enthusiastic about working hard to achieve goals? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Be creative. A friend of mine had to work his way through college. Rather than participate in low- or no-pay internship programs or extracurricular activities, he pumped gas and stocked supermarket shelves during the summers. So when asked why he hadn't had any internships, he was ready to reply:

<i>"I wish I'd had more time to write for the school paper. Whenever I wasn't studying, I pretty much had to work to pay for college. But I learned a number of things from the jobs I held that most people learn only after they've been in their careers for a while, such as how to work with other people and how to manage my time effectively."</i> |

WORDS THAT PACK A PROFESSIONAL PUNCH

Ability	Discovered	Operated
Accelerated	Disproved	Organized
Accomplished	Effective	Persuaded
Accurate	Eliminated	Planned
Achieved	Enlarged	Prepared
Adjusted	Established	Presented
Administered	Evaluated	Processed
Advised	Examined	Produced
Analyzed	Excelled	Proficiency
Approved	Expanded	Programmed
Arranged	Focused	Promoted
Calculated	Formulated	Provided
Capable	Founded	Recommended
Communicated	Generated	Reduced
Compiled	Guided	Reorganized
Completed	Identified	Researched
Conceived	Implemented	Restored
Conceptualized	Improved	Reviewed
Conducted	Increased	Revised
Consolidated	Initiated	Scheduled
Constructed	Installed	Solved
Consulted	Instituted	Streamlined
Controlled	Instructed	Strengthened
Coordinated	Introduced	Supervised
Counseled	Invented	Systematic
Created	Launched	Tested
Decreased	Led	Thorough
Delivered	Maintained	Trained
Designed	Managed	Translated
Detected	Modified	Updated
Determined	Monitored	Utilized
Developed	Motivated	Vital
Directed	Negotiated	Won

CHAPTER 4

Questions About Your Education

The more work experience you have, the less anyone will care about what you did in college, even if you attended Podunk rather than Princeton. As important as particular courses and extra-curricular leadership positions may have been a decade ago, no amount of educational success can take the place of solid, real-world, on-the-job experience.

But if your diploma is so fresh the ink could stain your fingers and your only (summer) job was intimately involved with salad ingredients, then the questions in this chapter are directed to you, the relatively inexperienced candidate facing that age-old catch-22: You need experience to get the job, but how can you get experience if you can't get a job?

So it's back to "Creative Thinking 101." On your resume and in your interviews, you'll attempt to "upgrade" your experience, no matter how little or minor, while avoiding the temptation to blatantly transform a summer job at the local hot dog stand or on the beach into what sounds like a divisional vice presidency.

How are you going to accomplish this? You want to portray yourself as a well-rounded person who, in addition to getting decent grades, demonstrated desirable traits—leadership, team building, writing, communicating—either through extracurricular activities, internships, and/or part-time work experience.

If you weren't a member of many official school clubs or teams, talk about other activities you engaged in during college. Did you work part time? Tutor other students? Work for extra course credit?

What you've been doing—*whatever* you have been doing—should demonstrate a pattern that bears at least some passing relation to the job at hand. What you did during your summers, unless it was a pertinent internship or part-time job, is virtually irrelevant. You *chose* a major, particular courses, clubs, and activities—most interviewers will want to know the reasons why you made *those particular choices*. That will reveal to them where your “real” interests lie...no matter what perfect “objective” you’ve branded atop your resume.

Q: What extracurricular activities were you involved in?

What do they want to hear?

Most interviewers are seeking a candidate who can illustrate industriousness, not just someone who did enough to eke by. They’re expecting enthusiasm, confidence, energy, dependability, honesty. A problem solver. A team player. Someone who’s willing to work hard to achieve difficult but worthy goals.



Activities that bear some relationship to the job/industry—for example, a college newspaper editor applying for a job in newspaper, book, or magazine publishing.

Activities that show a healthy balance. You are probably a top candidate for a wide variety of jobs if you participated in one or more sports *and* a cultural club (chess, theater, etc.) *and* a political club *and* you worked part-time, as opposed to someone whose sole focus was on a sport or cause, no matter how illustrious his or her athletic or other achievements.

If you’re able to demonstrate the ability to manage multiple priorities (let’s not forget coursework and maybe a part-time job here) *and good time-management skills.*



If you've spent an inordinate amount of time doing things outside of class but your GPA (Grade Point Average) indicates you spent too little time concentrating in class. (Anything below a B average should lead you to expect a whole series of follow-up questions, forcing you to explain why.)

If you have seemingly tried every activity at least once and have demonstrated no clear direction, most interviewers will not assume you'll suddenly change on the job.

Never think a joke is a good answer: "Well, Mr. Johns, I didn't do much more than drink beer on weekends." I'm probably more appreciative of good jokes than the next guy, but an interview is simply the wrong place and the wrong time to channel Colbert. Even if you're funny, most interviewers will probably question the common sense of anyone who thinks sitting across from their desk applying for a job is the right time and place to try out a new stand-up routine.

Variations

- | What made you choose those activities?
- | Which ones did you most enjoy? Why?
- | Which ones did you least enjoy? Why?
- | Which ones do you regret not choosing? Why?

The interviewer posing questions like these is just trying to get a handle on how you think, how you make choices and decisions, and how flexible or inflexible you seem to be in those choices.

Q: Why did you choose your college? Why did you choose your major? Why did you choose your minor? Which courses did you like most? Least?

What do they want to hear?

If you are a recent college graduate, some interviewers may substitute this series of questions for the ubiquitous "So, tell me about yourself"—your college experience is probably a good measure of "yourself."

If you were a liberal arts major, talk about the skills you developed in some of your courses: writing ability, researching and analytical skills, debating, language and communication skills. Assuming that you took courses related to the job at hand, focus only on those that are career oriented.

Don't feel handicapped if you majored in something non-technical or non-professional. Most interviewers, even those offering fairly technical jobs, expect to spend an inordinate amount of their time cajoling an endless line of history, English, and French lit majors to explain how their college education prepared them for a sales/marketing/management/executive position.

What was your thought process? Did you choose a major because it was the easiest? Because it had specific relevance to other interests (as demonstrated by consistent volunteer/work/activities)? Because you analyzed the job market and took courses to prepare for a particular career/industry? Just because it was there?

What other majors or minors did you consider? And why did you choose one and reject the others?

If you are being interviewed for a highly technical job—engineering, science, programming, etc.—the interviewer should reasonably expect that you majored in engineering, chemistry, or computer science, and that your major and even minor coursework is pertinent (with the exception of someone like my friend Andy, who majored in astrophysics at MIT...and minored in theater). It will probably be a plus if you demonstrated a particular interest in chemistry or computers or mechanical engineering while still in high school.



Talk about the skills you developed, especially in courses you didn't necessarily like or want to take. I *like* to hear that a candidate did well in a course she really didn't care for. I seem to spend an inordinate amount of time doing things I don't care for, but I still must do them to the best of my ability. When I interview people, I'm seeking someone with the same attitude.

When talking about particular courses, develop answers that focus on the subject, *not* the workload or the professor's personality. Talking about past troubles with an authority figure will introduce a possible negative into your current candidacy. And complaining about too much work is not the best way to impress any prospective boss.

Interviewers don't take kindly to freshly minted graduates who expect to start at a salary higher than their own. So acknowledge that you are well aware that despite your *summa cum laude* credentials, you probably have less job-related knowledge than the senior person in the mailroom. Humility is an attractive trait at times, especially when it's well deserved: "*I know this position has its share of unpleasant duties, but I'm sure everyone who's had this job before me has learned a lot by doing them.*"



Blaming a professor, even tangentially, for a bad grade or experience will give many interviewers pause—do you have problems with authority figures?

Complaining about the workload of a course, semester, or year. Interviewers are seeking industriousness, not laziness.

There are interviewers out there—and I'm one of them—who go out of their way to describe in excruciating detail the worst or most mind-numbingly boring aspects of the job. A successful candidate shouldn't be fooled into expressing *any* negative reaction—(even a raised eyebrow when “garbage detail” is being discussed!)

Variations

- | Why did you change majors? Change minors? Drop that course? Add that course?

What do they want to hear?

Again, what was your thought process? The change may well be considered a positive—if you explain and justify it well—unless, of course, it clearly was to eliminate a difficult major for

an easier one, a stratagem to take more classes with a girlfriend, or something equally superfluous.

If you have changed majors, even more than once, you must be ready to admit that you simply didn't have all the answers when you were 19. (Don't worry, neither did the interviewer.) I suspect many interviewers would find such candor refreshing and realistic. After all, how many high school seniors know that eventually they will (or want to) become accountants, or hospital administrators, or loading dock foremen, or, for that matter, interviewers for Human Resources? But you should be prepared to show how your other studies contributed to making you the best candidate for the job.

Q: Why are you applying for a job in a field other than your major?

What do they want to hear?

Life doesn't always turn out according to our plans. Especially when you're young, changes in direction are common. Changes are hard enough to live through without getting grilled about them. But when the interviewer asks about one of your 180-degree turns, you've got to respond.

If you're applying for a retail management position and your degree is in geology, there's a good chance that you'll be asked this question. But count on it—it's not the first time this employer has encountered someone like you. In today's job market, changing careers is common, and there's nothing unique about going into a field other than the one you majored in.

So what do you do? You know you've piqued the employer's interest enough to get an interview, right? So relax and answer the question. Keep it brief and positive: You've reexamined your career goals. You enjoy customer contact, the competitive nature of sales, and the varied management responsibilities required in retail, and you've decided it's the career you want to pursue. And, oh yeah (perhaps with a sheepish grin), there are only 142 new jobs in geology this year—and you didn't get any of them!

Then it may be a good idea to pause and ask, “Have I answered your question?” Give the interviewer an opportunity to express concerns about your qualifications. If he has any, be prepared to explain how the skills required in your degree field transfer to the field in which you’re seeking employment. You can use the same strategy with your prior work experience. Are there particular things a geologist must learn that directly translate into retail management? Particular skills? *I* don’t know, but *you* certainly better be ready to talk about them.

Just because many students who major in more esoteric areas are, by definition, ill-prepared for some specific jobs, and because many people now change jobs, careers, and even industries more and more, that does *not* mean that many interviewers will not make you sell them on how your learning will benefit *them*.

Q: If you were starting college tomorrow, what courses would you take?
What do they want to hear?

Be prepared to detail changes you would have made in your course selections that would have made you a better candidate for this job. Should you have taken more marketing courses, an accounting course, a statistics seminar? At the same time, don’t be afraid to admit that it took you a little while to find the right course of study.

A bit of candor is fine, but avoid offering a dissertation involving a wholesale change of major, minor, and hair color.



Consider this question a good opportunity to describe how courses that are completely unrelated to this or any other “real-world” career nevertheless were valuable in your development.



Don’t claim you would have gone away to school so you could have dated more.

Don’t answer, “Same courses, but this time I’d pass.”

Don't answer in a way that clearly implies you don't understand the purpose of the question. You have been given an opportunity to show you know what the job entails and, because of that understanding, to declare you would have taken more pertinent courses while dropping that 17th century Chinese literature course like a hot chop stick.

Q: What did you learn from the internships on your resume?

What do they want to hear?

No company really believes that you're going to hit the ground running right out of college or graduate school. Training and experience will be necessary to make you productive. So, as a relatively inexperienced candidate, you can expect an interviewer to do a bit of probing—trying to determine how “trainable” you are.

Stress how the real-world internship experience you've had complemented your academic training. But never pretend that college is where you learned the “secret of life.” No interviewer is going to react favorably to someone who acts like he or she knows it all.



If you are able to show how the real internship experience you had complemented your academic training.

Pertinent internships that tie in directly to your new job/career.

Well-thought-out answers that demonstrate consistent career concerns.

Good recommendations from internship supervisors.



If you sincerely believe—and, worse, actually tell the interviewer—that college is where you learned the “secret of life.”

No internships in a field in which they are *de rigueur*.

Internship(s) in an unrelated field (especially if it ties in with your courses/activities, indicating that your *real* area of interest lies elsewhere).

Poor or no recommendation from your internship supervisor or a negative reaction from you about its value. (Even if your internship turned out to test nothing more than your coffee-making skills, you should *never* introduce such a negative into the interview.)

Variations

- | Why are there no internships on your resume?
- | Why weren't any of your internships paid?
- | Would you repeat each of your internships?
- | Why did you pick those particular internships?
- | Why did you feel the need to do an internship?
- | Have you ever shadowed a professional in this field?

Q: In what courses did you get the worst grades? Why? How do you think that will affect your performance on this job?

What do they want to hear?

Many companies will ask to see copies of your college transcripts if you don't have work experience. So you might as well spill the beans now!

If you flunked every accounting course, you're probably not applying for an accounting job, right? Hopefully, you can blame bad grades you received in some of your electives on the amount of time and effort you were putting into your major.

Do interviewers expect that every interviewee is a straight-A student and, therefore, will have a hard time answering this question? Not in my world. So the answer to the first part of the question is less important than the explanation and how you handle introducing a negative: "*Yes, sir, I flunked statistical analysis, but it was completely outside my major and, as far as I know, has nothing to do with the job you're offering.*"



If you really can't answer the question because you didn't get any bad grades!

If you satisfactorily explain the one or two less-than-stellar grades. If a poor grade was in an elective course, blame the extra time you spent on your major (in which, of course, you did great). If you blew a single major course, perhaps outside activities were to blame (and you have a ready explanation for placing such activities ahead of good grades).



Too many C's and D's to count.

No reasonable explanation, leading an interviewer to assume that you simply didn't care or aren't all that bright.

A choice that you made based on reasons most interviewers would question. Although it may have been quite exciting and educational to devote a significant amount of time to getting your friend elected student body president, were a plethora of D's a viable trade-off?

Variations

- | Are grades a good measure of ability?
- | Why didn't you get better grades?
- | Why are your grades so erratic?
- | What happened that semester (year) when your grades sunk?

What do they want to hear?

Again, if your grades were great, you should be suitably proud; if they weren't, hopefully there were mitigating circumstances: work, an unusual opportunity, a family crisis, whatever. But if you fail to take responsibility for a poor performance, most interviewers would consider it a big thumbs down. Whatever you do, don't become defensive. This will lead most interviewers to wonder whether you actually made a choice or simply did something without thinking of the consequences.

SPECIAL TIPS FOR RECENT COLLEGE GRADS

<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't be afraid to say you'll need help. And when you do need help, make sure that the interviewer knows you'll ask for it. Not many companies are looking for—or expect to find—a 22-year-old know-it-all. If you <i>are</i> a 22-year-old know-it-all, keep it to yourself.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Admit that you don't have all the answers. Or begin a lot of your answers with "I think..." or "From what I know about the industry...."
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't appear squeamish at the idea of going through the school of hard knocks. Tell the interviewer, "Sure, I know this position has its share of unpleasant duties, but I'm sure everyone who's had this job before me has learned a lot by doing them."
<input type="checkbox"/>	If it took a little time for you to find your direction, admit it. Nobody has all the answers at 18 or 19. Most interviewers will not be surprised that you changed your major as an undergraduate. Show how your other studies contribute to making you the best candidate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't answer any question about who paid for your educational expenses or about any outstanding educational loans you may be carrying. Go ahead and play up the fact that you received a full academic scholarship or were industrious enough to work your way through school, if you want to. But by law, you don't have to say any more. For more detail on how to recognize and deflect illegal questions, see Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 5

Questions About Your Experience

It should come as no surprise that most interview questions will focus on your previous work experience. You've bid your alma mater adieu, either last decade or last week, so what have you done out there in the real world? Many employers think that your past is a "prologue" to your future performance. If you do have some deep, dark character flaw, they figure it must have shown up already!

So be prepared to be thoroughly grilled about every job you've ever had, especially the last two or three. Stay positive through it all. And don't forget about pertinent volunteer experience, even if it was unpaid—it may be a good way to "add" a skill or qualification you haven't been able to attain on the job.

Let's look at some of the questions you're likely to face.

Q: Tell me about your last three positions. Explain what you did, how you did it, the people you worked for, and the people you worked with.

What do they want to hear?

Whew! This is a scattergun approach, in part designed to see how well you organize what could be a lot of data into a brief, coherent overview of three, five, 10 or more years' experience. Interviewers who ask this question, or one like it, are trying to flesh out your resume, catch inconsistencies, create a road map for the far more detailed inquiries to follow, and evaluate how

well you “edit” your answer to match your experience and skills to the requirements of the job at hand.



If you can boast pertinent experience and skills in a brief, coherent, positive answer.

If you are cognizant of the importance of relating *your* experience and skills to *the interviewer's* job requirements.

A clear pattern upward: Increased responsibility, authority, money, subordinates, skill level, and so on.



Asking the interviewer *my* least favorite question: “What exactly do you want to know?” (Answer: What I just asked for!)

Any answer that is inconsistent with the facts on your resume (dates, duties, titles). You would think no one would refer to a job that doesn’t appear on his or her resume, but it happens all the time. (And if you hint at such a problem, here’s how a good interviewer will make you sweat: “Your resume says that you were working at _____ during 2002, but you just said you were working at _____. How do you explain that?”)

I’ll admit to being part of the stupidest interview ever undertaken by an otherwise smart, reasonably experienced person. I spent the first five years after graduating from Princeton trying to be a full-time writer without actually starving to death. The only way to accomplish that was to work a series of short-term, part-time jobs (often two or three at once) while I frantically turned out short stories, newspaper and magazine articles, plays, screenplays, and, eventually, books, some of which I actually got paid for.

How many different jobs did I have? Dozens. Some lasted a day, some months, one nearly two years.

But the only one that appeared on my resume was the two-year stint at a trade association, because my supervisor graciously agreed to back up my white lie and allow me to claim that it was full time—for five years.

| Questions About Your Experience

Within ten minutes of sitting down in front of the interviewer for a major magazine company, I was blithely discoursing on what I had learned at two or three of these other jobs. Yes, that's right, the ones that officially didn't exist. I finally realized what I had done...a minute or so after the interviewer. At about the same time, the interviewer and I both tumbled to the reality—I wasn't getting this job or, for that matter, any other potential job at that magazine company. We parted, amiably, though I felt like a small poodle that had been pulled through one too many mud puddles.

So don't torpedo your candidacy by detailing jobs, responsibilities, and skills that don't "officially" exist. It worked for me!

Don't complain in any way, shape, or form about bosses, subordinates, or coworkers. Most interviewers will fail to be impressed by anyone attempting to blame everyone else for his or her failures. *Even if you weren't at fault*, any transfer of blame will not be deemed a positive.

Most interviewers will grill you about lateral moves (why didn't you get promoted?) and, even more so, about obvious demotions. You'd better have a very good explanation ready.

Q: What was your favorite job? Why?

What do they want to hear?

A description of the job the interviewer is discussing.



Presuming that you have to acknowledge that your favorite job differs from the job at hand in a couple of very specific, perhaps even important ways, you can still recover if you can explain why and how you have changed so that the current job is much more appropriate for you now.



Any answer that inadvertently reveals the kind of job you're really seeking—obviously *not the one being offered*:

“My favorite job was at WPRB radio. It was very loose and informal and there was little supervision, which I really enjoyed. I had the freedom to program my own shows with little or no interference and only had to put in 20 hours a week to actually get my work done, so the rest of the time I could write or think up new creative ideas.”

This sounds like a reasonable answer...if only you weren't applying for a job assisting four high-powered businesspeople who are always on deadline and require ten hours a week overtime at a highly structured and very rigid old-line firm.

It's not a problem if your last job offered some travel and this one doesn't, or the previous position offered more varied tasks and this one is more highly focused. But it *is* a problem if your answer *fails to take into account what the current job entails*, which will indicate to many interviewers a lack of pre-interview research or the simple inability to realize the importance of matching past experience to his or her needs.

Q: Tell me about the best boss you ever had. Tell me about the worst one.
What do they want to hear?

Talk about a loaded question! If you're asked to talk about the best boss you ever had, you could try for an on-the-spot description of the hiring manager sitting across the desk from you.

But as a rule of thumb, most companies want to hear that you most enjoyed working for someone who was interested in helping you learn and grow, involved in monitoring your progress, and generous about giving credit when and where it was due. I hope you've had the chance to work for someone like that!

Now, what do you say about your *worst* boss? Don't get carried away with venomous accusations. They may serve only to introduce doubt about your own competence or ability to get along with other people.

For example, if you level the charge of "favoritism," the interviewer might wonder why your boss liked other employees more than you. If you complain about a boss who was always looking

| Questions About Your Experience

over your shoulder, the interviewer might wonder whether it was because you couldn't be trusted to complete a task accurately, on budget, on time—or all three.



If you understand that this question offers you an opportunity to accentuate your own experiences, accomplishments, and qualities. There are bad bosses out there, but a savvy candidate should be able to put a supervisor's failures in a positive context. If you say your boss was "stingy with his knowledge," you are accentuating your desire to learn. In the same vein, saying that a manager was "uninvolved" could indicate your desire to work within a cohesive team. Just prepare—and practice—your responses ahead of time.



Any negativity.

Any attempt to blame the boss for your failures:

"You know, I had to really work hard to learn how to sell spice racks in the South Pacific, but it sure didn't help that my boss had never sold a darn thing to anyone. She seemed to think that everything I did was wrong and constantly called me out of the field for evaluations. I spent so much time filling out unnecessary reports for her and attending meetings to discuss why I wasn't reaching my unrealistic quota, that I never had a chance to succeed. I hope my new boss just leaves me alone."

Q: Looking back now, is there anything you could have done to improve your relationship with that supervisor?



Of course there is (presuming you are smart enough to grasp the life raft the interviewer just flung overboard). The work experience you've had since has shown you how to better accept criticism. Now that you have a better understanding of the pressures your supervisors are under, you can more successfully anticipate their needs. Use this opportunity to demonstrate your experience, perceptiveness, and maturity.



"Nah, not with that dumb so-and-so. He reveled in our misery. I'm glad we put sugar in his gas tank!"

Q: What were the most memorable accomplishments at your last job? In your career?

What do they want to hear?

Focus on your most recent accomplishments—in your current position or the job you had just prior to this one. But make sure they are relevant to the position for which you're interviewing.

For example, a friend of mine who had been an editor for years answered this question by talking at length about the times she'd been asked to write promotional copy for the marketing department. She was trying to change careers so she deliberately tried to shift the interviewer's attention from her editing experience to her accomplishments as a marketing copywriter.

It's also wise to think about why you were able to achieve these peaks in your career. For example:

"I really stopped to listen to what my customers wanted, rather than just trying to sell them."

"I realized I needed to know a lot more about Subchapter-S corporations, so I enrolled in a tax seminar."

This type of response tells the interviewer you give a great deal of thought to how you will reach your goals rather than blindly plunging ahead in their general direction. By letting the interviewer know that you are in the practice of regularly assessing your shortcomings, you show that you are better able to find the means to overcome them.



Bragging about accomplishments that have nothing to do with the requirements for this job.

Citing (proudly or otherwise) frivolous, meaningless, minor, or dubious accomplishments:

| Questions About Your Experience

“I finally managed to get out of bed every morning and get to work on time.”

“I personally raised \$25 for the volunteer fire department.”

“I successfully typed all my boss’s correspondence the same week it was handed to me, even though I had to work all day on it.”

Q: What is the biggest failure you’ve had in your career? What steps have you taken to make sure something like that doesn’t happen again?

What do they want to hear?

In this situation, it would be foolhardy to produce a detailed log of your every shortcoming, misstep, and misdeed. But it would be equally silly to pretend you’re perfect and have never experienced failure in the course of your career, education, or life.

The best approach is to admit to one weakness or failure—make it a good one!—and then talk about the steps you are taking (or have taken) to make sure that you’ll never fail in that way again.

What makes a failure not so bad or a weakness acceptable? Good question! Choose any deficiency that might be considered a plus in a slightly different light. For example:

- ☒ You have a tendency to take on too much by yourself.
You’re trying to solve this problem by delegating more.
- ☒ You’re impatient with delays. You’re trying to better understand every step of the process a product must go through so you can anticipate holdups in the future.
- ☒ You’ve realized you’re a workaholic. But you’re doing your best to remedy your “condition” by reading books on time management.

Try to think of a failure that took place relatively early in your career and/or one that would seem completely unrelated to the work you would be performing for your new employer.

Don't ever admit to any personal quality that might hamper job performance, such as procrastination, laziness, or lack of concentration.



Acknowledge a failure for which you do not appear to be fully responsible. (When I'm interviewing someone, the way a successful candidate scores the most points is to make it obvious she wasn't fully responsible for an admitted failure but is ready, nevertheless, to shoulder all the blame.)

If you must cite a job-related failure, be prepared to convince the interviewer that you now recognize what your error was and offer concrete examples that illustrate the lessons you've learned.



Claiming that you've never failed.

Citing a non-work related failure.

Your inability to offer any evidence that you are prepared to take responsibility for whatever failure is cited nor any proof that any changes were made as a result.

Don't declare, "That can never happen again." This is an unrealistic assessment that will call your judgement into question.

Never confess a huge work-related weakness: "*I've always hated my bosses, every one. But I think I'll like you!*"

Variations

- | What's your greatest weakness?
- | What's the worst decision you ever made?
- | What's the dumbest thing you ever did?
- | What would you say is the biggest problem you've so far failed to overcome?
- | What don't you want me to know about you?
- | What aren't you telling me?

| *Questions About Your Experience*

A good interviewer will, based on the answers to questions like these, continue to probe and put you on the spot, searching for details, details, and more details. If, for example, you say your greatest weakness is a fear of delegating because it always seems you can get it done faster and better yourself, you might be asked, “Tell me about the last time you should have delegated but didn’t. What happened? Would you do it that way again? Would you do it differently today?”

Such probing can also help the interviewer assess your character: how you react to stress; how well you handle pressure, failure, or success; your own standards of “success” and “failure”; and how willing you are to assume responsibility, especially for decisions or outcomes that weren’t your fault.

Q: Have you managed people in any of the positions you’ve held?

What do they want to hear?

Moving up in most companies (and in most careers) means managing people. If you are interviewing for a supervisory position or for a job that typically leads to a management track, the interviewer will try to probe your potential in this area.

So it’s best to answer this question positively, *even if you have never actually managed anyone on the job*. Candidates with experience managing other people are considered more mature, whether or not their subordinates considered them good leaders. What’s important is that they earned the confidence of their employers.

If this is you, be sure to give the interviewer specific details on how many people you supervised and in what capacities these people worked.

What if you haven’t actually had people reporting to you? You may want to substitute the word “leadership” for “management” and talk about the clubs and other activities in which you “managed” members or volunteers or built consensus within the group. If these experiences have convinced you that you have the right stuff to be a good manager, by all means say so.



Not just management experience, but managing the same (or a slightly higher) number of people in a similarly sized and directed department or division.

A positive appreciation of the varying skills needed to manage and motivate different types of employees, especially if you never actually managed anyone “on the job.”



No management experience for a job that requires you to manage people. (Remember, thumbs down means an answer that may make the interviewer stop and think, not necessarily one that will automatically eliminate you. If companies only hired people who have managed others, how would they ever grow their own stars?)

Any negative expression of management experience. (“*Yes, I managed two people at my last firm and let me tell you, they were both overpaid do-nothings!*”)

Don’t give the impression that you underestimate the requirements of management, thinking it’s just an increase in prestige and money but not appreciating the pressures of increased responsibility, new skills needed, and so on. And don’t appear unwilling to work to acquire them.

**Q: Tell me about the types of people you have trouble getting along with.
What do they want to hear?**

This could be a land mine for a candidate who responds too quickly, answering with “pushy, abrasive people,” only to find out later that the interviewer is known for being “brusque.”



One person I interviewed gave me what I thought was a good answer to this question:

“I was discussing this problem with my boss just the other day. He told me I’m too impatient with slow performers. That the world is filled with ‘C,’ rather than ‘A’ or ‘B’ people, and I expect them all to be great performers. So, I guess I do have trouble with mediocre and poor workers. I don’t expect to ever accept poor work, but I’m learning to be more patient.”

| Questions About Your Experience

Was he *really* discussing this “just the other day”? Did the conversation ever take place? Probably not, but who cares? It’s a nice touch! And the answer works, too. Shouldn’t any top candidate be impatient with slow performers? He even discussed what he’s doing to solve his “problem.” Short and sweet, but very much to the point.



A general, vague answer, supplying little detail, indicates both a lack of analysis and a dearth of self-knowledge. Of course, you don’t really want to answer this question—which is why it was asked. But you certainly should know it and its brethren—“What’s your greatest weakness?” “Tell me about your worst boss.” “Tell me about your greatest failure.”—are potentially on the agenda.

Variation

| What types of people have trouble getting along with you?

What do they want to hear?

If you say “none,” the interviewer will assume you’re being evasive, stupid, or both. So be ready with an answer. I suggest thinking of an anecdote—a short story that softens with humor the reasons someone disliked you.

A friend of mine remembered back to his first job. Just out of college, he was the first new hire in his department within a state agency in six years. Eager to succeed, he hit the ground running. From day one, he worked twice as fast as his long-term peers, who, needless to say, resented him for it. So his answer was ready-made—and pretty much unverifiable—making it a near-perfect answer.

Q: Who do you think are our two (or three or five) major competitors?

What do they want to hear?

It doesn’t belong in this “group” of questions, but some interviewers like asking this question (or something like it) as early in the process as possible. It will quickly and painfully reveal the depth or shallowness of your pre-interview research. If you clearly

have a handle on the company's place in the industry and can adequately, even intelligently, discuss its products, its strengths and weaknesses vs. the competition, the health of the industry, and so on, you are a *serious* candidate. Granted, it says absolutely nothing about your particular qualifications for the job, but if you *are* qualified, this display of knowledge may well be that "little extra" that separates you from other qualified (or even slightly *more* qualified) candidates.

Although a lot of hemming, hawing, and nail-biting—along with an obvious lack of an answer—may not automatically lead to your dismissal, I would personally consider it a black mark.

Variations

- | What's our greatest advantage over our competitors?
- | What's our biggest disadvantage?
- | Which of our new products do you think has the greatest potential for growth?
- | What do you think is the greatest challenge facing our company? Our industry?
- | Which of our products is in trouble?
- | What do you see as the biggest trend in our industry?

Now *really* tell me about yourself

In the world of business, "style" has little to do with how well you dress (although at some companies, and in some positions, the "right" wardrobe may be a defining element of the culture). Typically, your business style is a measure—often a subjective one, at that—of how you conduct or will conduct yourself on the job.

How well do you get along with superiors? Subordinates? Peers? What's your management philosophy? Do you like to work alone or be part of a team? Interviewers will ask these types of questions to assess how you'll act and interact on the job.

| Questions About Your Experience

And interviewers will undoubtedly base at least some of their hiring decisions on their feelings about each candidate's attitude. In every case, they are assessing how the candidate's style fits in with the organizational culture, their own style, and/or the team's style. So, in general, a "thumbs up" is any answer that will convince the interviewer he or she has found a positive fit, and a "thumbs down" is an answer that reveals differences of style substantive enough to give an interviewer pause. Rather than characterizing an answer as inherently right or wrong, in other words, most interviewers are simply trying to ascertain whether you will get along with Joe or Sally or Jimmy—the other members of the company, department, or team.

Following is a series of "style" questions you should probably expect to be asked somewhere along the way.

Q: Are you an organized person?

What do they want to hear?

Even if you firmly believe that a neat desk is the sign of a sick mind, talk in detail about the organizational skills that you have developed—time management, project management, needs assessment, delegation—and how those skills have made you more effective.

But don't veer too close to either extreme. No one wants to hire someone so anal-retentive that he always knows the number of paper clips in his drawer, or someone so *disorganized* that she'd be lucky if she remembers it's Monday.

Variations

- | Paint me a mental picture of your current office.
- | Describe the top of your desk.
- | Tell me about the first five files in your file cabinet.
- | Does your smartphone help you stay organized? What apps do you use?
- | Do you use an online calendar? Which one?

Q: Do you manage your time well?

What do they want to hear?

I hope you can truthfully say yes, that you are a self-starter and almost never procrastinate. And if you *can't* say it truthfully, I hope you're smart enough to realize now is not the time to wail about your broken alarm clock—which is why, by the way, you were 15 minutes late for the interview, as you now remind the interviewer. Good employees are able to set goals, prioritize their tasks, and devote adequate and appropriate amounts of time to each one.

In answering a rather conceptual question like this one (and what could be more conceptual than time?), try to sprinkle in specifics. Here are a few examples:

"I rarely miss a deadline. When circumstances beyond my control interfere, I make up the time lost as quickly as possible."

"I establish a to-do list first thing in the morning. Then I add to it—and reprioritize tasks, if necessary—as the day goes on."

"I really like interacting with the people I work with. But when I need to focus on detailed tasks, I make sure to set aside time that will be free of interruptions of any kind, so I can concentrate and work more effectively."

Variations

- | Tell me about the first 60 minutes of a typical day.
- | What are the first three things you do in the morning?
- | How often do you have to stay late to complete your work?

Q: How do you handle change?

What do they want to hear?

Business is about change. In order to remain competitive, companies have to adapt to changes in technology, personnel,

| Questions About Your Experience

leadership, business structure, the types of services they deliver, and even the products they produce. And their people need to change just as quickly.

Choose an example of a change you faced that's resulted in something positive. Try to show that you not only accepted change and adapted to it, but flourished as a result of it, like this:

“Recently, my boss decided our company needed to develop a virtual storefront on the Web. I was given the task, along with a designer, of taking the project from the research phase to operation in eight weeks. I didn’t have any special expertise in the area of computers and online communications, so I have to assume I was given the task because I adapt well.”

“We researched the subject, examined the alternatives, and presented a plan that was accepted. Then I worked with the designer to present information in a medium neither of us had ever worked with before. In our second month online, sales were up seven percent over the same time last year.”

Q: How do you go about making important decisions?

What do they want to hear?

By now, you will have some sense of the culture of the company you’re interested in working for. So shade your answer to match it.

For example, if you want to work for a financial services company, you probably don’t want to portray yourself as a manager who makes decisions based on “gut feeling” rather than hard data. Similarly, if you’re auditioning to be an air traffic controller, it’s best not to admit that you like to “sleep” on things before making up your mind.

Think in terms of the interviewer’s main concerns. Will you need to be analytical? Creative? Willing to call on the expertise of others?

If you are aiming for a management position, you'll also want to take this opportunity to convince the interviewer that your relationship skills have made you management material—or set you on the way to achieving that goal.

You might say something like this:

"When I'm faced with an important decision, I ask the advice of others. I try to consider everything. But ultimately, I'm the one who decides. I guess that's why they say, 'It's lonely at the top.' The higher you go in management, the more responsibility you have and the more decisions you have to make by yourself."

Although this is a nice general answer, you may run into an interviewer who decides to probe to see if the “rubber meets the road,” following up with something like, *“Okay, tell me about the last important decision you had to make, how you went about making it, and the results you achieved.”* Can you match in particulars the nice general answer given above? Or do you inadvertently show you do things completely differently (better or worse) than you just said you did?

Q: Do you work well under pressure?

What do they want to hear?

Naturally, everyone will say yes to this question. However, it will be best to provide examples that support your claim to being the Second Coming of Cool Hand Luke. Be sure to choose anecdotes that don't imply that the pressure you've faced has resulted from your own procrastination or failure to anticipate problems.

Variation

| Tell me about a time pressure led you to indecision, a poor decision, or a mistake. What would you have done differently? Have you found yourself in a similar situation since? What did you do?

The questioning pattern I am suggesting you prepare for throughout this book should be apparent by now: Good interviewers

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will probe, probe, then probe some more. Why? Because they figure you can only rehearse so many generalizations and remember a limited number of little white lies, so the more detailed their questions, the more likely you will inadvertently reveal any misrepresentations, exaggerations, or omissions.

Q: Do you anticipate problems well or merely react to them?

What do they want to hear?

All managers panic from time to time. The best learn to protect themselves by anticipating problems that might lie around the bend. For example, one sales manager I know had his staff provide reports on all positive—and negative—budget variances on a weekly basis. By sharing this valuable information with his boss and also with the manufacturing, distribution, and marketing arms of the company, he helped improve product turnover and boost flagging sales. This kind of story is terrific fodder for successful interviews and the kind of example you should be trying to provide.

Q: Are you a risk-taker or do you prefer to play it safe?

What do they want to hear?

In most cases, the ideal candidate will be a mixture of both. Interviewers who ask this question are probing for intimations of innovation and creativity. Are you the shepherd or just one of the flock? But they also want to find out whether you might turn into a “loose cannon” that will ignore company policies and be all too ready to lead a fatal cavalry charge.

Again, this is a highly (company) cultural question. The interviewer might personally prefer Stonewall Jackson, CEO, to be leading his troops into battle, but probably wouldn’t want him to be controller.

Variations

- | Tell me about the last time you took a risk. Was it the right decision? What would you have done differently?
- | Tell me about a time you played it safe. Did you miss an opportunity or avoid a debacle?

Q: If you could start your career over again, what would you do differently?

What do they want to hear?

Interviewers use hypothetical questions to get candidates to think on their feet. They expect you to “know your lines” when it comes to the facts about your career and education. But how will you react when you have to ignore the script and ad lib?

Unless you’re attempting a complete change of career, you must convince the interviewer that you wouldn’t change a thing. You love your career and, given the chance, you’d do it all over again.

Feel free to quote Paul Anka (via Sinatra): “Regrets? I’ve had a few. But all in all, too few to mention.” In this case, however, watch which ones you *do* mention and make sure you position them in a way that shows what you’ve learned. Did you leave your first job because you were too impatient for a promotion, only to realize you hadn’t learned all you could have? Did you miss the opportunity to specialize in some area or develop a particular expertise that you should have?



“My only regret is that I didn’t go in this direction sooner. I started my career in editorial, and I enjoyed that. But once I got into marketing, I found I really loved it. Now, I can’t wait to get to work every day.”



“I wish I had never gotten into magazine publishing in the first place. But now I guess I’m stuck. And to think, I could have been editing garden books for FernMoor Press...”

Variations

- | What was the biggest mistake you ever made when choosing a job?
- | How important a factor has money been in your career choices?

Q: Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?

What do they want to hear?

Again, the position you're interviewing for will dictate how you should shape your answer. For example, if you're interviewing for a job as an on-the-road sales rep—who may develop an unhealthy crush on her rental car but will otherwise interact solely with customers, wait staff, and hotel employees—you *won't* want to admit that you thrive on your relationships with coworkers and can't *imagine* working without a lot of interaction.

Even if you do like the interaction at work, don't try to paint your environment as a bed of roses without any thorns. You know the old saying: "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your relatives." That goes for coworkers, too.

Every job situation forces us to get along with people we might not choose to socialize with. But we must get along with them and, quite often, for long stretches of time and under difficult circumstances. Acknowledging this reality is essential. Talk about how you've managed to get along with a variety of other people.



Once I was interviewing candidates for a position managing a production department with 16 employees. Production departments in publishing companies are filled with some of the quirkiest people you'll ever come across, so I had to gauge the interpersonal skills of each applicant very carefully.

After I'd asked one candidate a couple of questions about his management and communication skills, he gave me a steady look and said:

"Look, you know and I know it's not always easy to manage artists and proofreaders. I do my best to convince them of the importance of deadlines and let them know what it costs us when we miss them. I also point out how unfair it is to others in the department, and to the entire operation, when things are held up unnecessarily."

“I usually find some way to get along with all of the people in the department, some way to convince them that timeliness and accuracy are absolute musts. It’s not always easy. But a lot of times it’s fun. When we are rushed because another department is late, I use this as an object lesson. The most important thing is to distribute the work fairly and let everyone know that you expect them to do their share.”

Needless to say, this “right-on” answer won the job.

Variations

- | How do you get along with your superior(s)? With your coworkers? With your subordinates?
- | How much time per week do you spend working alone? Do you think it should be more? Less?
- | Do you enjoy doing individual research?
- | Do you tend to procrastinate when left alone?

What do they want to hear?

The answers to these questions should, first of all, bear some relation to the answers to earlier questions about people with whom you have had trouble or who have had trouble getting along with you. But this is, yet again, a highly cultural question, and one for which the requirements of the job define the “rightness” of any answer. If you thrive working alone but the interviewer is seeking someone who will always be part of a team, the dichotomy will be obvious.

Q: How do you generally handle conflict?

What do they want to hear?

“I really don’t get angry with other people very often. I’m usually able to work things out or anticipate problems before they occur. When conflicts can’t be avoided, I don’t back down. But I certainly do try to be reasonable.”

Or:

“I’ve had confrontations with coworkers who weren’t holding up their end of a job. I feel that employees owe it to their bosses, customers, and coworkers to do their jobs properly.”

Q: How do you behave when you have a problem with a coworker?

What do they want to hear?

“I had to work with a designer who just refused to listen to any of my suggestions. He would answer me in monosyllables and then drag his feet before doing anything I requested. Finally, I said, ‘Look, we’re both professionals. Neither of us has the right answer all the time. I have noticed that you don’t really like my suggestions. But rather than resist implementing them, why don’t we just discuss what you don’t like?’

“That worked like a charm. In fact, we eventually became friends.”

Variations

- | Tell me about the last time you lost your temper.
- | How often do you get angry?
- | How do you deal with difficult people?
- | Tell me about the last time you disagreed with your boss. A coworker. A subordinate. What did you do and what was the result?

Q: How do you motivate people?

What do they want to hear?

A good answer will note how it “depends on the person,” then offer one or two concrete examples. A poor candidate will imply that all people are motivated by the same thing or can be motivated with the same approach, a kind of “one-size-fits-all” philosophy. A savvy interviewer will use this as a follow-up question to “What is your management philosophy?”

TIPS FOR HANDLING QUESTIONS ABOUT WORK

	<p>Be honest. But play up your strengths and whitewash your weaknesses. If you have to talk about negative experiences, point out what you learned from them and why you wouldn't make the same mistakes again.</p>
	<p>Introduce only positives. Don't give away information that could come back to haunt you.</p>
	<p>Strike a balance between portraying yourself as a “company man or woman” and a “loose cannon.” Screening interviewers and hiring managers are often attracted to risk-takers. But they also put a lot of stock in playing by the rules. Your pre-interview research should clarify which road to take. If in doubt, choose neither—settle for a balanced reply.</p>
	<p>Use specific work situations to substantiate your claims. If you sense the interview drifting into subjectivity, regain the upper hand by citing concrete examples from your past experience. Don't just say you're organized. Tell how you organized a complex project from beginning to end. Remember, insofar as possible, you want the interviewer basing his or her decision on the <i>facts</i>—your strengths, qualifications, and accomplishments—not some subjective evaluation of “chemistry.”</p>
	<p>Choose your words carefully. Make sure that you are indeed answering questions and not suggesting other areas the interviewer hadn't thought to explore. For example, I suggest, “I'm looking for greater challenges,” rather than, “The boss didn't give me enough to do.” Do you really want to travel down <i>that</i> road?</p>

Sometimes you just can't win

Some people have always had a job—in fact, a lot of jobs. And companies are especially cautious about hiring people who have changed jobs repeatedly. Curiously enough, however, many are equally cautious about hiring people who have never moved. If either of these situations describes your particular job history, here's how to handle it.

Q: You've changed jobs quite frequently. How do we know you'll stick around?

What do they want to hear?

The hiring process is expensive for companies and time-consuming for managers. Job-hoppers only serve to make it a more frequent process. So, in framing your reply, convince the interviewer you have staying power by painting the position on offer as your career's "Promised Land."



Take one of these two approaches:

Confess that you had some difficulty defining your career goals at first, but now you are quite sure of your direction.

Convince the interviewer that you left previous positions only after you realized that moving on was the only way to increase your responsibilities and broaden your experience.

Be sure to emphasize the fact that you would like nothing better than to stay and grow with a company. Here's an example to study if you have to explain your own job-hopping history:

Sherri had four jobs in the first six years after college graduation. Her clever reply to an interviewer's skepticism about her staying power combines both techniques:

"All through college, I was convinced that I wanted to be a programmer. But after a few months in my first job, I found that I

was unhappy. Naturally, I blamed the company and the job. So when an opportunity opened up at Lakeside Bank, I grabbed it. But not long after the initial euphoria wore off, I was unhappy again.

“By this time I’d noticed that I really did enjoy the part of my job that dealt with applications. So when I heard about the job in end-user computing at SafeInvest, I went for it. I learned a lot there, until I hit a ‘glass ceiling.’ It was a small firm, so there was no place for me to grow.

“I was recruited for the applications position at Deep Pockets Bank, and I got the job because of some of the innovations I’d developed at SI. The work has been terrific. But once again, I find that I’m a one-person department.

“This position offers the opportunity to manage a department and interact with programmers and applications specialists on the cutting edge of technology. Throughout my career, the one thing that has remained constant is my love of learning. This job would give me the chance to learn so much.”

Variation

| You’ve been with your current employer for only a short amount of time. Is this an indication that you’ll be moving around a lot throughout your career?

Q: You’ve been with the same organization for _____ years. Won’t you have a tough time getting used to a different culture and structure?

What do they want to hear?

This is the corollary of the previous question. Here’s what the interviewer is doing to you: If you’ve moved around, she questions your staying power. If you stuck with a single company, she questions your initiative. It seems like a lose-lose situation for you.

Here’s how to fight back: During your tenure with your current company, you’ve probably worked for more than one boss.

| *Questions About Your Experience*

You may even have supervised many different types of people in various departments. Certainly you've teamed up with a variety of coworkers. And from inside this one organization, you've had a chance to observe a wide variety of other organizations—competitors, vendors, customers, and so on.

You're both flexible and loyal, which can prove a valuable combination.

By the time you've been asked introductory questions, questions about high school and college experiences, and these preliminary "on-the-job" questions, you should certainly have an idea of whether you are still a viable candidate. And if you are, you can expect even more questions. (If you are *not*, you can expect to be led politely to the door any time now.)

If the interviewer is still unsure, it's time for her to ask even more detailed questions. She's invited you to paint her a picture. Okay, Rembrandt, what else do you have to offer her?

CHAPTER 6

Questions About Core Competencies

Now that the generalities have been covered—pesky things such as motivation and your basic on-the-job attitude—good interviewers will try to glean even more particular information on your past performance. Take heart—if you've made it this far, you're still a viable candidate!

Q: Tell me about the last time you:

- Made a mistake.
- Made a good decision.
- Made a poor decision.
- Fired someone.
- Hired someone.
- Delegated an important assignment.
- Led a team.
- Successfully completed a complex project.
- Failed to complete a project on time.
- Learned a new skill.
- Developed a new expertise.
- Found a unique solution to a problem.
- Found a creative solution to a problem.
- Found a cost-effective solution to a problem.

- ☒ Rallied your team.
- ☒ Motivated a troubled employee.
- ☒ Aimed too high.
- ☒ Aimed too low.
- ☒ Made (or lost) a great sale.
- ☒ Saved the company money.
- ☒ Cost the company money.
- ☒ Went over budget.
- ☒ Exceeded your own expectations.
- ☒ Exceeded your boss's expectations.
- ☒ Fell short of your boss's expectations.
- ☒ Had to think on your feet.
- ☒ Had to make an unpopular decision.
- ☒ Had to implement an unpopular decision.
- ☒ Dealt with a difficult boss.
- ☒ Dealt with a difficult customer.
- ☒ Dealt with a difficult coworker.
- ☒ Dealt with a difficult subordinate.
- ☒ Were frustrated at work.
- ☒ Were angry at work.
- ☒ Were stressed at work.
- ☒ Delivered a speech or major presentation.
- ☒ Questioned your boss's decision.
- ☒ Convinced your boss to change his decision.
- ☒ Went over your boss's head.
- ☒ Lost a battle but won the war.

What do they want to hear?

As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, these are examples of competency-based interview questions. What are they trying

| Questions About Core Competencies

to discover? According to Robin Kessler's *Competency-based Interviews*, there are three general groups of competencies—those dealing with people, with business, and with self-management.

Competencies dealing with people include:

- Establishing focus
- Providing motivational support
- Fostering teamwork
- Empowering others
- Managing change
- Developing others
- Managing performance
- Attention to communication
- Oral communication
- Written communication
- Persuasive communication
- Interpersonal awareness
- Influencing others
- Building collaborative relationships
- Customer orientation

Competencies dealing with business include:

- Diagnostic information gathering
- Analytical thinking
- Forward thinking
- Conceptual thinking
- Strategic thinking
- Technical expertise
- Initiative
- Entrepreneurial orientation
- Fostering innovation
- Results orientation

- ☒ Thoroughness
- ☒ Decisiveness

Finally, self-management competencies include:

- ☒ Self-confidence
- ☒ Stress management
- ☒ Personal credibility
- ☒ Flexibility

All such questions seem open-ended, like “Tell me about yourself,” encouraging you to talk, but these clearly require focused, specific answers. Based on your initial answer, follow-up questions will seek even greater detail: *“Okay, I understand how the lack of divisional coordination led to the budget shortfall. And you have clearly taken responsibility for your part in the miscommunication. But what did you do to change procedures to ensure it didn’t happen again? And, by the way, did it happen again?”*

Expect a seasoned interviewer to keep probing and asking for more specifics, more examples, who said what, who did what, what were the results, what would you do differently now, what do you need to change to do better in the future, what *have* you changed, and so on.

The more detailed and clear-cut the job description, the more likely the interviewer has identified the particular competencies required to succeed at it...and the more questions will focus on those specific requirements.



A *specific answer to a specific question, the more detailed the better.*

An answer to any of the above questions that has a beginning, middle, and end, much like a good story: **Here's what happened, here's what I did, here's what I learned.**

Some of the questions *require* job-related answers; others may allow for examples chosen from outside activities, perhaps volunteer work or any part of one's personal life. A savvy candidate

will “mix and match” stories and examples to convince an interviewer she is well-rounded and actually has a life after 5 p.m.

Take appropriate credit for an accomplishment (reducing costs, increasing revenues, a creative solution, a tough sale) but be fair and honest enough to put your own contribution within the context of what your team/organization/bossassistants did...and try to appear to be bending over backward to do so.

Most interviewers will favor a candidate who has been around long enough to make good *and* bad decisions, good *and* bad hires, good *and* bad choices. The breadth of your exposure to the basic tenets of business is more important to *me*, anyway, than the extent of your experience.



Avoid giving the impression you’re a “hardworking, self-starting, high-energy” Mr. Generalization who can’t furnish an interviewer with too many examples of your wonderfulness, no matter how many questions she tosses you.

Most interviewers will be suspicious of someone with years of experience in the same job that seems to have enjoyed little exposure to the normal day-to-day vagaries of the world. You hired someone once and they were fine. Never fired anyone. Can’t remember the last time you actually had to make a major decision.

No matter how talented you are (or think you are), avoid claiming to have been CEO/COO/CFO/creative star/sales guru—all at the same time. Even if you are a prodigy who would give Mozart pause, you should be savvy enough not to take credit for every success your company achieved in the last decade (especially if you’ve only been there three years).

I always found it interesting, for example, that seven different independent publicists approached me at a trade show and that every single one of them claimed—in their literature and even on their business cards—to be totally responsible for the success

of the book, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. While I'm not sure every one of them had even worked on the book, clearly not every one of them was singularly in charge of the publicity plan!

Q: What do you do when you're having trouble...

- Solving a problem?
- With a subordinate?
- With a boss?
- With your job?

Q: What do you do when...

- Things are slow?
- Things are hectic?
- You're burned out?
- You have multiple priorities (family/work/school, etc.)?

What do they want to hear?

These questions are just further attempts to figure out how you think and act in reality. You may well have been asked about problems with a boss, coworkers, or subordinates 10, 20, or 30 minutes before, so be careful—a good interviewer may be trying to trip you up by homing in on the same issue from a different direction. The style of question framed along the lines of “What do you do when...” is very different from “Do you have a problem with _____?”

Q: What skills do you most need to acquire or develop to advance your career?

What do they want to hear?

You should claim to be developing a skill in line with the job for which you're interviewing, otherwise why are you talking about it? “*Well, I really need to grip my tennis racquet more firmly at the net. My stroke is just all wrong.*”

Let me rephrase this question:

Q: What do your supervisors tend to criticize most about your performance?

What do they want to hear?

This is another way of framing a series of questions you've probably already been asked: What's your greatest weakness? What was your greatest failure? What would your supervisor say about you?

Asking what amounts to the same question three or four different ways gives a seasoned interviewer the ability to look for the inconsistencies that you might well reveal.



You should certainly assume your references will be checked—and your current supervisor contacted—so your answer better match what your supervisor says.

Consider discussing an evaluation from an earlier job, switching to what you did about it, and claiming that your current supervisor would, therefore, not consider it a problem any longer. This is a really beautiful answer because it's possible that the interviewer can't really check the initial evaluation, which makes the rest of the scenario moot—but it works for you!

Just remember: A good interviewer will find a way to get around this elegant subterfuge: “*Was there anything your current supervisor criticized you for in your last performance evaluation?*” or “*What specific areas did your current supervisor’s last evaluation indicate you needed to work on?*”



Never cite a personal quality that might (or convince the interviewer that it might) hamper your job performance, such as procrastination, laziness, lack of concentration, a hot temper or tardiness.

Most interviewers probably will be suspicious if you claim never to have received a poor evaluation. While not necessarily untrue—there are companies and bosses that fail to do systematic evaluations or fail to take them very seriously—it will probably just

lead you to these follow-up questions: “*Tell me about the last time your boss criticized you. What for? What was your response? What have you done to fix/solve/change what he criticized?*” I would find it highly suspect for any candidate to claim they have *never* been called on the carpet for *anything*.

Q: Did you inaugurate new procedures (systems, policies, etc.) in your previous position? Tell me about them.

What do they want to hear?

Of course! You had some very good solutions you’d be happy to share with the interviewer. Regrettably, however, some (or none?) could be implemented because of circumstances beyond your control.

You don’t have to be a divisional president or department head to answer this question. An administrative assistant may have creatively and by his or her own volition instituted a new filing system or a better way to delegate departmental correspondence, or simply utilized technology to improve a mundane task, like keeping the boss’s calendar.

The interviewer is seeking industriousness, creativity, and someone who clearly cares about the organization and its success. So this is the time to bring up those facts and figures we talked about earlier. Describe the changes or improvements you were responsible for making and identify how they helped the company, in terms of increased profits, cost savings or improved production.

Variation

| Was there anything your company (or department or team) could have done to be more successful?

Here’s a perfectly acceptable answer:

“Sure, we could have expanded our product line, perhaps even doubled it, to take advantage of our superior distribution. But we just didn’t have the capital and couldn’t get the financing.”

Q: Have you been in charge of budgeting, approving expenses, and monitoring departmental progress against financial goals? Are you very qualified in this area?

What do they want to hear?

Again, financial responsibility signals an employer's faith in you. If you haven't had many—or any—fiscal duties, admit it. But as always, nothing is stopping you from being creative in the way you frame your reply. Here's an example:

"Well, I've never actually run a department, but I've had to set and meet budgetary goals for several projects I've worked on. In fact, I did this so often that I took a class to learn how to set up and use Microsoft Excel spreadsheets."

If you've had broader responsibilities, talk about your approval authority. What is the largest expenditure you could sign off on? Let the interviewer know, in round numbers, the income and expenses of the departments you've supervised.

Be careful. This question is also designed to trap you if you lied in the previous question. *"So, Ron, you managed 14 people but had no financial responsibilities at all? Hmm..."*

If you answer this question *positively*, expect more probing: *"In your experience, what are the most common obstacles you've faced when completing assignments or projects on time and on budget? Give me one or two examples of how you dealt with them."*

Q: Have you ever fired anyone? Why?

What do they want to hear?

Even if you had good reason, you know that firing someone is never pleasant. Say so, and provide a “sanitized” (and brief!) version of the events to the interviewer. Remember, you don't want to seem like a negative person, one who might disrupt an entire department, nor appear *too* empathetic.

You should express a modicum of sympathy for the person (people) who got the axe (you clearly didn't relish your role), an

understanding that sometimes people have to be fired (business is business), and a readiness to do it appropriately, professionally, and compassionately, when required.



Let's say you fired someone for not meeting productivity goals. You might be thinking, "Boy, I'm glad I got rid of that bum. He was nothing but a wimp and whiner who never did a good day's work in all the time he was on the job." Go ahead and *think* that. But when you open your mouth, *say* something like this:

"Yes, I fired someone who continually fell short of his productivity goals. His shortcomings were documented and discussed with him over a period of months. But in that time, he failed to show any real improvement. I had no choice. As a supervisor, I want everyone in my department to work out. Let's face it, though, not everyone is equally dedicated to his or her job."

If you haven't actually fired anyone, here is one way to respond:

"I've never actually fired anyone myself, but it was the policy at my company that no hirings or firings should be unilateral. I was asked on two occasions to give my opinion about someone else's performance. It's never easy to be honest about a coworker's shortcomings. But I felt I had to do what was best for the department and fair to everyone else in it."

Q: Have you ever hired anyone? Why did you choose them?

What do they want to hear?

If you have hired one or more people during your career, your answer might go something like this:

"Yes, I have hired people. I have also decided whether some internal applicants were right for jobs in my department. The first time I hired someone, I concentrated on checking off all the right qualifications. I just went down a checklist."

“Since then, I’ve learned that some candidates who became excellent workers didn’t necessarily have every qualification on that checklist. They more than made up for what they lacked in the beginning with enthusiasm and a willingness to work with others.”

What if you’ve never hired anyone? Show the interviewer you appreciate that he or she is trying to evaluate both your management potential and people skills, and try something like this:

“Not really. But on several occasions I was asked to speak to prospective applicants and offer my opinion. Of course, in those cases, I was trying to determine whether that person would be a team player and if he or she would get along with the other people in the department.”

L et’s take it from the top

If you’re seeking an executive-level position, most of the previous questions in this book are just as pertinent as if you were interviewing to be a receptionist (although the interviewer would expect a different level of answer). Here are a few questions you can expect if you are a potential CEO, CFO, CIO, or executive vice president:

Q: Describe your management philosophy.

What do they want to hear?

Most companies want someone who can demonstrate a desire and ability to delegate, teach, and distribute work—and credit—fairly (unless, of course, the interviewer is an autocratic jerk seeking a mirror image). In general, you probably want to come across as neither a dictator nor a pushover. Successful candidates will convey that they have the ability to succeed should opportunity present itself. But they should avoid giving the impression that they’re fire-breathing workaholics ready to succeed no matter what (or whom) the cost.



“More than anything else, I think that management is getting things done through other people. The manager’s job is to provide the resources and environment in which people can work effectively. I try to do this by creating teams, judging people solely on the basis of their performance, distributing work fairly, and empowering workers, to the extent possible, to make their own decisions. I’ve found that this breeds loyalty and inspires hard work.”



These are wishy-washy answers I’ve actually heard during interviews:

“I try to get people to like me, and then they really work hard for me.”

“I guess you could say I’m a real people person.”

“I just kind of go with the flow and see what happens.”

Q: What’s the most difficult part of being a manager or executive?

Q: Tell me about the last situation in which you were directed to overhaul a problem unit/department/division/company. What were you confronted with, what did you do, what kind of culture did you attempt to create?

Q: How many people did you hire and fire?

Q: What goals did you establish?

Q: How long was your outlook, and what were the results?

What do they want to hear?

Every question is designed to get a handle on your management philosophy and gauge your abilities to conceptualize on a general basis and implement on a specific one: to foster loyalty, unity, and shared goals; to create and produce under pressure; to stay within budget and/or produce over budget; and so on.

| *Questions About Core Competencies*

Needless to say, very specific examples that detail the problems you've faced, the actions you took and the results you achieved, are called for.

Variations

- | What kinds of decisions are difficult for you to make?
- | How do you go about making a decision?
- | How do you decide what tasks to delegate and to whom?
- | Tell me about the last responsibility you delegated that went wrong.
- | What was the worst decision you ever made?
- | How much feedback do you want from your subordinates?
- | Tell me about the last decision you made that your subordinates disagreed with.
- | Tell me about the last decision you made that your boss disagreed with.

Q: How do you “stay in the loop”?

What do they want to hear?

There are many ways to get the information an interviewer is seeking with this question. Here are some variations:

- How many meetings do you schedule and/or attend per week? Per month?
- Do you believe in “Management by Walking Around”?
- Do you spend a lot of time in your subordinates’ offices asking questions or do you prefer to wait for them to come to you with problems?
- Tell me about the last time you skipped a meeting. Why didn’t you attend?
- What regular communications do you expect from your employees?

All of the above are much more specific than “Explain your management philosophy,” a question an experienced interviewee can wiggle through with a couple of business-guru quotes. The more senior your current position—and the more “executive” the position for which you’re applying—the more likely these types of questions will be asked. And the more important the answers to them will be.

Q: How do you deal with subordinates who are becoming part of the problem rather than part of the solution?

What do they want to hear?

This has been asked previously in other forms. The interviewer is trying to separate the real leaders from the “managers with a title” and ascertain whether your particular style will mesh with that of the organization.

A matter of ethics

Q: Tell me about your personal code of ethics?

Are you an ethical person? What is your moral code? I would seek to emphasize one’s honesty, loyalty, and integrity, all attributes any company should value and welcome. If your personal sense of ethics or morals is based on your religious upbringing or faith, I would not feel it necessary (or advisable) to trumpet that fact. As we will see in Chapter 10, the interviewer has no right to ask about your religion, so why raise the issue yourself?

And if you are willing to do just about anything to get ahead and barely know the difference between right and wrong? Please don’t confess your lack of integrity to the interviewer...or schedule an interview at my company.

Variations

| Tell me about the last time you did something inconsistent with your values or ethics.

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- | Have you ever had to “bend the rules” to do your job?
- | Tell me about the last time you uncovered or learned about a coworker’s unethical behavior. What did you do?
- | What would you do if you learned this company was doing something you thought was wrong?

Q: Would you lie for your company?

Sorry, no. That certainly doesn’t mean you won’t be loyal and willing to go the extra mile, but you will not compromise your own ethics.

Q: A colleague told you she is looking for a job but asked you to keep her confidence. What would you say if your boss asked you point-blank about it?

Well, you are not a snitch and you can certainly keep a secret, but you have to demonstrate that your loyalty to the company trumps your loyalty to a colleague, subordinate, or friend. Can you think of any (equally hypothetical) way to protect that person’s confidence without lying to your boss? Finding such a solution would certainly highlight your diplomatic skills.

Variations

- | Would you lie to cover up a mistake or ethical violation by your boss (colleague, subordinate, team member)?
- | When is it okay to break a confidence?
- | When is it okay to reveal another’s secret?

Can you keep a secret and respect confidentiality? Companies protecting valuable patents, product recipes, and other corporate secrets are now assailed daily by computer hackers. A loss of confidential information to a competitor could be devastating. Can they trust you to put the company first? Are you part of the solution or another potential leaker or whistleblower they have to worry about?

MORE TIPS FOR ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT WORK

	<p>□ Be positive about your reasons for leaving your current job (or any previous jobs, for that matter). The key word to remember is “more.” You want <i>more</i> responsibility, <i>more</i> challenges, <i>more</i> opportunity, and finally (but don’t play this up, except as a natural consequence of the previous “mores”), <i>more</i> money.</p>
	<p>□ If you’ve been fired, stress what you learned from the experience. Be as positive as you can be.</p>
	<p>□ Quantify the confidence other employers have placed in you. Do this by stressing specific facts, figures, and measurable accomplishments. Mention the number of employees you’ve supervised, the amount of money you controlled, the earnings that your department achieved under your management.</p>
	<p>□ Never speak badly of past supervisors or employers. It’s the biggest negative of all, and you’re highlighting nothing but the positive, right?</p>
	<p>□ Make the job you’re interviewing for your chief objective. Frame your answers so that you let the interviewer know that you see this job as a means to achieving your ultimate career objectives. Be careful not to make it sound like either a stepping stone or a safe haven.</p>

C HAPTER 7

Questions About Your Current (or Last) Job

Whether you have been working for 20 years or 20 days, you will probably face a lot of questions about your current or last job. Even if it boasted the shortest tenure. Even if a previous job lasted years and your current one just months. Why? Because the interviewer wants to know what you can do for him or her right now—and the most current job offers the best available proof.

Q: Why are you thinking of leaving your current job?

What do they want to hear?

Obviously, no one wants to leave a job with which they are completely content (although some people routinely interview to keep “in practice” or explore other opportunities in their area or industry). But the last thing you want to do is appear negative or, worse, speak ill of your current employer. (If you do so, your interviewer will assume that if you’re hired, you will soon be characterizing him and/or his company in the same disparaging terms.)

So handle your discontent (if that’s what led you here) very gingerly. The less contented you are, the more careful you should be in talking about it. It will do you absolutely no good to confess to the interviewer that you lie awake most nights fantasizing about putting a contract out on your current boss.

Instead, use what management consultants call “visioning”: Imagine the ideal next step in your career, then act as though you are interviewing for that position.

Here's what I mean. Let's say you are interested in assuming more financial management responsibilities. You might tell the interviewer:

"There is a great deal I enjoy about my current job. But my potential for growth in this area is limited at Closely Held, Inc., because of the size of the company and the fact that expansion isn't part of its current strategic plan."



Unless you've been fired or laid off, you should make it clear that you are sitting in front of the interviewer only because you seek more responsibility, a bigger challenge, or better opportunities for growth (even more money), *not* because you are desperate to put some distance between yourself and your current job situation.

Emphasize your desire to move "up" rather than just to move "out."

Avoid any personal and/or negative comments about coworkers, supervisors, or your current (last) company's policies.



The introduction of any negative, no matter how horrible your current job situation. (In fact, the more obviously horrible your job, the more points you will score with many interviewers for creating an impression of relative contentment.)

A willingness to make a lateral move or even take a demotion just to leave your current company. Unless you are moving into an entirely new area or field, such a willingness to move out rather than up would give *me* pause. What are you hiding? Is this just a last-ditch effort to get out before you are shoved out? And what does such a willingness say about your ability to tough it out until the right situation comes along? Is my company just a calmer sea in which to tread water until the right freighter passes by?

Variations

- | What's hindering your progress at your present firm?
- | Is this the first time you've thought about leaving? What made you stay before?
- | If the situation is so dire, why haven't you already given notice?

Q: Where does your boss think you are now?

What do they want to hear?

Although you may have been given notice or laid off and, therefore, be interviewing with the full knowledge of your boss, it's more likely you're still employed. So under no circumstances mutter something like, "He thinks I'm interviewing with you so I can leave that hellhole behind. By the way, he'll be calling you tomorrow to find a job himself." You should attempt to schedule interviews during lunch hour, after work, or on a personal or vacation day. I personally don't like to hear that a candidate has taken a sick day to talk with me. It's a white lie, but a lie nevertheless.



The truth, whatever it is. Many interviewers will give you points for demonstrating your sense of responsibility to your current job by scheduling a breakfast interview or one during a lunch hour or after hours.



If you have blatantly lied or indicate through body language that the question makes you uncomfortable (implying that you lied).

If your answer demonstrates little or no loyalty to the company that's still paying the bills, whether that organization is enlightened or despotic.

Q: Are you still employed at the last firm listed on your resume?

What do they want to hear?

You probably know the adage that it's always easier to find a job when you already have one. Well, it's true, because many

interviewers believe that an employed person is somehow “better” than an unemployed one, even if the latter is more qualified. Being laid off is perceived by many interviewers as a sign of weakness. I even heard one experienced executive recruiter say, “Oh, if she was laid off, there must be something wrong with her. Companies don’t ever let really good employees go!” Would that it were true!

But the fact is that massive layoffs can and do still occur. And many hardworking, loyal individuals who contributed greatly to their companies—and could be significant assets to a new one—have to admit they’ve been laid off. Personally, I am firmly convinced that there is no shame in this status and give a laid-off candidate the same consideration I do anyone else. I would not assume all interviewers are as enlightened.

What if you *were* fired? Come clean quickly and smoothly to turn this potential negative into a positive.

Let’s consider the case of Nick. A hotel sales manager, he was unfortunate enough to work for a petty tyrant who made a practice of taking Nick and his coworkers to task often, publicly and mercilessly.

One day, Nick finally had it. He blew up at his boss—and was fired on the spot. Later on, he was asked about his employment status in an interview for another hotel sales job. He answered bluntly, “*I was fired.*”

When the stunned interviewer asked to hear more, Nick explained:

“My boss and I just didn’t get along, and I have to admit I didn’t handle the situation well. I certainly understand the importance of call reports and log sheets and other sales-management controls. I guess I interpreted some of Joe’s quick demands for these things as a lack of trust, and I shouldn’t have. I’ve learned my lesson.”



Talk less about why you were terminated and more about what you've learned from the experience.

If you were laid off, or, as the British quaintly say, “made redundant,” you shouldn’t be expected to apologize. You might say something like, “*Yes, I was one of 16 people laid off when sales took a slide.*” (This is an easy way out—presuming you were not a member, or head, of the sales department!)



As always, the introduction of any negative. (“*Yeah, I was fired because I’m not as young as I used to be. Wait until they see what my old lawyer has to say about age discrimination. I’ll make them pay through the nose!*”)

Being fired for cause, especially if you refuse to admit responsibility or detail what steps have been taken to correct the problem. Celebrity felons like Mike Tyson may get two or three or umpteen chances to make millions even after serving time, but most interviewers get a bit antsy about hiring someone who was fired for stealing, drinking on the job, hitting their boss, or some equally charming offense.

Q: Describe the way your department is organized. Also, what is the title of the person to whom you report? What are his or her exact responsibilities?

What do they want to hear?

Did you hear that? If you’ve been vastly exaggerating the duties and responsibilities of your current position, that sound you heard was the door that just closed...behind you...on your way out of the interview.

This question is designed to clarify what you really do—how can you be doing “X” if you said that’s your *boss’s* main function?—and set up a series of follow-up questions about why you exaggerated (presuming the interviewer doesn’t just say “thank you” then and there). Don’t be surprised if you are asked to draw an organizational chart of your company or department.



Duties and responsibilities that match those claimed on your resume.

Duties and responsibilities commensurate with the job at hand.

An answer that ties in with your answers to previous questions about work experience. The more detailed these answers, the easier it will be for an interviewer to catch any inconsistencies (at which point he or she will return to those previous answers and ask why the current one doesn't seem to mesh with them).

A clearly presented explanation of how your department, division, or company is set up, which tends to at least show consistency with your resume and implies that you have really done what you said you have (although a really good interviewer will take detailed notes so he or she can check each particular with your supervisor when calling for a reference).



A hazy, vague explanation that indicates you may be making it all up as you go along.

Glaring inconsistencies with your resume or previous answers.

Failure to include a key responsibility or job duty that was previously proclaimed, especially if it's one that is important to the new job.

An organizational plan that doesn't make sense to the interviewer. (The more experience someone has at different companies, the more likely she will have been exposed to different structures and management styles, and the more confident she will feel that a structure that seems top heavy or one that gives lower-level staff members an extraordinary amount of freedom doesn't "feel right.")

Q: Tell me about your typical day at your current (last) job. How much time do you spend on the phone? In meetings? In one-on-one chats? Working by yourself? Working with your team (or others)?

What do they want to hear?

Again, they are looking for the detail that will “prove” some of the earlier general statements you made (about responsibilities, duties, even favorite aspects of your job) or show that those statements were disingenuous or perhaps somewhat excessive.

Variations

- | On a typical day, tell me what you do in the first and last hour at work. When do you arrive and leave?
- | Tell me what specific responsibilities you currently delegate. Are you delegating too many or too few tasks? Why? What's stopping you from changing it?
- | How many hours per week do you have to work to fulfill your responsibilities at work?
- | What's the most important part of your current job to you? To your firm?

Q: How long have you been looking for a job?

What do they want to hear?

Unless you've been fired or laid off, your answer should always be that you've just started looking. If you think the interviewer has some way of finding out that you've been looking for a while (perhaps you've come to him through a recruiter who knows your history), be prepared to explain why you haven't received or accepted any offers.

Rightly or wrongly, many interviewers presume that the longer you've been “out there,” the less desirable you are to hire. Personally, I disagree. If someone's been looking for a month or two or three, are they inherently less desirable than a newly minted ex-employee who's still wearing his company T-shirt

under his suit? It's unrealistic to expect that everyone who wants a job can find one right away. It's even less realistic not to assume that the most qualified candidates might well be picky and simply be ensuring a proper fit with the right company before plunging back into the corporate seas.

Nevertheless, be prepared to deal with those interviewers less understanding than I.

Variations

- | How's your job search going?
- | How optimistic are you about getting a job?

Q: What other companies have you interviewed with?

This is a not-so-veiled way to see whether you are being consistent—you just declared *this* company is the end-all and be-all of your search, but all the other companies with which you've interviewed are in entirely different industries, some in entirely different locations. What is the interviewer to believe? How serious are you?

Variations

- | Have you interviewed with any of our competitors?
- | Why haven't you gotten interviews with more companies?
- | Why have you interviewed with so many companies?
- | Why did you interview with *them*?

Q: Why haven't you received any offers so far?

What do they want to hear?

You're just as choosy about finding the right job as the interviewer is about hiring the right candidate. Don't whine or show that the search is upsetting you. If you've already fielded an offer or two, you might say:

"I have had an offer. But the situation was not right for me. I'm especially glad that I didn't accept, because I now have a shot at landing this position."

It's important to tell the truth, however, because the interviewer's next logical question may be:

Q: Who made you an offer? For what type of position? At what salary?

What do they want to hear?

If you've already lied, you're in hot water now! Some interviewers will consider any admission of lying in these circumstances your "voluntary" offer to end the interview.

Many interviewers know a great deal about their competitors and which positions they're trying to fill. If you did the smart thing and told the truth, supply the name of the company. He or she may already be aware of your visit there.

It's important to stress that the position you turned down was very similar to the one you're applying for now. After all, if the job you are currently interviewing for is perfect for you—as you've undoubtedly already told the interviewer three or four times—why would you be interested in a very different position at the other company?

Q: If you don't leave your current job, what will happen there? How far do you expect to advance?

What do they want to hear?

Is desperation driving you away from your current job, so that you'll say or do anything to get this one? This doesn't exactly make you a prime candidate to most interviewers. Why should he or she save you?

Even if you'd rather hawk peanuts at the circus than stay another month at ABC Widget, convince the interviewer that you're the type of employee who is capable of making the most of any situation—even an employment situation you've characterized as undesirable.

You could say:

"Naturally I'm interested in this job and have been thinking about leaving ABC. However, my supervisors think highly of me, and I expect that

one day other situations will open up for me at the company. I'm one of ABC's top salespeople. I have seen other people performing at similar levels advance to management positions. But I'm looking for that increased responsibility right now."

However you really feel about your current job, it's always best to conduct your part of the interview as if you are in the driver's seat, just cruising along happily until you see that changing lanes would improve your career. You certainly aren't interested in getting off at the next exit, no matter where it leads!

Begin your answers with the phrase, "Well, assuming I'm not the successful candidate for this position...." Without too much ego, let the interviewer know that you're taking your time. You're interested in choosing a job that's right for you.



If you can claim (or do claim) that you will still advance and be given more responsibility, but perhaps at too slow a pace or without adequate compensation.

If you are able to describe a situation in which the company, through little or no fault of your own, will clearly not be able to keep or pay its top people what they're worth (for example: a pending merger, bankruptcy, cash flow problems, loss of a key customer or product). Clearly, your reason for leaving is obvious and justifiable, your future there dim.



"Well, I doubt I'll last the week. Old Scrawnynose will probably fire me right after lunch."

An answer that indicates problems at the company for which you must bear some responsibility. ("Well, sales are down 10 percent across the board but my territory is down 72 percent. It's not my fault that all those stores went out of business!")

Although it's a good idea to convince your prospective employer that the world is your oyster—and you're simply waiting to find the perfect pearl of a job—you might get hit with questions like these:

Q: If you're so happy at your current job, why are you leaving? Will they be surprised?

What do they want to hear?

You might think your current company will go out of business at any second. Or you may be leaving because you just broke off your engagement with the person in the office next door. Don't cry on the interviewer's shoulder.

Instead, reassure him or her that you're not running away from anything. You've made the decision to move toward:

- ☒ More responsibility.
- ☒ More knowledge.
- ☒ The wonderful opportunity available at Good Times, Inc.

Variations

- | What would have to change at your current job to make it tenable?
- | What have you had to change about yourself/your skills/philosophy/duties to adapt to changes at your current firm?
- | What aspects of your current job were different than you expected when you took it?

Q: If you have these complaints about your current job/boss/company, and they think so highly of you, why haven't you brought your concerns to their attention?

What do they want to hear?

The interviewer is trying to "hoist you by your own petard." Some problem solver you are! You can't even talk to your boss about changes that might make you happier.

If you do find yourself cornered, facing this dead end, the only way out is to be as positive as possible. Say something like:

"Grin & Bear It is aware of my desire to move up. But the company is still small. There's really not much they can do about it. The management team is terrific. There's no need right now to add to it, and they are aware of some of the problems this creates in keeping good performers. It's something they talk about quite openly."

Variations

- | If you could eliminate one duty/responsibility from your current (last) job, what would it be and why?
- | If you could make one comment or suggestion to your current boss, what would it be? Did you do anything of the sort? Why or why not?

Q: How would your coworkers describe you?

What do they want to hear?

Of course, they would describe you as an easygoing person who is a good team player. After all, you've found that "a lot more can be accomplished when people gang up on a problem, rather than on each other."

Once again, the personal inventory you completed in Chapter 2 will come in handy. Cull words from the lists I encouraged you to make: "My strongest skills," "My greatest areas of knowledge," "My greatest personality strengths," and "The things I do best"—and put them in the mouths of coworkers and friends.

Variations

- | What five adjectives would your last supervisor use to describe you?
- | How effectively did your supervisor conduct appraisals?
- | How did you do on your last performance appraisal?
- | What were your key strengths and weaknesses mentioned by your supervisor?

| *Questions About Your Current (or Last) Job*

- | How did your last supervisor get the best performance out of you?
- | What did you say and do the last time you were right and your boss was wrong?

Q: Give me specific examples of what you did at your current (last) job to increase revenues, reduce costs, be more efficient, etc.

What do they want to hear?

This ties in to the earlier questions you were asked about budgetary responsibility and how your current department is organized. (Savvy interviewers think it's a good idea after asking the first question or two to ask some different questions, *then* return to the subject later. Many candidates, having successfully navigated the shoals of the earlier questions, may be caught in an exaggeration when the interviewer returns to the question later on rather than following it up immediately.)

Q: What do you feel an employer owes an employee?

What do they want to hear?

This is not—let me repeat, *not*—your invitation to discuss the employee benefits package you would like to have. It's a loaded question.

Don't get into a dissertation on the employer's moral or legal responsibility to employees. Try to refocus the interviewer's attention on your positive outlook, and keep your answer short and sweet:

*"I think an employer owes its employees opportunity.
In my next position, I look forward to the opportunity
to run projects profitably."*

If the interviewer digs for a more specific response about a sensitive issue—such as your feelings about the information an employer should share with employees or the size of the raise pool—you could respond like this:

"I hope that my employer will be respectful of me as an employee and of any agreements we may negotiate in the course of business. However, I know that there are times when organizations face tough decisions that may require confidentiality and affect employees. That's business."

Q: The successful candidate for this position will be working with some highly trained individuals who have been with the company for a long time. How will you mesh with them?

What do they want to hear?

Your answer should indicate your eagerness—as the new kid on the block—to learn from your future coworkers. You don't want to raise any doubts about how they might react to you. So convey the fact that, while you are certainly bringing something to the party (skills, knowledge, your own insights), you realize you have a lot to learn from the people you'll be working with (even if, in your heart of hearts, you think they're probably a bunch of old fogies and can't wait to get on board and shape them up).

Q: Your supervisor tells you to do something in a way you know is dead wrong. What do you do?

What do they want to hear?

This is a tough question, so why not acknowledge it with an answer like this:

"In a situation like this, even the best employee runs the risk of seeming insubordinate. I would pose my alternative to my supervisor in the most deferential way possible. If he insisted that I was wrong, I guess I'd have to do it his way."

Q: If you were unfairly criticized by your supervisor, what would you do?

What do they want to hear?

All of us can think back to a time when the pressure was on at work and a mistake was made. Maybe you took more than

your fair share of the blame. Perhaps you were caught in circumstances beyond your control. In any event, your boss blamed you. But chances are, you and your boss got through the rough spot and you made sure the mistake never occurred again.

You could answer the question by telling of such an experience. You do not have to select the most vulnerable or perilous moment of your career to illustrate the point. Simple mistakes are more than adequate:

“In the course of my career there have been a few times when problems have come up and I have been held accountable for mistakes I did not feel I had caused. But a problem is a problem no matter who creates it, and you certainly don’t have to create the problem to solve it. The most important thing is to deal with it.”

“On those occasions when the issue has been significant enough, I have explained my point of view to my supervisor later—after the situation has been resolved and the atmosphere has calmed.”

Q: Would you like to have your boss’s job? Why or why not?

What do they want to hear?

No matter how you answer this question, the interviewer will learn a lot about you, so proceed with caution. It’s an indirect way of finding out whether or not you want to be promoted.

Let’s start with the first part of the question: Saying “yes” indicates you’re ambitious and interested in career advancement. Saying “no” indicates doubts or reservations, at least about the job in question.

In the second part of the question, things get sticky. For instance, if it’s clear that you’re interested in promotion and the position you are applying for doesn’t offer a direct path to a higher level, then the interviewer may conclude that you’ll be

disappointed. On the other hand, in a highly competitive organization, expressing reservations about career advancement could knock you out of the running immediately.

There are two things you should do to prepare for this question. First, in your preliminary research, get a sense of the corporate culture and opportunities for advancement. Try to be aware of the possibilities going into the interview.

Second, identify your honest answer to the question. Maybe you're ready, willing, and anxious to move up and take on your boss's job. Or maybe you shudder at the thought of a management job where you have to deal with personnel issues. "Know thyself" on this one, because if you're hired, your answer may come back to haunt you.

Now put the results together to develop your response. Ideally, your honest answer will suit the company. If your aspirations are incompatible with the possibilities, you can—at your own risk—compensate by offering an answer that fits. No matter what, make it *positive*:

"In time, I would love to have my boss's job. I'm particularly interested in the vendor relationships and sales promotion sides of buying."

"I am very interested in career advancement, but my current boss's responsibilities are heavily weighted toward managing department production. In time, I hope to move into a position with primary responsibility for design quality."

"I would be open to taking on additional responsibilities, but I like the autonomy of a sales position, and I find it rewarding to work directly with clients. My boss is mainly responsible for supervising the department and its personnel. In such a position, I would miss the client contact."

Q: Please tell me a joke

Please don't.

This is the only example I am going to include of questions that are, for lack of a better term, stupid. I personally don't care what kind of tree you think you are, what animal represents your management style, or what your zodiacal sign means, and neither should any other interviewer. But, of course, some of them do. So treat any such question—or a disconcerting suggestion like “tell me a joke”—as the unwelcome diversion that it is. Find a way to bring the conversation back to the particulars you know you need to emphasize and the traits and skills you need to feature.

Oh, and *don't* tell them a joke. But you can always craft an answer that discusses how a sense of humor is an important attribute when diffusing a volatile situation, along with a pertinent example.

CHAPTER 8

So Why Us?

In most prizefights, the first couple of rounds are relatively boring. The boxers spend their time checking each other out—assessing each other’s feints and jabs—before the real mayhem begins.

The same could be said of most interviews. After the first bell, the pleasantries begin. The second bell signals the “getting-to-know-you” round of questioning. Then, if the interviewer thinks it’s worthwhile, he begins “pummeling” you with questions meant to separate the “stiffs” from the real contenders.

If you’ve already confidently answered a dozen or so questions, you’re in that pummeling stage. Your chance to dance around open-ended questions is long gone. In order to make it to the final bell, you need to demonstrate some real knowledge.

Q: What do you know about our company?

What do they want to hear?

Believe it or not, many candidates think this is merely an ice-breaker and simply answer, “Nothing, really.”

Don’t follow suit! After all, why would you go into one of the most important encounters of your life so thoroughly unprepared? And then admit it?

I have urged (okay, nagged) you to do your homework. This is where your research will come in handy. Toss out a few salient

(and positive) facts about the company, and finish by lobbing a question that demonstrates your interest back into the interviewer's court. For example:

"Boy, what a growth story Starter Up is! Didn't I read recently that you've had seven straight years of double-digit growth? I read in your annual report that you're planning to introduce a new line of products in the near future. I jumped at the chance to apply here. Can you tell me a little bit about this division and the position you're interviewing for?"



Any answer that demonstrates your pre-interview research. The more informed you are, the more likely you should end up at the top of the list of potential employees.

A detailed answer that indicates the breadth of your research, from checking out the company's Internet site to reading its annual report and being familiar with its products and services. Referring to a trade magazine article that mentions the company or, better yet, the interviewer, is a nice touch, don't you think?

Variations

- | What are the most important trends you see in our industry?
- | What do you think are our best products or services?
- | How do you think our major competitors are doing? By the way, who are they?
- | What do you know about the community (town, city) in which we're located?
- | In which of our offices would you prefer to work?
- | Would you have a problem traveling between a few of our offices?

Q: Do you have any questions?

What do they want to hear?

In a traditionally structured interview, this question occurs very near the end of the interview. In fact, you may well assume that its appearance signals that end.

If you are unsure of whether you want a particular job, there is nothing wrong with letting the interviewer take the reins and direct the conversation. Through her questioning, you will probably get a much clearer understanding of what exactly she is looking for...and whether that “person” is you (or whether you *want* to be that person).

But do you have to wait until the interviewer puts you through the wringer, smiles benevolently, and actually asks, “So, do you have any questions?” I really don’t think so, especially if you have decided it is a job you want and are qualified for, in which case I would be more assertive and start asking your own questions. Just keep a couple of caveats in mind.

First and foremost, always ask permission to ask the first couple of questions. Once it’s clear the interviewer has no problem with *your* asking questions even as she continues to pepper you with her own, you will have established some easy rapport and won’t need to ask permission each time. But it’s up to you to make sure the interviewer is comfortable with your approach. If he shows obvious signs of discomfort—frowning while saying okay, pursing his lips, or showing in any other way that he clearly is *not* too keen on your interrupting his supposedly well-crafted approach to the interview session—back off!

But if an interviewer suggests you are free to ask questions at any time or tells you it’s fine when you ask permission, do so! In that case, waiting for the ubiquitous “Do you have any questions?” is a bad move: The interviewer may have already downgraded you because you *didn’t* take her (strong) hint to be assertive right from the start.

Asking questions during the regular interview does not mean interrupting. And it doesn't mean always answering an interviewer's question with a question of your own, which may well thwart the interviewer's attempts to assess your strengths.

Taking the initiative and asking questions early (with the interviewer's permission, of course) is the scenario I prefer, both as an interviewee and an interviewer.

As an interviewer, it impresses me. It makes me believe (barring evidence to the contrary) that the person in front of me is interested, engaged, and assertive.

As an interviewee, I want to exert some control of the interview—subtly steering it in the direction *I* want it to go—and asking questions early and often certainly accomplishes that. Doing so is especially effective with an inept (or at least less-than-veteran) interviewer, who may welcome your help.

Another great reason to ask questions early and often is because it transforms a stilted, traditional “Q & A”—with you being the “A”—into a *conversation*. By definition, this makes the meeting less formal, less “you vs. me,” more “we.” And a conversation is how you explore areas of common interest, trade comments, chat rather than “talk.” In other words, it’s the way you establish the personal chemistry that is one of the vital factors in landing any job! Once the applicant pool has been whittled down to a select two or three candidates, there is usually little difference between their qualifications. What differentiates one from another may well be the relationships established during the interview process...and the interviewers’ assessments of how each candidate will fit in.

Last but not least, asking a good question is a slick way to sidestep an uncomfortable question from the interviewer (at least, for the time being). How do you explain that one-year gap in your resume? Darn. You didn’t want to have to talk about that aborted dot-com bomb *yet*. Don’t expect the topic to die. You are, at best, buying a temporary reprieve, but at least

you've given yourself a little time to think about how you want to defuse a potentially uncomfortable situation.

By interspersing your own smart questions throughout the interview, when the interviewer finally asks, "Do you have any (other) questions?" to signal the end of the interview, you may well be able to reply, "No, not really, I think we've covered all the bases." And you wouldn't have to worry that she will reject you for a lack of interest...since you have clearly demonstrated your interest throughout the interview.

What do you want to know?

It's easy to get caught up in the challenge of impressing the interviewer with your brilliant answers, but it's also important that you don't lose sight of the fact that you have a goal—trying to determine whether this situation is right for you, whether this job is worthy of your talents and commitment.

With this in mind, here are a few key questions I would want to ask:

"Can you give me a formal, written description of the position? I'm interested in reviewing in detail the major activities involved and what results are expected."

This is a good question to pose to the screening interviewer. It will help you prepare to face the hiring manager. If a written description doesn't exist, ask the interviewer to dictate as complete a description of the job to you as possible.

"Does this job usually lead to other positions at the company? Which ones?"

You don't want to find yourself in a dead-end job. So find out how you can expect to advance after you land this job. What happened to the person you would be replacing? Is he or she still with the company? If so, doing what?

Try to pursue this line of questioning without giving the impression that you can't wait to get out of a job you don't even have yet! If you ask in a completely nonthreatening manner, your ambition will be understood, even welcomed.

"Tell me some of the particular skills or attributes that you want in the candidate for this position."

The interviewer's answer should tell you how much your traits are valued. With this information, you can underline those traits you possess at the close of the interview to end it on a strong note.

"Please tell me a little bit about the people with whom I'll be working most closely."

I wish someone had told me about this question before my last job interview! The answer can tell you so many things, like how good the people you could be working with are at their jobs and how much you are likely to learn from them. Most important, you'll find out whether the hiring manager seems enthusiastic about his team.

A hiring manager usually tries to put on his best face during an interview, just as you do as the prospective candidate. But catching the interviewer off guard with this question can give you a glimpse of the real feelings hiding behind the "game face."

If she doesn't seem enthusiastic, you probably won't enjoy being part of the team. This particular hiring manager may attribute little success, and perhaps a lot of headaches, to the people who work for her.

"What do you like best about this company? Why?"

If the interviewer hems and haws a lot over this one, it may indicate that she doesn't really like the company that much at all.

If she's instantly enthusiastic, her answer should help sell you on her and the company.

The answer to this question can also give you a good sense of the values of the organization and the hiring manager. If she

talks about nothing but products and how well her stock options are doing, it indicates a lack of enthusiasm for the people side of the business.

“What is the company’s ranking within the industry? Does this position represent a change from where it was a few years ago?”

You should already have some indication of the answer to this question from your initial research, particularly if the company is publicly owned. If you have some of this information, go ahead and build it into your question:

“I’ve read that the company has risen from fifth to second in market share in just the past three years. What are the key reasons for this dramatic success?”

This question again clearly illustrates that you have done your research...and are ready to flaunt it!

Avoid asking about days off, vacation, holidays, sick pay, personal days, and so on, at least until the interviewer has actually offered you the job. You’ll seem like someone who is looking for a chance to get out of the office before you even start!

Here’s a list of questions to ask about the company, department, and job itself. While you should attempt to answer as many as you can *before* the interview, this will not always be possible, especially if you are interviewing with a small, privately held company.

Questions about the company

- ☒ Are you currently planning any acquisitions?
- ☒ Do you have a lot of employees working flextime or telecommuting?
- ☒ How rapidly is the company growing?
- ☒ How many employees work for the organization?

- ☒ Is there anything else you feel it is vital I know about the company (or department, job, expectations, and so on)?
- ☒ On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the work environment here in terms of stress (congeniality, workload, teamwork, and so on)?
- ☒ Please explain the company's organizational chart.
- ☒ What are the company's strengths and weaknesses?
- ☒ What are your goals for the next few years?
- ☒ What are your key markets? Are they growing?
- ☒ What are your leading products or services?
- ☒ What are your prospects and plans for growth and expansion?
- ☒ What do you like best about this company? Why?
- ☒ What do you see as key goals for the company during the next year?
- ☒ What growth rate are you currently anticipating? Will this be accomplished internally or through acquisitions?
- ☒ What has been your layoff history in the last five years? Do you anticipate any cutbacks in the near future? If you do, how will they impact my department or position?
- ☒ What is your hiring philosophy?
- ☒ What is your ranking within the industry? Does this represent a change from where it was a year or a few years ago?
- ☒ What is your share of each of your markets?
- ☒ What major problems or challenges have you recently faced? How were they addressed? What results do you expect?
- ☒ What products or services are you planning to introduce in the near future?
- ☒ Which other company serving your markets pose a serious threat?
- ☒ Who owns the company?

- ☒ Will you be entering any new markets in the next couple of years? Which ones and via what types of distribution channels?

Questions about the department

- ☒ Are there specific challenges you are facing right now?
- ☒ Can you tell me about a successful project and how you managed it?
- ☒ Can you tell me about some recent problems you've faced and how you (as a team) overcame them?
- ☒ Can you explain the organizational structure of the department and its primary functions and responsibilities?
- ☒ How is the department's performance measured?
- ☒ How many people work exclusively in this department?
- ☒ If you could change one thing about the way this department works (or is structured, managed, compensated, and so on), what would it be?
- ☒ To whom does my boss report?
- ☒ To whom will I be reporting?
- ☒ What are the department's specific objectives for the next three months?
- ☒ What are the department's strengths and weaknesses?
- ☒ What are the departments current goals and objectives?
- ☒ What has the turnover been in this department in the last couple of years?
- ☒ What is the department's budget? Who is part of the planning process?
- ☒ What was the last great challenge faced by the department? How did you and your team handle it?
- ☒ What would you most like to see changed in this department?
- ☒ With which other departments would I work most closely?

Questions about the job

- ☒ Are there a lot of after-hours business events I will be expected to attend?
- ☒ Are there other things you would like someone to do that are not considered “formal” parts of the job?
- ☒ Can you give me a better idea of the kinds of decisions I could make (or amounts of money I could spend) without oversight?
- ☒ Could you describe a typical day in this position?
- ☒ Does this job usually lead to other positions in the company? Which ones?
- ☒ How advanced or current is the hardware and software I will be expected to use?
- ☒ How did this job become available? Was the previous person promoted? What is his or her new title? Was the previous person fired? Why?
- ☒ How do you see me working with each of the department heads?
- ☒ How do you see my role evolving in the first two years?
- ☒ How has this job been performed in the past?
- ☒ How long has this position been available?
- ☒ How many hours per week do you expect your star employees to put in?
- ☒ How many people will be reporting to me?
- ☒ How much budgetary responsibility would I have?
- ☒ How much day-to-day autonomy would I have?
- ☒ How much discretion would I have to hire my own people?
- ☒ How much input would I have in determining my team’s or department’s goals, objectives and deadlines?
- ☒ How much travel should I expect to do in a typical month?
- ☒ How will we work together to establish objectives and deadlines in the first months of this job?

- ☒ How would my performance be measured?
- ☒ Is a written job description available?
- ☒ Is relocation an option, a possibility, or a requirement?
- ☒ Is there anyone within the organization who is interviewing for this position?
- ☒ On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate a successful candidate's chance to advance from this position?
- ☒ On what basis are raises and bonuses awarded?
- ☒ Please tell me a little bit about the people with whom I'll be working most closely.
- ☒ Please tell me more about your training programs. Do you offer reimbursement for job-related education? Time off?
- ☒ What are three specific goals I should set for my first three months on the job?
- ☒ What three things need immediate attention?
- ☒ What do you think my biggest challenge will be?
- ☒ What is the first problem I should tackle?
- ☒ What is the one thing I should do during my first three months on the job?
- ☒ What kind of training should I expect and for how long?
- ☒ What skills are in short supply here?
- ☒ What will my days be like?
- ☒ What would be the most logical areas for me to evolve into?
- ☒ What would you like to be able to say about your new hire one year from now?
- ☒ Where will I be working? May I see it?
- ☒ Would I be able to speak with the person who held this job previously?
- ☒ Would I be able to unilaterally fire an underperforming team member?

Q: What interests you most about this position? Our company?

What do they want to hear?

You know the drill from some of the previous chapters: You have your eye on more responsibility, more opportunities, the chance to supervise more people, and the chance to develop a new set of skills and sharpen the ones you've already acquired. And, of course, if they absolutely insist they'll increase your salary, well, you certainly aren't one to be negative and say no!

However, this is also the ideal time to show what you know about this company and how the position you're interviewing for can contribute to its success.



Armed with this knowledge, you might reply: "I've heard so much about your titanium ball bearings that I've wanted to experiment with different applications for them." Rather than, "I'll have a better commute if I get this job."

(Unbelievably, I have heard this response from more than one candidate I've interviewed! It may be honest, even important to the candidate, but it sure wasn't the answer I wanted to hear.)



Be careful of any answer that clearly demonstrates incompatibility. If your primary interest lies in an area that will be peripheral, at best, to your real function, you're just setting yourself up for a "thank you, we'll be in touch."

Variation

| On a scale of one to five, rate your interest in this company. In this job.

Q: What have you heard about our company that you don't like?

What do they want to hear?

This is tricky. Obviously you want to minimize the negative implications of any question, including this one. If there hasn't been any dire news, you could ask about the dearth of the most recent software or your wish that the company's profits were a bit more predictable.

Of course, the existence of real news changes your response. Maybe you've heard that ABC Widget had a layoff 12 months ago and you're wondering if the dust has settled yet. Or perhaps you've heard rumors of a merger.

Don't play dumb. Given either of the above scenarios, any new prospect would have reservations about the company's stability and plans for the future. If the interviewer opens the door for you to ask what might otherwise be uncomfortable questions, by all means walk right in.

Just don't slam the door in your own face by raising a huge negative: "*I'm not sure I like the fact that I'll be reporting to three different executives*" or "*Is it possible to be scheduled for a salary review in 30 days?*"

Q: This is a much larger (smaller) company than you've worked for. How do you feel about that?

What do they want to hear?

If the company is larger, you are undoubtedly looking forward to terrific growth opportunities and exposure to more areas of knowledge than you have access to now.

If the prospective company is smaller, you are looking forward to a far less bureaucratic organization, where decisions can be made much more quickly and where no department is so large that its people are unfamiliar with the workings of the entire company.

Q: What are you looking for in your next job?

What do they want to hear?

Obviously, you should tailor your response to the job you're applying for. But answering with a slightly reorganized rendition of the job description isn't the right way to go about it.

Interviewers typically ask a question like this to gauge your level of interest in the job and see if you have any doubts. So focus on the job at hand. Think of key skills the job requires and emphasize your interest in having a chance to develop (or further

develop) one of them. And don't forget to express enthusiasm for your field of work. Here is an example:

"In my current position as development research associate, I research corporate and government funding opportunities and write grant proposals. I enjoy my work very much, but my contact with prospective donors has been limited. I look forward to a position that offers more opportunities to work with donors, securing their support, and insuring that they are recognized for their contributions."

"I have had a few opportunities to do this with my current employer, and based on my success in dealing with Timely Donations, Inc., I know I can successfully advocate an organization's mission to gain needed corporate support."

Variations

- | If you could have any job in the world, what would it be?
- | If you could work for any company in the world, which would it be?
- | Describe your ideal job.

This is not the time to wax philosophical about your dreams, let alone your fantasies. You may well harbor a desire to work in Paris, but if the company with which you're interviewing doesn't happen to have an office in France, why are you bothering to bring it up?

On the other hand, disingenuously telling the interviewer that *his* is your dream company is not usually believable.

Since virtually any answer is just going to land you in the proverbial hot water, you'd do better to find a way to slide around the question as quickly as possible.

Q: Please describe the job for which you are applying.

Is there a distinct difference between what you think you are going to be doing and what the interviewer has assumed are your

major duties? Then this question will undoubtedly reveal them. If a disparity becomes obvious, make sure you take the time to cite examples that illustrate the competencies or experience you now know are required.

Q: What aspect of the job I've described appeals to you least?

What do they want to hear?

Let me lead with a little humor. After conversing with his Irish friend one day, a man finally blurted out in consternation, “*Why do the Irish always answer a question with a question?*” Unruffled, the Irishman winked and replied, “*Do we, now?*”

Your best tactic is to follow suit. Shoot the question right back at the interviewer! For example, you might say:

“You've described a position in which I'd be overseeing some extraordinary levels of output. What sort of quality control procedures does this company have? Will I be able to consult with in-house specialists?”

Much like the question asked earlier (“*What have you heard about our company that you don't like?*”), I would presume this question is inviting a real answer. If you aren't going to take the job (unbeknownst to the interviewer) because of what you believe to be a fundamental flaw in the job or the company, a good interviewer will want to know about it.

One of three possible scenarios will result:

- ☒ You'll reveal an invalid or mistaken objection. Once the interviewer answers it, you will again be an interested candidate.
- ☒ You'll reveal a viable objection that leads the interviewer to eliminate you from consideration.
- ☒ You'll reveal a viable objection that will lead you to remove *yourself* from consideration.

Q: Based on what you know about our industry, how does your ideal job stack up against the description of the job for which you're applying?

What do they want to hear?

The “ideal” job is always one in which you’ll have a broad scope of responsibilities that will enable you to continue to learn about your industry and grow. So use your knowledge about the industry to formulate a reply that, though perhaps a bit idealistic, doesn’t sound unrealistic:

“I know that many accounting firms are deriving more and more of their fee income from consulting services. I’d like a job that combines my cost accounting knowledge with client consultation and problem solving. Ideally, I’d like to start as part of a team, then eventually head up a practice in a specific area, say, cost accounting in manufacturing environments.”

Now, based on what you know about the position, touch on one (and only one) minor shortcoming, and formulate a few careful questions about some aspects of the position you don’t know about. Expanding on the above example, you might say:

“I know this position is in the auditing area and that you hire many of your entry-level people into that department. I must confess, I would like this to be a stepping stone to working more in the manufacturing area and, several years down the line, in consulting. I’m sure I don’t have the requisite knowledge or experience yet. Is this a position in which I can gain such experience, and is this a career track that’s possible at this firm?”

Q: How will you handle the least interesting or most unpleasant parts of this job?

What do they want to hear?

An interviewer posing this question usually will build in specific aspects of the position, such as: “You won’t always be looking

for creative solutions to our clients' tax problems. Most of the time, you'll be churning out returns and making sure you comply with the latest laws. You're aware of that, of course?" You might answer:

"I'm sure that every job in the accounting field has its routine tasks. They have to be done, too. Doing those tasks is part of the satisfaction of doing the job well. They make the relatively infrequent chances we have to be creative even more satisfying."

Q: You've had little experience with budgeting (or sales or whatever). How do you intend to learn what you need to know to perform on this job?

What do they want to hear?

"Well, throughout my career, I've proven to be a quick study. For example, when my company's inventory system was computerized, I didn't have the time to go through the training. But the company that supplied the software had developed some computer-based tutorials and training manuals. I studied them and practiced at home. I hope that I'd be able to do something similar to pick up the rudiments of your budgeting system."

You could also mention other options, such as learning from professional publications and seminars. Show your initiative and resourcefulness in getting up to speed quickly. The interviewer wants to be sure you won't just be sitting around twiddling your thumbs and complaining that you don't know what to do next. Reassure him or her that you plan to do whatever it takes to go right on learning throughout your tenure.

Now, how would you step in and save the day? If you don't know as much as you'd like to about the position for which you're interviewing, spend some time with industry and trade publications. Focus on articles written to help people in this type of position solve common problems—or that suggest tips, tricks, and tools designed to increase everyday efficiency.

You want to demonstrate that you're ready to step right in and handle a tough situation with a cool head.

It's also a good idea to sharpen your working knowledge and skills. Interviewers like to pose problems you can solve on the spot. These exercises are intended to demonstrate your proficiency in the areas most important to the job.

Preparation makes perfect. If you come up blank, or use a fact or formula inaccurately during one of these exercises, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to recoup your credibility. That would be especially unfortunate after you've gotten this far.

Caveat: Different companies may use slightly different terms for the same procedure or material. So explain your terminology up front to make sure you're communicating clearly.

Q: How long do you plan to stay with us?

What do they want to hear?

One answer I *don't* want to hear is “forever,” because I simply won’t believe it (and I’ll wonder about the intelligence of a candidate who would think that’s what I want to hear). You should offer a fairly simple answer along the lines of “as long as I continue to grow, continue to learn, and continue to contribute in ways you feel are valuable.”

I’m not sure whether this question will ever give an interviewer any useful information, because any candidate candid (or stupid) enough to answer “*oh, a month or two, until I find a job I really like*” shouldn’t have made it through the screening process (or, for that matter, the first two questions of the interview). But be careful your body language doesn’t reveal your real answer. Squirming *does* imply, “*Oh, a month or two, until I find a job I really like!*”

If you already appear to be a job-hopper but trot out the standard “as long as I continue to grow” speech, don’t be surprised if the interviewer asks, “*Is that what you told the interviewers at your four previous positions?*” Whatever you do, don’t answer, “*Yep, and they all believed me, too!*”

Q: How do you think I've handled this interview?

What do they want to hear?

Well, your options aren't very pleasant, are they? Saying "lousy" doesn't seem appropriate, but "great, sir, and may I polish your shoes?" seems a bit too obsequious. There is no right answer, so don't offer one—ask a question of your own instead: "I think your questions have given me a good opportunity to discuss many of my strengths and qualifications already. What else can I tell you to convince you I am absolutely the best candidate for this job?"

Variations

- | How well do you think I've conducted this interview so far?
- | Am I talking too much?
- | What do you think of the questions I've asked so far?

CHAPTER 9

Questions About Your Personal Life

Most people think that the candidate who talks only about work, work, work stands the best chance of getting the job. But there's a "you" that exists after 5 p.m.—and most interviewers want to get to know that person, too.

The guiding principle for answering personal questions is the same as it is for responding to queries about your professional experiences: Emphasize the positive. Let the interviewer in on the best and most interesting aspects of your personality.

Just be careful of saying too much. Your answers can reveal more information than the interviewer is entitled by law to ask for. For example, in the warm glow of an interview that seems to be going well, you might feel comfortable talking about your children and the challenges of being a single parent.

The interviewer could not have asked about your family situation in order to eliminate you from the running. Yet once this information is out, it's fair game. He or she is free to use it to make unfair judgments about your ability to handle various aspects of the job. If the job you're applying for involves occasional overnight travel, for example, he or she may decide your family situation would create unnecessary difficulties.

So, while these questions do give you an opportunity to demonstrate what a terrific person you are, they could also prompt

you to—unwittingly—provide information that does you in as a prospective candidate for employment! A little later in this chapter, I will help you identify questions that are, at best, inappropriate and, at worst, illegal.

When does the interview actually start?

As the head of recruiting for a rather large company, a friend of mine spent weeks at a time interviewing scores of candidates for a wide variety of openings. With so much practice, she became very good at identifying unsuitable candidates in minutes—and “releasing” the unsuspecting person with a simple, “Thanks for stopping by” before the interview even got underway!

Here’s how it worked: On greeting a young applicant for a field sales position one morning, my friend asked, “How are you?” The applicant immediately began whining that it was raining and she had a run in her stocking.

My friend turned to her and, feigning embarrassment, said, *“Oh! Are you here to apply for that field sales position? I’m sorry. We forgot to call. We filled the position yesterday. But we’ll keep you in mind for other, similar positions that come along. Thanks for stopping by.”*

This story demonstrates a fact that few candidates realize: There is no such thing as an innocent or “throwaway” question. You are being judged from the moment the interviewer sees you (or hears you on the telephone) until the instant you are offered the job (or escorted out of the building).

Many interviewers use these questions as icebreakers, believing that they give a false, informal impression of “let’s just chat, shall we?” and lead candidates to drop their interview guard. Some interviewees, dismissed after only a few minutes, belatedly discover that these innocent questions “ice-picked” their chance for the job.

Following are just a few to be prepared for.

Q: How are you today?

What do they want to hear?

You're doing just fine, thank you. And no, you didn't have any trouble at all finding their offices. That's because (don't admit to this, just do it) you took the time to get directions from the interviewer's assistant.

Again, it all comes down to being positive. I'm not suggesting that you plaster an idiot grin on your face and go on like a "Stepford" employee. But I do urge you to make every effort not to let anything negative (even the crummy weather) enter into any part of your interaction with the interviewer.

Since my recruiter friend told me her little story, I know I pay much more attention to the answers candidates give to these little throwaway questions.

Variations

| Did you have any trouble finding us?

| Where are you staying? Do you like the hotel?

| How was your flight?

Q: What's the last book you read?

What do they want to hear?

What someone chooses to read speaks volumes about what kind of a person he or she is. But before you reel off your reading list, consider this: Right or wrong, many interviewers seem to think that people who read nonfiction are more interested in the world about them than fiction readers, whom they may believe are looking for an escape.

So rather than talk about the latest thriller you couldn't put down, opt for a popular how-to book. This will demonstrate that you're interested in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* or *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, or generally trying to improve your knowledge and skill as a businessperson.

Q: What's the last movie you saw?

What do they want to hear?

Mention a popular but noncontroversial movie. It won't do you any good to gleefully admit it was *Friday the 13th, Part 86*.

Do you want your taste in foreign films or left-wing documentaries to stand between you and a job? If you insist your preferences shouldn't matter, feel free to discuss them.

Variations

- | What three people would you most like to have dinner with?
- | What other person would you invite to a desert island?
- | What's your favorite book?
- | Who's your favorite author?
- | Who's your favorite actor?
- | What's your favorite movie?
- | What's your favorite TV show?
- | What magazines do you read regularly?
- | Where do you get your news?
- | Tell me a favorite quote.

Q: If I went on to your Facebook page right now, what would I find?

Everyone has been telling you for years that anything posted online never dies, so of course you never put photos of yourself with drink in hand (or face on floor). Wait. You did? What were you thinking? Okay, but you deleted them before you started your job search, right? NO? WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

The older the interviewer, the less likely he is intimately involved with social media, though this is just a generalization. But many companies are now routinely checking applicants' Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, blogs, and other social media sites, so have the good sense to scrub yours clean. And be prepared for questions about your Internet presence you wouldn't have faced even a few years ago.

Variations

- | How many friends do you have on Facebook?
- | What's your favorite website?
- | What's your favorite podcast?
- | Who do you follow on Twitter?
- | How many Twitter followers do you have?
- | What's your favorite blog?
- | What's the most-used app on your phone?
- | How much time do you spend on social media sites during a typical day?

Q: How do you manage to balance career and family?

What do they want to hear?

Gosh, you are facing one tricky devil. Again, this is a perfectly legal question, but it does make it decidedly difficult if you are determined to keep any discussion of family out of the interview. Why would you want to avoid such a discussion? If you've been around the block a few times, you may legitimately worry that the interviewer has some unwritten rules, such as no single parents hired for travel positions.

Accordingly, if you're attempting to give an answer that is as unrevealing as possible, try something like this:

"I have been a dedicated, loyal, hard-working employee throughout my career and nothing in my personal life—family obligations, hobbies, or volunteer work—has ever affected my performance. Nor would I ever expect it to."

Q: What do you like to do when you're not at work?

What do they want to hear?

Many employers subscribe to the theory, "If you want something done, give it to a busy person." So, you want to portray

yourself as an active, vital individual. Take this opportunity to paint a self-portrait of a well-rounded, curious, and interesting person.

Be sure to emphasize those activities that may complement your on-the-job duties. For example, if you're applying for a position as a bookstore manager, mentioning that you read three books a week is highly appropriate. Your addiction to helicopter skiing probably isn't (for any job!).

Variations

- | What are your hobbies?
- | What turns you on in your off-hours?
- | What did you do last weekend?
- | Where did you go on your last vacation?
- | So, what do you spend your extra money on?



Shy away from the controversial. A savvy candidate will cite reading and tennis, for example, rather than bungee jumping, picketing abortion clinics, or raising money for the Liberal Party. Do you really want your off-hours interests to come between you and the job you're after? Then don't brag about activities that would cause a squeamish employer to envision a prolonged sick leave or a conservative one to shudder at your radical views.

It's generally safe to talk about most sports activities—participating in team sports; coaching children; or indulging in singular activities such as swimming, running, walking, or bicycling. Avoid emphasizing activities that are likely to spark concern or controversy, such as sky diving or hunting.

As a rule, employers like activities that show you are community-minded and people-oriented. Your involvement with the chamber of commerce, Toastmasters, Rotary Club, or fundraising for charities is likely to earn points. However, consider avoiding any religious or political activities that may alienate the interviewer.



Carefully craft your answer so you don't:

Sound like a couch potato. “I’m a Giants fan. I never miss a game. I also catch every rerun of my 14 favorite shows.”

Seem headed for a collapse. “I play racquetball, coach a softball team, am on the board of directors of the local museum, plan to run for city council this fall, and, in my spare time, attend lectures on Egyptology at the university.” (And exactly where will you find the time and energy for work?)

Boast about dangerous activities. “I like to challenge myself. Next weekend, I’m signed up for another parachute jump. I need something to keep me pumped up until rugby season starts.”

Bring up controversial interests that may be personally objectionable to the interviewer. “I’m always on the front lines at Greenpeace demonstrations.” Or, “I give all my money to the Crusade to Convert the World to (fill-in-the-blank) religion.”

To your good health

Employers have more than just a passing interest in your health. Most companies are looking for ways to keep the overall cost of health-care insurance from skyrocketing. Most managers want to know that you won’t be felled by every flu bug that makes the rounds—and on sick leave when they need you most. Here are two *legal* questions they can ask:

Q: Are you in good health? What do you do to stay in shape?

You must be honest in answering this one. Prospective employers can find ways to check your medical history if they’re worried about your health. In fact, many employers make job offers contingent on your passing a physical examination.

If you appear to be dedicated to maintaining your own good health, you’ll ease many of their concerns. You don’t have to be

an exercise nut. Just play up any activities you do regularly that provide at least some health benefit, such as yard work, home repairs, even walking the dog.

Q: Do you have any physical problems that may limit your ability to perform this job? If so, what accommodations would be necessary?

This is a perfectly legitimate question for the interviewer to ask. So be honest. Are you applying for a job that requires a lot of data entry despite the fact that you've been waging an ongoing battle with carpal tunnel syndrome? Will you be doing a lot of walking and standing on the job that might trigger that problem knee?

Remember, though, the key words are “ability to perform this job.” A physical problem that is not job-related is not pertinent... and none of the employer’s business, by law.

Discriminate and eliminate?

In an ideal world, companies and managers would judge every applicant solely on the basis of the skills and experience necessary to perform the job.

But it should come as no surprise that our world is far from ideal. In the real world, many managers and companies discriminate against people of color, people with disabilities, people over the age of 50, even women whom they may simply assume are planning to have children sometime during their future employment!

Few of us can claim to be completely objective when judging other people. But the fact is that you, as a candidate for any job, do not have to answer questions related to your race, nationality, marital or financial status—or even a disability if it is unrelated to how well you are able to perform the job.

If an interviewer is foolish enough to make an issue of your nationality, marital status, or other personal information, should you leap out of your chair and make a citizen’s arrest right there in the interview? No.

But you should sit up and take notice. Every state has regulations governing what may and may not be asked of an applicant during the pre-employment (application and interviewing) process. Just asking the wrong question is not illegal in itself. But it may open an employer up to a lawsuit if an otherwise-qualified applicant is passed over for a job based on his or her answer. Few companies are willing to take that chance. So when it comes to inappropriate questions, most employers tread lightly.

But regulations don't preclude the subtle techniques some interviewers use to get applicants to volunteer information. As an applicant, it's still up to you to dodge the bullet. The key is knowing when a question is inappropriate—and deciding whether to surrender information that might cost you the job.

Every question the interviewer asks should pass this test: Does it have something to do with your current job or the one that you're applying for?

Beyond that, it pays to check with your state's Fair Employment Practices Commission for a list of questions considered inappropriate for employers to ask on job applications and during pre-employment interviews.

In the meantime, here are some questions that should trigger alarms in your head during even the most congenial interview.

Q: How old are you?

Age can be a loaded issue for many employers. If you're in your late 40s or 50s, some employers may worry about your energy flagging or your health failing. Don't give them ammunition in the form of a number.

Employers cannot ask for your birth date or about facts that might reveal your age, such as the year you graduated from high school. Interviewers may only state that hiring is subject to verification of legal minimum age requirements and that employees under the age of 18 must provide a work permit. (So asking whether you are at least 18 years old is a legal question.)

But age, like race, can be easy to guess. So again, take a positive tack. Play up the benefits of your experience and assure the employer that you have all the vitality for work you had when you were in your 20s. You might say:

The more I've accomplished, the more effective I've become. When I was just starting out, I was so full of energy I was like a loose cannon. Now I find I can accomplish more in less time because I know where to find the resources I need and how to work effectively with all kinds of people."

Variations

- | When were you born?
- | When did you graduate from high school?
- | When did you graduate from college?
- | Are you near retirement age?
- | Aren't you a little young to be seeking a job with this much responsibility?
- | Aren't you a little too old for a fast-changing company such as ours?

Q: Are you single (married, separated, divorced)?

Often an interviewer's bias is not overt. Many interviewers use subtle ploys designed to get you to volunteer just the information that they may use to disqualify you from the running.

You may be married with children—and proud of it. But resist the temptation to whip out the latest pictures from Walt Disney World. Why? After all, what could seem more innocent than chitchatting about your girlfriend, spouse, or kids? What's the harm in letting an employer know about your tentative plan for having a child within a year?

Maybe there's no harm in it. But then again, you never know how an interviewer may interpret your answers. If you're planning to have a child within a year, for example, an interviewer

may wonder whether you will begin to curtail your hours at work. If you're engaged to be married, he might assume that you will be so wrapped up in wedding plans that your attention won't be focused on the job at hand.

Interviewers may not ask about your marital status or plans for marriage or for having children. If you already have children, you're not obliged to reveal their ages or the arrangements you've made for childcare. In many states, married women are not required to give an employer their maiden name—unless they've worked under another name at previous companies listed on their resume.

You may be asked whether you are able and willing to relocate, to travel extensively, or to work overtime as needed (as long as the latter two questions are asked of all candidates). While these may be veiled attempts to discover whether you have a lot of family obligations—there may not actually *be* much travel or overtime—they are still legal questions and you will need to have answers ready.

Meeting the interviewer halfway

Rather than simply refusing to answer a question—and creating bad feelings between you and the interviewer—you may find it helpful to confront what you believe might be the employer's concerns about your situation. For example, if the interviewer keeps digging for information about whether you have children, or plan to, he may be concerned about your commitment to the job. You might respond by saying something like:

"I sense that you are concerned about my ability to be here on a regular basis to put in the work necessary to meet deadlines. Just let me assure you that I have always been a reliable worker who's committed to getting the job done well and on time. In fact, in my last position, I was never late to work and I consistently completed all projects ahead of deadline."

See? Without answering any questions about children or family plans, you addressed the real issue—the employer's concern about your commitment to your job.

Variations

- | What do you think caused your divorce?
- | Why have you never married?
- | Were you ever married?
- | Do you intend to marry?
- | Do you live alone?
- | Do you have any children?
- | Do you prefer to be called Miss, Ms., or Mrs.?
- | Are you a single parent?
- | How many dependents are you responsible for?
- | Who's the boss in your family?
- | What kind of work does your spouse do?
- | How much time do you spend with your family?
- | What do you think makes a happy marriage?
- | Tell me about your children.
- | Do you have a good relationship with your children?
- | Do you have any children not living with you?
- | Do you live with your parents?
- | What childcare arrangements have you made for your children?
- | My darn kids seem to pick up every bug that comes around. Yours, too?
- | My wife (husband) hates me working on weekends. What about yours?
- | Do you practice birth control?
- | Are you pregnant?
- | Do you intend to have children?

- | Will travel be a burden on your family?
- | Are you a family man (woman)?

Q: What's your nationality?

When you meet, you can't stop an interviewer from drawing conclusions about your lineage from the color of your skin, eyes, or hair. But never surrender that information over the telephone or hand over a photograph of yourself before you accept a job.

Employers may not ask about your ancestry, descent, parentage, or nationality—or that of your parents or spouse. It's okay to volunteer that you're proficient in a language other than English, but the interviewer cannot ask you how you learned to read, write, or speak those languages.

Let's say your last name is "obviously" Italian. When you greet the interviewer, he remarks, "Rutigliano. That's Italian, isn't it?" What do you do? Just smile politely...and don't answer at all. It is quite possible that the interviewer meant absolutely no offense.

If the interviewer still doesn't get the hint and continues to allude to your Italian heritage, you might say, "I really don't see what my ancestry has to do with my application for this job." If you try to handle the situation diplomatically, you can stay on the interviewer's "good" side.

If an employer tries to pressure you into submitting a photograph of yourself to accompany your job application, simply say, "I don't have a suitable photograph available at this time. Of course, if I'm offered this job, I'd be happy to have one taken."

The Federal Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 prohibits employers from hiring undocumented workers—people who are not properly authorized to work in this country. So confirming that you *are* authorized to work in the U.S. is perfectly legitimate. In fact, once you have accepted the offer, you will be required to document your right to work by providing your United States passport, a green card, or some combination of birth certificate, social security card, and driver's license.

Variations

- | Hmm, that's a _____ (Italian, Greek, etc.) name, isn't it?
- | What language do you speak at home?
- | Where are your parents from?
- | Where were you born?
- | Where were your parents born?
- | What is your maiden name?
- | Is that the last name you were born with?
- | What languages do your parents speak?
- | What do your parents do?
- | Were your parents born in this country?
- | Were you born in this country?
- | What kind of accent is that?
- | What languages do you speak?*
- | Are you bilingual?*

*These last two are legal questions if proficiency in one or more foreign languages is a requirement of the job.

Q: What's your sexual orientation?

"I'm sorry. I don't intend to discuss that."

Variations

- | Are you straight?
- | Are you gay?
- | Are you a lesbian?
- | Do you date other men?
- | Do you date other women?
- | Do you have any roommates?
- | Do you live with anyone?
- | Do you belong to any gay or lesbian groups?
- | What gender is your spouse?

Q: Are you _____ (Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, etc.)?

Employers may tell you which religious holidays the company observes. But they cannot ask you for any specific information in this area.

If an interviewer presses you to reveal your affiliation, simply say:

“I like to keep my religious beliefs separate from my work, and I respect that right in the people with whom I work.”

But if you find yourself dodging too many of these bullets, maybe you should take a moment to think about whether you want to work for a supervisor who has shown himself to be ignorant and insensitive. If you don’t care that he’s an insensitive boob—or you desperately need the job—then don’t make an issue out of his comments. It’s up to you.

Variations

- | What do you do Sunday mornings?
- | Can you work Friday evenings?
- | We’re a _____ (Christian, Jewish, Muslim) firm.
Would that be a problem for you?
- | Are you a member of any religious group?
- | What religion do you practice?
- | Do you tithe?
- | Are you “born again”?
- | Do your children go to Sunday School?
- | Do your children go to Hebrew School?
- | Do your children attend a madrassa?
- | Do you sing in the church choir?
- | What church do you belong to?
- | What temple do you regularly attend?
- | Is there any day of the week on which you can’t work?

- | Will working on weekends be a problem for you?
- | What religious holidays will you need to take?
- | What organizations do you belong to?
- | Have you ever done any missionary work?

Q: Do you have any physical problems?

Interviewers may only ask about a physical or mental disability *that will directly affect your performance on the job.*

Your general physical health is not fair game, although you may be asked to take a physical examination after you receive an offer. The outcome of this examination must be related to essential functions of the job, so the employer has the right to condition the offer on the results.

Employers may not ask about whether you have:

- An existing mental condition.
- Received workers' compensation.
- Problems with alcohol or drugs.
- HIV, AIDS, or AIDS-related syndrome.

Although new laws and regulations will likely be written, currently HIV infection, AIDS, and AIDS-related medical conditions are considered "disabilities" under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

If you test positive for HIV or AIDS (or any other disability) in a pre-employment medical examination, the employer cannot use that information as grounds for withdrawing the offer, *unless the extent of the illness substantially inhibits your ability to do the job or poses a reasonable threat to the safety of others in the workplace.*

Variations

- | Do you have any health problems?
- | How many days were you sick last year?
- | Do you spend a lot on prescriptions?
- | Can you read the fine print on this form?

| *Questions About Your Personal Life*

- | How's your back?
- | Is your hearing good?
- | Were you ever denied health insurance?
- | Were you ever denied life insurance?
- | When were you last in the hospital?
- | When did you last consult a doctor?
- | Do you have a doctor you see regularly?
- | Are you handicapped?
- | Have you ever filed a worker's compensation claim?
- | Are you sensitive about your weight?
- | Are you on a diet?
- | Shouldn't you be on a diet?

Q: What organizations do you belong to?

Think carefully about your answer to this question. An employer can ask about (and should only be interested in) your membership in organizations, professional societies, or other associations considered important to your performance on the job.

It's a good idea to leave out the names of any organizations that might provide "clues" to your race, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, or disability.

Q: Have you ever gone bankrupt?

A prospective employer may only ask what you're currently earning.

Your current or past assets, liabilities, or credit rating are not fair game. This includes whether you own a home or any information about a past bankruptcy or garnishment of wages (except when permitted by federal and state laws governing credit-related information). Again, it's wise to consult specific guidelines in your state.

Variations

- | Do you own or rent your home?
- | Do you have any outside income?
- | Do you earn any money from hobbies or investments?

Q: What was your record in the military?

If you have served in the military and want to highlight relevant skills and knowledge you gained from that experience, go ahead. But be aware that you're not required to give the dates of your military service or the type of discharge you received.

A dishonorable discharge from the military or an arrest that did not result in a conviction does not mean your professional life is over. In the majority of cases, these facts should remain in your past.

Be aware, however, that regulations do differ from state to state and from industry to industry. For example, under the Federal Deposit Insurance Act, banks are prohibited from hiring individuals convicted of any crime involving dishonesty or breach of trust, even if the conviction is more than seven years old.

Variation

- | What kind of discharge did you receive from the military?

Q: Have you ever been arrested?

Unless you're applying for a position as a police officer or with the Department of Justice, a prospective employer is not entitled to know whether you've been arrested, unless the arrest resulted in a conviction.

In some states, employers may only ask about felonies, not misdemeanors. If you have a criminal record, do some research.

So what do you do?

Over the past 25 years, there has been a plethora of lawsuits charging employers with discriminatory hiring practices, yet

inappropriate questions still are commonly asked during interviews. This is particularly true of interviews by hiring managers, who may not be as informed as they should be about legal issues. If you're asked an inappropriate question, you have four choices:

- ☒ You can choose to answer the question, assuming that (for now, at least) the interviewer is not being wily, merely curious.
- ☒ You can choose to answer the question you think the interviewer is *really* asking. He may not really care if you have kids, for example, if you point out that travel and overtime are no problem.
- ☒ You can make sure the interviewer is aware—oh so tactfully!—that she is treading on thin legal ice: “*I'm not sure my religion is relevant to the job, but as you can see from my resume...*”
- ☒ You can end the interview. I’m presuming you would do this because the interviewer has not stopped with one question—despite your tactful warnings—but has continued to ask inappropriate questions. Why would you want to work in a company that has made it clear they discriminate?

What to do after the fact

If an interviewer has asked you questions not related to the job on offer, and you believe you weren’t hired based on your refusal to answer or the information you did provide, you might have grounds for charging the employer with discrimination.

The operative word here is “might.” The burden of proof is on you. You will have to prove that the questions were asked for the purpose of discriminating among applicants. For example, if the manager asking all those questions about Italian ancestry subsequently hired another Italian, you wouldn’t have much of a claim, despite the fact that you were asked inappropriate questions.

If you do think that you have grounds for a charge of discrimination, you should file your charges simultaneously with the appropriate state agency and the federal government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC generally will wait until the state agency has conducted an investigation, then conduct an investigation of its own.

As you might expect, the wheels of government agencies can creak at their own slow pace. In fact, you might not hear anything for years! Even then, an agency will only determine whether there is reason to believe your charge is true. Therefore, if you are anxious for justice, you should request that the EEOC issue you a notice 180 days after you file your charge.

I f you're in the right

If the EEOC determines that your complaint is valid, it will first attempt to mediate the dispute between you and the employer. If an agreement can't be reached, the commission will either file its own suit or issue you a letter giving you the right to sue the employer. You must file your suit within 90 days of receiving such a letter.

If you win your lawsuit, don't expect to receive a colossal jury award. The most you'll probably get from the employer is the equivalent of a year's salary.

O ne last word...

None of the information or advice in this chapter should be taken as legal advice. I am not an attorney. If you feel a prospective employer is guilty of discrimination, your first step should be to contact the appropriate government agencies, as well as an attorney, to accurately assess your rights and options under federal law and the laws and regulations in your state and industry.

TIPS FOR FENDING OFF ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

<input type="checkbox"/>	Know your rights. Do some research to find out what questions are out of bounds in your particular state, industry, or profession.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't open the door for the interviewer. Let him get it himself! That is, don't bring up subjects you don't want to talk about. If you do, the interviewer is likely to ask what would otherwise have been illegal questions...if you hadn't opened the door first.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change the subject. If you feel that the interviewer is asking you questions that shouldn't be asked, the first step is to try to shrug them off and change the direction of the conversation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Give them the benefit of the doubt. After all, you are here because you want the job. So it's up to you to weigh your personal reactions to certain searching questions against your desire to have this job. Many hiring managers may not realize they are in the wrong. Give them the benefit of the doubt.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Warn the interviewer... subtly. Tell the interviewer in a nonthreatening way that you know the questions he or she is asking are inappropriate. This should deliver the message that you know your rights and aren't willing to be a victim of discrimination.
<input type="checkbox"/>	End the interview. If the interviewer refuses to back off, end the interview quickly. After all, would you really want to work at a company or for a person capable of such narrow-minded attitudes? If you think you have a strong case, look into bringing formal charges against the company and the interviewer.

CHAPTER 10

Questions to Wrap Things Up

Okay, you've made it this far, you must have the job by now. Anyway, there's absolutely no way to mess it up at this point, right?

Don't be so quick to relax. The closing questions of an interview should be handled with care. There are still likely to be some tough questions ahead. Here goes:

Q: Are you willing to travel?

What do they want to hear?

Yes, of course you are. Your family understands the demands of your career and is supportive when you need to spend some time away from home. Does that mean you want to be away three weeks out of four? Probably not. Unless you are unwilling to travel at all, don't let this question cost you the job. (If the job requires far more travel than you are prepared for, what are you doing on the interview? And if the heavy travel requirements are a complete shock, why didn't you learn about them beforehand?)

If travel is an important part of the job, it's more likely the interviewer will ask this question early in the process, so as to immediately eliminate home-bound candidates.

Q: Are you willing to relocate?

What do they want to hear?

If you really are, say so:

“Absolutely. In fact, I would look forward to the chance to live elsewhere and experience a different lifestyle and meet new people.”

If you’re not, say so:

“Well, not unless the job is so terrific that it would be worth uprooting my family and leaving my relatives and friends. Does this position require a move? I’m obviously very interested in it, so I might consider relocating.”

Q: May I contact your current employer?

Why do interviewers ask this question? You will probably feel like saying, *“Sure, after you give me this job and I don’t have to worry about getting canned because I’ve been out looking for another job.”*

But you’ll sound better saying:

“Sure you can—after we come to an agreement. I think it’s best if they hear about this from me first.”

Q: May I contact your references?

What do they want to hear?

“Of course you can.” Tell the interviewer that you will get back to him or her with a list of references that afternoon or, if it is already afternoon, the very next day.

Does this stalling make you seem unprepared? Shouldn’t you go into the interview with the list ready to hand over to the interviewer?

Frankly, in the world of interviews, stalling for a little time before giving references is SOP (standard operating procedure). The reason you want to wait is so you can tell your prospective references that a call might be coming from Mr. Krueger of Trikadekaphobia, Inc. If your references are indeed going to say wonderful things about you, they should be prepared to do so.

Caveat: Employers are growing more reluctant to provide references because of a rise in the number of claims of defamation

| *Questions to Wrap Things Up*

and misrepresentation. Because job references are partially privileged communications, it's a good idea to try to get an inside line on what is being said about you to a prospective employer. As an applicant, you may be able to approach a current or former employer to work out a narrative job reference that is accurate and amenable to both of you. With your consent and involvement, former employers may be more willing to discuss your strengths and weaknesses and the circumstances surrounding your departure in a positive light.

Q: Is there anything else about you I should know?

What do they want to hear?

You might not think you have anything else left to say, but you should. This is your chance—beautifully presented on a silver platter—to close the sale. You'd be a fool to turn it down.

Develop a short answer to this question, one that features your strengths, accomplishments, skills, and areas of knowledge. In other words, a great close remarkably similar to the narrative you prepared as an answer to “tell me about yourself.” For example:

“Mr. Krueger, I think we’ve covered everything. But I want to re-emphasize the key strengths that I would bring to this position:

“Experience: The job I’m currently in is quite similar to this one, and I would be excited by the chance to apply what I’ve learned at WidgetLand to working for your company.

“Management skills: I run a department almost equal in size to this one. I’m a fair and effective supervisor.

“A record of success: I’ve won two prestigious industry awards. I would bring that creativity here.

“Enthusiasm: I am very excited about the prospect of working with you here at Trikadekaphobia. When do you expect to make a decision?”

YOUR NEGOTIATING “CHEAT SHEET”

<input type="checkbox"/> Wait until you receive an offer before you discuss salary, benefits, vacation days, and so on.
<input type="checkbox"/> Research compensation levels within your industry, your city, and state. If you don’t already know the salary range for the specific position you’re considering, find out. You need to enter any salary negotiation armed with this information.
<input type="checkbox"/> Know your worth. A solid offer is proof that the company wants you. They have decided you are the best candidate they have met. This puts you in a relative position of power. If they balk at your initial salary demand, remind them of the specific benefits they stand to gain by hiring you.
<input type="checkbox"/> Get it in writing. Especially if you negotiate a complex, nonstandard salary/benefits package. Be sure you have something in writing—either a letter, memo, or email from the employer or one you’ve sent that’s been acknowledged— <i>before</i> you give notice to your current employer.
<input type="checkbox"/> Negotiate the perks. Make sure you understand the value of <i>all</i> the potential benefits in the salary/benefits package. Benefits can vary widely and, depending on your level, could represent a substantial portion of your overall compensation package.
<input type="checkbox"/> Calculate hidden costs—Higher local income or property taxes, the cost and length of your commute, the cost of private school because of the poor local public system, and other similar concerns need to be “monetized” and considered.
<input type="checkbox"/> Shoot for the top salary. If it is more than the company will pay, the interviewer will counter with another offer. Work toward a compromise from there. Employers expect some give-and-take. You will not make them angry if you remain calm and professional.

This type of answer should underline the points that you have been trying to make throughout the entire interview. By ending with a question, you ask Mr. Krueger to take some action. This is an effective selling technique that should give you a good indication of your chances of getting the job.

Variations

- | Why should I hire you?
- | If you were me, would *you* hire you?

M_{oney} talks

No one likes to talk about money during an interview. It seems “indelicate,” somehow. But that doesn’t mean you should avoid it completely. Just remember that timing is everything.

My own rule of thumb is simple: Don’t discuss dollars and cents until after you’ve convinced the interviewer that you’re the best person for the job.

That’s why I’ve relegated the first question on salary to near the end of the final chapter. Until you’ve made it over all the other interview hurdles, the interviewer is still assessing your ability. And he or she is probably still seeing other contenders as well—some whose talent may come cheaper than yours.

But even if an interviewer tries to pressure you into naming a specific number early in the game, avoid committing yourself. Instead, name a very broad range. You might say, “*I believe a fair wage for this kind of position would be between \$30,000 and \$40,000.*”

Be sure the bottom end of that range is no less than the minimum salary you would be willing to accept for the position.

Once the employer has made his decision, you’ll be in a much stronger bargaining position.

Q: What sort of salary are you looking for?

What do they want to hear?

You should already have a pretty good idea of what your particular market will bear. If you don’t know the high and low

ends in your area (city and state) and industry, do some research. Make sure you know whether these figures represent just dollars or a compensation “package” that may include insurance, retirement programs, and other value-added benefits.

If you’re a woman, make sure you know what men are making doing the same job. You’re bound to find a discrepancy. But you should request and expect to earn an equivalent salary, regardless of what female predecessors may have earned.

Even if you’ve been out of a job for months, this is not the time or place to let your desperation show, so avoid gushing, *“Gee, this job sounds so gosh-darned wonderful I can’t believe you’re going to pay me anything! Just give me an office and a phone and I’ll work for the sheer fun of it!”*

Have confidence in your own worth. By this time, you’ve worked hard to sell the interviewer on your value as a future employee. Just remind her of what she’s already decided.

Variations

- | What do you think this job should pay?
- | What do you think you are worth?
- | How much do you want (expect) to make?
- | What are your salary expectations?
- | How much were you paid last year?
- | If I’m going to make you an offer, I want to ensure it is competitive. What will it take?

Q: The salary you’re asking for is near the top of the range for this job.
Why should we pay you that much?

What do they want to hear?

Remind the employer of the cost savings and other benefits he’ll enjoy when you come on board. Pull out your specifics again, if necessary. For example, you might say:

“I was able to cut my previous employer’s expenses by 10 percent by negotiating better deals with

vendors. I think it's reasonable to expect that any additional salary we agree to would be offset by savings I could bring the company."

Variations

- | Why are you asking for so little?
- | Are you willing to take a pay cut to work here?
- | Are you willing to take less than you made on your last job?
- | Do you think you were overpaid in your last position?

What if you don't like their offer?

If you are offered a salary close to the top of the range for that position at that company, consider it a compliment and don't think too hard about pushing for more money. You don't have that much to gain anyway, particularly in today's performance-based job market.

But if you're offered a salary at the floor of the range, you may certainly consider making a case for a better deal.

Never couple asking for more money with an explanation of why you need it. Rather, always couch such a request within a declaration of the "extra value" the employer should expect in return. Remind him of the cost savings and other benefits he'll enjoy when you come on board.

Look for win-win solutions. If the employer is adamant about not increasing your salary, he may be amenable to a company car or some other perk that works for both of you.

Unless you become overheated and frantic, employers will not be put off by your attempts to negotiate. You will not lose the offer just because you try to get a better deal—your willingness (or unwillingness) to do so may actually be the final test!

Even if you're disappointed, but have decided to take the job, make sure everything ends on a friendly note. Otherwise, you're leaving a bad impression, and may be put under the microscope or on a short leash right from the start.

If you become too intransigent, you may even force them to change their minds! After all, you're already showing them you're not a team player by not giving an inch on anything, no matter how inconsequential.

And don't forget that they are offering a compensation package, not just a salary. So even if you are an entry-level candidate, analyze the entire value of that package before making any decision. Some companies provide very generous benefits packages—including stock options, dental care, company cars, free lunches, and more—even to the rank and file. While these benefits won't fatten your take-home pay, at least you won't have to pay for them out of your own pocket.

Q: Is there anything that will inhibit you from taking this job if offered?

What do they want to hear?

“Absolutely not.”

The interviewer is attempting to do everything in her power to ascertain whether you'll accept the job if offered and actually show up on the start date. But there is no way she can guarantee either. All she can hope to do is give you another opportunity to voice a previously hidden concern—too small a salary, a poor benefits package, a lousy cubicle, reporting to too many people, inadequate support, unrealistic sales or profit expectations, and so on.

Variation

| If I made you a great offer right now, would you accept on the spot?

There's only one way to tell, Mr. Interviewer, give it a try! This is also a good opportunity to clarify the details of any offer—vacation policy, bonuses, and so on:

“I would love to accept the job right now, but can we discuss a few details first so I can compare everything with other offers I am considering?”

Q: Are you considering any other offers right now?

What do they want to hear?

This is another “closing” question I like to ask early in the process so I know what I’m up against. Of course, this is presuming that an honest answer is good for you, which, frankly, it probably isn’t. Unless you believe the interviewer will respond positively to such an admission, you should play your cards very close to the vest. You probably gain nothing by admitting you have other irons in the fire, so why stir up the coals?

I would not claim to be the most popular girl at the prom if I didn’t actually have a date—don’t make up offers you don’t actually have.

If you have no other offers, stay positive. You may consider citing other good interviews you’ve been on or point out that you are still very early in your job search, but in any case this would be your first choice because...

Variations

- | Tell me about the other offers you’re considering.
- | How does this job compare to others for which you are interviewing?

Q: When can you start?

What do they want to hear?

If you’ve been laid off or fired, you can start immediately, of course.

But if you’re still working for someone else, you should give at least two weeks’ notice to your employer, more if you are leaving a position in which you had considerable responsibility.

As eager as you may be to get started on this new job, I know I don’t have to remind you that it’s never wise to burn bridges. You never know when you might have to cross one of them again! So be as accommodating as you can. For example, offer to help find and train your replacement.

If it will be several weeks before you can assume your new responsibilities full time, offer to begin studying literature or files in your off hours. Or come into the office in the evening or on a weekend to meet members of the staff and begin to familiarize yourself with the lay of the land. You might even volunteer to attend a company event or seminar.



Although it may reflect your true feelings about the job, saying you “aren’t sure” when you can start implies to me you “aren’t sure” about taking the job.

Don’t ever admit you can’t start for several weeks because you want to take a vacation. I can empathize with someone who feels the need to “recover” from a bitter job experience before punching the clock at a new one, but there’s just something that sticks in my craw about such an answer. Perhaps it’s feeling that you’re already putting your own needs above mine—maybe it’s a real hardship for me to wait four weeks. Maybe it’s my own idiosyncrasy, but I really hate to hear about someone planning a vacation before starting to work for me.

Apres-interview etiquette

Once you step out from under the bright lights and shake hands with the interviewer, it will probably take all the composure you can muster not to kick up your heels and run out of the office.

But in your hurry, don’t forget that the process is not quite over. There are a few standard rules of etiquette you should follow:

- ☒ Ask when the hiring decision will be made. If you don’t get word by then, it’s perfectly acceptable to call the employer to inquire about the status of the position.
- ☒ Write a thank-you note or email. Make it short and sweet. Thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you. Then restate your interest in the

| Questions to Wrap Things Up

company and the position and find a way to remind the interviewer of how you can use your skill and experience to address one of the key requirements of the job. Type it in a business style and be sure there are no typographical or spelling errors.

- ☒ Remember that if you met with more than one interviewer, you should send thank-you letters or emails to each person with whom you talked.

Ask yourself the following questions after every interview and take notes on your answers:

- ☒ How did it go?
- ☒ What did they say?
- ☒ What did you say?
- ☒ How many people did you see?
- ☒ How much time did you spend with each?
- ☒ What role does each of them play?
- ☒ Who seemed the most important?
- ☒ Who is the hiring manager?
- ☒ Who is the decision maker?
- ☒ Who seems to most influence the decision?
- ☒ Who else did you meet (secretaries, receptionists, department heads, peers, etc.)?
- ☒ How quickly do they want to make a decision?
- ☒ How do you stack up to your competition?
- ☒ What objections did you have to overcome? Do you think you did so successfully?
- ☒ How badly do you want this job?
- ☒ What's the next step according to them?
- ☒ What is *your* plan?

FINISHING TOUCHES

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <p>Nourish your network. If a colleague or former associate referred you to the company or arranged a personal introduction with the interviewer or hiring manager, be sure to drop that person a note of thanks as well.</p> |
| | <p>Replay the highs and the lows. What went well during the interviewing process? What could you have done better? The point is not to berate yourself for what you did or didn't say. You want to keep doing the things that worked—and change what didn't—so you can ace your next interview.</p> |
| | <p>Rewrite your resume. Did the interviewer have any questions that you could clarify through your resume? Did you find yourself talking about accomplishments you forgot to include? If so, now is the time to revise your resume.</p> |
| | <p>Keep in touch. The hiring process can move at a snail's pace in corporate America. Often, the larger the corporation, the slower the pace. So don't panic if a week or two passes before you hear anything. No news may be good news. If time stretches on, it's okay to call to find out if the job has been filled. Use the opportunity to remind the employer of your interest and qualifications. (But I wouldn't call back more than three times if you don't get a response. Not getting a response is, unfortunately, the message you've been waiting for.)</p> |
| | <p>Accept...in your own time and on your own terms. Never accept an offer at the time it is tendered. Take a day or two to think about it. Tell the interviewer when you will make your decision. If you do decide to refuse the offer, politely tell the employer why you don't feel you can accept the position.</p> |

EPILOGUE

I've Got a Secret

I hope you are reading this after going through the entire book, and not treating this as a beach thriller and turning to the ending first. Either way, you will now learn the secret: There really aren't 101 questions you have to prepare yourself for. Not even a dozen. There are only six questions that every interviewer is asking him- or herself:

Can you do the job?

Do you have the specific qualifications I'm seeking? Do you have the right degree? The right experience? The appropriate skills? Or, to use the current in-vogue term, the appropriate *competencies*?

Will you do the job...

...better than the other people I'm interviewing? Prove to me that you're the best person for the job by giving me great answers to *my* questions and showing your interest by asking me equally detailed questions.

Will you actually take the job if I offer it to you?

How hungry are you? How much do you actually want *this* specific job? Or are you so desperate you'll take *any* job...even this one?

Even if you are perfectly qualified and highly motivated, do I think you will fit in with the rest of the group?

The smaller the company or department, the more important this “chemistry” question becomes. In a one- or two-person office, it may be the *key* question. Many managers base their hiring decisions on an overemphasis of candidates’ qualifications, but then wind up firing them because of a misfit with the company culture.

Will you make me, the interviewer, look like a genius for recommending or hiring you?

Or will your miscues and missteps make me look like an idiot, kill my promotion, slash my bonus, maybe even jeopardize my own job? (The higher up on the food chain the interviewer is, the more central this question becomes to her.)

What are you going to cost me?

In money, time, and effort. How long before you actually start contributing to my bottom line? And what will I have to expend to get you there?

Will you ever be asked these simple, specific questions? Probably not. Instead, you will be asked dozens of questions about your strengths and weaknesses, your successes and failures, your plans and ideas. Just remember: The answers to *these* six questions are what all the *other* questions are really trying to uncover.

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Interview Preparation

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Introduction

The interview is the single most important step in the job search process, therefore, thorough preparation is essential. The purpose of the job interview is to determine whether you are right for the job and whether the job is right for you. The interview also provides you with an opportunity to ask questions about the organization/company and the position.

Your ability to answer questions with relevant detail and in a conversational manner is key in an interview. Often it is the person most skilled at interviewing, not the most qualified person, who gets the job. The interview is your opportunity to shine, to sell your strengths and to present yourself as a unique candidate for the position. Your role in an interview is to leave a clear and convincing impression of who you are, what you can do to contribute to the organization/company, and why you should be hired for the position instead of another candidate. The interviewer's role is to determine whether you have the skills, knowledge and personality needed to be an effective member of the organization/company.

Interviewing Goals:

- Demonstrate how your experience, knowledge and accomplishments match the qualities and skills the organization/company is seeking.
- Convince the interviewer that you will "fit in" and contribute to the needs of the organization/company and the position.
- Gather information that will help you decide whether you can be successful in the position and whether the organization/company will give you the opportunity for growth and development.

When you receive the call to come in for an interview, be sure to politely request the following information:

- Time, date, location and confirm the specific job
- Name(s) and position(s) of the interviewer(s)
- Detailed job description (if you do not already have one)
- Contact number in the event you need to contact the organization/company
- Number of candidates being interviewed (optional)

Once you accept the interview, follow through with that commitment. Nothing can be more frustrating to an employer than to have a candidate fail to show up for an interview.

If you have to cancel an interview, for whatever reason, do so as quickly as you can, providing a brief explanation for this decision. Cancelling your interview within 24 hours can leave the same impression as not showing up. Employers may not be able to change their schedule, if flights are involved for example, and there may not be enough time to fill the void with another candidate. For example, if you have to decline your interview because you have accepted another position, call the employer and follow up with a brief note explaining your decision and thanking them for considering your application. This small act of professionalism may help leave a more favourable impression of you, should the need arise to approach this employer in the future. If, however, your reason to cancel your interview relates to some unforeseen circumstance, notify the employer as soon as possible and

Competencies and Qualities that Employers Seek

Accountability

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Credibility and substance
- Results-oriented

Interpersonal Skills

- Strong verbal and written communication skills
- Leadership ability
- Ability to work independently and as a team member

Attitude & Character

- Positive attitude
- Confidence
- Enthusiasm (but not overwhelming)
- Professionalism
- Maturity

Knowledge & Experience

- Track record of achievement/success
- Relevant education and experience
- Analytical/logical thinking
- Problem-solving skills



make the effort to reschedule the interview for another time. Employers can be left wondering about your motives for applying and initially accepting an interview, if there was not an attempt made to explain or to reschedule your time.

Preparing for the Interview

Careful preparation is critical to conveying a polished image. You never know when the call will come, so do not wait until after you have been contacted to prepare for an interview. You might drop off an application and have the employer interview you on the spot, or you may receive a call for an interview the next day. Whenever it occurs, employers will be impressed with how much you know when you give specific examples of how your skills and achievements are right for the job. You will stand out from other candidates if you take the time to properly prepare for an interview.

Step By Step Guide

To help you get ready for an interview, follow this step by step guide.

Step 1: Know Yourself

The first step in preparing for an interview is to examine yourself. Having a strong understanding of your abilities, skills, interests, goals, personality preferences and experiences will help you present yourself more effectively. By improving your self-knowledge, you can demonstrate maturity and insight and enhance your ability to communicate your qualifications in an interview.

Evaluate yourself in terms of your strengths and how you can translate these strengths into skills the prospective employer can use. It can also be helpful to know your weaknesses. If you do not meet all the requirements for a specific position, do not elaborate on these shortcomings. Rather, concentrate on your potential strengths for the organization. Know why you want the position and why you are the best candidate.

Consider writing down specific examples of how you have used your skills to achieve tangible and measurable results. Then, relate your accomplishments to the requirements of the position. Be ready to talk about your career objectives, goals and interests. Study your resume and be familiar with your education and experiences. Be prepared to tell the interviewer why you should be hired for the position and to specifically relate your skills to what the employer is seeking.

Step 2: Do Your Research

Research the Employer/Organization

Researching the employer conveys interest and professionalism. You will make a positive impression if you have done your homework. The more you know about the organization, the more effectively you will communicate what you can contribute and how you will "fit" into the organization/company. Employers expect you to know about the organization.

Conducting Interview Research: Places To Start

Personal Contacts

- Professors, friends, relatives and acquaintances

Industry Contacts

- Telephone book
- People within your field of interest
- The organization and/or company's public relations or human resources departments

Internet

- Company websites
- Community information
- Newspapers/journals/trade journals
- Directories



Research the following areas prior to the interview:

- What are the major products/services provided by the organization?
- What is the history of the organization and who are its key competitors?
- What are the latest trends/issues in this field?
- What are the organization's goals?
- How large is the organization? Where is it located? Does it have branches? If so, where are they located?
- How can your skills fit with the stated goals for the organization?
- What are the organization's community interests and involvements?
- What skills are required and valued?
- What is the staff turnover rate? What are the available positions and advancement avenues?
- Is salary determined by wage or commission? Is there a bonus structure or an incentive package?

Your knowledge about the organization will help you respond to interview questions and develop appropriate questions to ask at the end of the interview. Interviewers expect you to have knowledgeable and insightful questions for them. You may be judged as much by the quality of the questions you ask as by your responses to the questions the interviewer(s) ask you.

Research the Position

Researching the position provides valuable clues to the kinds of questions you will be asked at the interview. The better you understand the position, the better you will be able to communicate your interest in the job and evaluate its impact on your career goals. Knowledge of the position will help you present relevant information to a potential employer. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the position by:

- Researching the general tasks and responsibilities that the job requires
- Researching other aspects of the job that may affect your decision (travel, overtime, shift work, evening work)
- Becoming aware of future job trends in the field
- Researching salary ranges and non-monetary benefits related to this occupation

Step 3: Consider Interview Formats

Interview Formats

- Basic/Traditional
- Behavioural Based
- Case Style
- Telephone
- Assessment/Testing
- Second and Subsequent Interviews

You should consider the different interview formats when preparing for your interview. Because you may not know what kind of interview to expect until you get there, it is important that you anticipate how you will handle all situations. Knowledge about the different components of interviews will help you prepare. Within the different interview styles, interview questions may be structured or unstructured. Structured interview questions are a prescribed set of questions determined prior to the interview.

Unstructured interview questions are developed by the interviewer(s) as the interview progresses. Further, probing questions are typically unstructured in nature. Interview formats can range from employer to employer, and can be presented in combination with one another.



Basic/Traditional

These types of interviews will typically begin with open-ended questions designed to get to know you better. Examples of open-ended questions include, “Tell me about yourself” or “Why should we hire you for this position?”

Behavioural Based

Behavioural based interviewing has become an industry standard for many companies recruiting on campus. It builds upon the basic premise that future performance is best predicted by past behaviour. Interviewers develop their line of questioning around the traits and skills deemed important in the position and organization. Questions focus on “real life” experiences and actions. Questions usually begin with such phrases as “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me an example of a situation where you demonstrated...”

<u>Common Skills Targeted During Behavioural Based Interviews</u>			
Accountability	Coping	Leadership/Initiative	Problem Solving
Accountability	Creativity/Innovation	Listening	Planning
Alertness	Decision Making	Management	Supervision
Assertiveness	Goal Setting	Organization	Team Building
Communication	Integrity/Honesty	Perception	Work Standards

Behavioural based answers require you to have a repertoire of detailed examples that showcase the skills in question. Look to the above list to generate situations exemplifying each skill. Begin your preparation by analyzing the job and determining the type of skills required. Next, review and categorize your background (education and training, work experience, volunteer activities, etc.) to determine which of the necessary skills you possess. Think of situations within your background and experiences to formulate potential responses to questions.

One technique for formulating strong answers to behavioural questions is the **STAR** technique. Be prepared for probing questions that an interviewer will use to further explore your answer.

STAR Technique

Situation _____ Provide a brief overview of the situation.

Task _____ Outline the specific task or responsibility that you were asked to accomplish.

Action _____ Explain the action or activities you took and why.

Result _____ Describe the positive result or outcome of your actions; if you are asked about a negative situation, indicate what you learned and/or how you would act differently.

When answering, make sure that you understand the question. If not, ask for clarification. The situation/example you choose can make or break an interview, so take a moment to think of an appropriate example to fit that interview situation. When answering behavioural based questions, use the pronoun “I”, as interviewers are interested in what your role was. For example, it is appropriate to describe the Situation using “we,” but when you describe the Task, Action and Result steps, you must talk about what you (“I”) did specifically. Do not be modest!



Talk honestly about what you did and sell yourself during the interview, but above all never lie. If you are unable to think of an answer do not make one up. Probing questions asked by the interviewer will expose dishonesty.

If you find that you are having difficulty responding to a question, seek clarification or ask the interviewer for the possibility of revisiting the question at a later point in the interview. If you find that you do not have any experience on which to base your answer, you can admit that you have never experienced such a situation, but explain how you would handle the situation if it did occur.

Tips for Preparing for Behavioural Based Interviews:

- Research the skills required for the position and choose the most appropriate and strongest examples from your experiences
- Prepare short descriptions of situations that demonstrate positive behaviours and actions based on positive and negative experiences
- Prepare to discuss several examples from your list of accomplishments for each of the desired qualities
- Prepare hard evidence that will demonstrate specific skills and abilities
- Draw upon your most relevant and recent professional experiences; these can come from your work, academic and personal life

Telephone Interviews

An increasing number of employers are relying on telephone interviews in their recruiting and hiring decisions. Employers may also use the telephone interview as a screening tool in order to narrow down a pool of applicants. Most employers will formally schedule the time of the interview in advance; however, it is not unheard of for employers to call without warning.

Telephone interviews can pose a unique challenge. In a telephone interview, it can be difficult to gain rapport with the interviewer because you cannot see the interviewer's non-verbal reactions.

You have to be able to sell yourself only with the tone of your voice and word choice. During a telephone interview, it is important to speak in a confident and positive tone—consider smiling when you speak so that you sound positive and upbeat.

Tips for Telephone Interviews:

Preparation

- Avoid interruptions—ensure you are in a quiet place and ignore call waiting
- Make sure you are wide awake. Provide ample time to feel refreshed and ready. (Applicants sometimes dress like it is an in-person interview to be in the right frame of mind.)

Types of Interviews:

One-on-one

- One job seeker, one interviewer

Panel

- One job seeker, two or more interviewers present

Telephone/Teleconference

- One job seeker, one or more interviewers not physically present

Presentation

- Job seeker requested to prepare (typically in advance) a presentation to an audience throughout the course of the interview—the audience may include interviewers and/or a variety of stakeholders from other areas

Reception/Dining

- One or more job seekers, one or more interviewers. The interview is conducted over a meal or beverages

"Cattle Call"

- Groups of candidates placed together, allowing interviewers to find dynamic and outgoing employees

Role Play

- Involves the job seeker participating in a fictional situation, designed to replicate a scenario that might occur in the position sought

Video Conference

- One job seeker, one or more interviewers conducting the interview via camera and monitor



- Have a copy of what you sent the company so you can refer to it during the interview
- Make some notes from which you can draw examples
- Have a pad of paper and pen available for taking notes

Answering the Call

- Always answer the telephone with: "Hello, <your name> speaking." Since the interviewer cannot see you, introducing yourself confirms that the interviewer is speaking with the right person

During the Call

- Stand while talking—this keeps your diaphragm upright and enables greater voice projection
- Avoid smoking, eating, drinking or chewing gum while on the telephone
- Allow the interviewer to finish talking before you begin—interruptions are more emphasized over the telephone
- Keep the mouthpiece about one inch away from your mouth. If you have to cough, clear your throat or sneeze, cover the receiver and move it up (away from your voice box) instead of down
- Refrain from using verbal tics such as: "ah," "er," "like," or "um"—these are especially noticeable on the telephone

Ending the Call

- Before hanging up the telephone, be sure you know the next steps in the hiring process.
- Hang up the telephone only after the interviewer has hung up

Assessment/Testing

This format can be administered prior, during or following any interview situation. These assessments can be used as a screening tool or can complement your interview. They can be administered online, in an individual or group setting or throughout the course of the interview. Many are designed to assess general aptitude, personality or your knowledge of the organization. Enquire with the company/organization on how to prepare and to see if sample questions are available. As an example, many government agencies provide online sample questions to give you a better idea of what to expect.

Second and Subsequent Interviews

Many employment offers do not occur until after a second interview. This can be especially true of on-campus recruiting interviews. Second interviews can vary in terms of content, purpose and structure. If you have been granted a second interview you are one step closer to receiving the job offer. The second interview can be more intense because you may be meeting with people who are more closely involved in making the final hiring decision. However, a second interview is not a sure sign that you will be offered the position.

Second interviews can serve a variety of purposes. They can:

- Provide the organization with the opportunity to assess candidates more thoroughly
- Permit the organization to reaffirm information already presented in the previous interview
- Allow the organization to sell itself to the candidate so that an offer of employment will be accepted
- Allow you to evaluate the organization and what it has to offer



As with the first interview, it is both acceptable and recommended that you enquire about the name(s) and position(s) of the interviewer(s), the length and format of the interview, and any specifics regarding any other requests. Ask about the itinerary for the interview, so you know what to expect, including what to wear.

Second interviews are often held at the employer's site. This may mean travelling to their location. Always confirm travel and accommodation arrangements prior to the interview, such as who will make the arrangements and who will be covering the expenses. Some organizations may reimburse candidates for any travel, lodging and meal expenses incurred by attending the second interview. It is recommended that you keep these expenses to a minimum. Keep all receipts for the expenses you incurred throughout the interviewing process. Submit your receipts promptly and always include a thank-you letter.

Expect a longer and more in-depth interview. The interview may be with two or more people; it may last for a few hours or up to one or more days. The interviewers may be executives, supervisors and/or peers. Remember that the interviewers may or may not have met you before, so you need to impress each of them. Some of the interviewers may not have formal interview training; they may be more subjective in their evaluation. It may not necessarily be just what you say, but how you say it and how you present yourself.

Each interviewer will have the task of determining your "fit" within the organization. The focus of the questions may change with the level of seniority of the interviewer. You could be asked the same questions that you were asked in the previous interview. If so, the interviewers could evaluate your views/responses from different perspectives. Be sure to request a business card from each interviewer, or their name and contact information, so that you will be able to write a thank-you letter.

Keep in Mind, This is a Competition:

- The company may be bringing in the "best of the best" or only talking to you
- If the best candidates are brought together, they may be assessed on a teamwork project or may be compared through interviews and meetings against each other
- The interview starts at the moment you arrive, which can include arrival at the airport, hotel or reception desk
- You may be invited to a staff function/social or for a meal with the company executives – never underestimate the importance of attending and participating

Step 4: Prepare & Polish

Responses to Questions

If you know what you will say and how you will respond to typical interview questions, you will feel and appear more confident, organized and focused. Review and practice your responses to possible questions interviewers may ask. It is imperative that you are able to communicate your knowledge clearly and concisely. An excellent way to improve communication skills is to practice role-playing before the interview. Consider asking a friend or relative to simulate an interview. Make sure you are critiqued on the strength of your voice and eye contact. Try to avoid memorizing what you want to say, instead, have key points prepared.

Take time to review sample interview questions and rehearse your responses. Keep your answers brief and concise, unless asked to provide more details.

Tips for Answering Questions at Interviews

- Share information that is pertinent to the situation and be concise when answering questions



- Provide answers that are more than one word, however, do not be too wordy that interviewers lose interest
- Practice in front of a mirror or with a tape recorder. Pay attention to any mannerisms, slang, posture, gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions you are communicating
- Stay focused on the subject and respond to the question asked
- Elaborate on your answers—provide supporting details
- Remember to highlight what you will be bringing to the position/company, not what they will bring to you

Questions to Ask at the Interview

Potential Questions to ask at an interview:

Employee Characteristics

- What characteristics would the ideal job candidate have for this position?
- What skills and attributes, if any, are you seeking in a candidate that I have not addressed?
- What are the characteristics of your most outstanding employees in a similar position?

Position

- Can you describe the type of work I would be doing or the types of projects I will be working on?
- What do you see as the most challenging aspects of the position?
- What would a normal day be like?
- How much travel is expected?
- What percentage of time would be devoted to each of the responsibilities of the position?

Organization – Structure

- Can you tell me about the people/positions to whom/which I would be reporting?
- Will I be able to work with the person whom I am replacing, before he/she vacate the position?
- How does this position contribute to the whole picture of your organization?
- How long have you been with the organization and what are the highlights for you?
- How many interns are typically employed by the company at one time?
- What percentage of your employees are hired immediately after graduation?

Organization – Direction and Mandate

- What makes this organization unique?
- What are the short-term and long-term objectives of the organization?
- What are the areas of anticipated growth for the company?
- Why was the position created?
- Does the organization have any plans for expansion?
- What are the company's values and how do you incorporate them into your business practices?

Training/Employee Education

- How is the training or orientation program for new employees structured?
- What is the nature of the training program and supervision provided to new employees?
- What kind of training will be provided? How long is the training period?
- What opportunities exist for employee education or professional development?
- Are employees encouraged to be active in professional organizations?

Opportunities for Advancement

- How much decision-making authority is granted after one year?
- Does the organization promote from within?
- What opportunities exist for advancement?

Evaluation

- How does the company measure performance? When are evaluations scheduled?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- When and how will job evaluations take place?



At the end of an interview, the interviewer will expect you to ask questions, therefore it is essential you arrive prepared. This is your opportunity to show your interest and knowledge of the organization and to clarify any information about the company and/or position to which you are applying.

A Polished Performance in an Interview Includes:

- Professional appearance
- Positive body language
- Verbal ability
- Poise/Confidence
- Self-understanding
- Knowledge of the organization
- Understanding of job responsibilities
- Ability to relate skills and experience to job
- Enthusiasm
- Quality of answers

The questions you ask the interviewer should give you a better understanding of the organization and the duties of the position. This is also your opportunity to ask questions that will help you evaluate the position, should an offer be presented following the interview process. It is, in some ways, your chance to interview the company. Your questions should be valid and you should be able to explain the purpose behind the questions, if asked. Ideally, your questions should demonstrate research into the organization and/or the position. Be aware of an interviewer's reactions and do not ask questions that could put an interviewer on the spot.

Strong questions relate to tasks, priorities, development, employee education/training, organizational structure and growth opportunities. Paraphrase your knowledge of the position as you relate your potential question to the employer. Questions relating to salary, benefits and job security should be avoided and saved for the negotiation phase following a formal job offer. You should avoid questions that might indicate that you are not really interested in the position. As well, never lead interviewers to think that you are using the organization as a stepping stone in order to further your career.

Answer Tough Questions

Anticipate that you may be asked tough questions. You can reduce your anxiety level if you are ready to field the types of questions most likely to cause you problems.

One common challenging question is, "What are your weaknesses?" When answering this question, you need to be honest without providing interviewers with a detailed analysis of all of your shortcomings. The best way to handle this question is:

- Turn your weakness into a potential strength, and/or explain how you have learned to compensate for the weakness, and/or put it in the past tense. Always end your answer on a positive note
- Avoid mentioning any personal qualities which can hamper job performance such as laziness or a bad temperament
- Think of a "weakness" as a challenge you will face during the first few months of starting this new job (learning the computer software and programming for the organization/company)
- Select a knowledge or skill base which can be easily/quickly improved if you choose a job-related example



Another question often found difficult, is the question regarding salary. Prior to the interview, you should have researched expected salary ranges for the position. If you are asked, "What salary are you expecting?" it is best to have a range in mind based upon similar positions in the labour market. Be prepared to provide specific information about your education and experience. You could say, "After doing some homework, I have an idea of the salary range I think is appropriate...". Another possibility would be to direct the question back to the interviewer and say, "I am open to negotiation; however, do you have a range of what the position is worth?" Keep in mind that salary negotiation is best discussed after the position has been offered to you.

Deal with Inappropriate Questions

Employers are obligated to follow rules and regulations regarding the types of interview questions they can and cannot ask in the interview process. If the interviewer poses tricky political or social questions, try not to say more than necessary. As well, certain questions cannot be asked under the Canadian Human Rights Act. Each province may be governed by different legislation. It is a good idea to develop a strategy to handle a situation where you are faced with an inappropriate question. Here are four possible options:

1. Ask for clarification on how the information being asked relates to the position
2. Refuse to answer the question, running the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational, and possibly harming your chances of getting the position
3. Answer the question, but remember that you are providing information that is not relevant and it may cost you the position if you give the wrong answer
4. Answer the question by addressing what you believe to be the underlying concern(s); clarify the intent of the question and respond with an answer as it might apply to the position

According to the Human Rights Code it is against the law to discriminate in the workplace on the basis of: Ancestry (includes colour and perceived race); nationality or place of origin; religion and religious creed; physical or mental disability; sex (includes pregnancy and sexual harassment); marital status; family status (parent-child relationships); receipt of public assistance; sexual orientation; or age (18 – 64 years).

Example of an Appropriate Response to an Inappropriate Question:

Interviewer: "Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?"

Interviewee: "I can meet the travel and work demands that this job requires."

Reconnect with Your References

It is a good idea to reconnect with your references to update them on the status of the position for which you are being interviewed. In the event they are contacted for a reference, provide them with an updated resume and a copy of the job description. Discuss the specific details of the position beforehand, so that he/she will be prepared to solidify your qualifications for the position.

Polish Your Communication Skills

When you are able to communicate effectively, employers will be able to recognize your value to their organization. Superior communication abilities include verbal and written communication and problem-solving skills, the ability to think critically and work effectively with others.

Assess key ways in which you will need to communicate on the job, from the job description. For example, will you be facilitating presentations? Chairing meetings? Leading teams? Or representing the company in different venues? Your ability to know your audience, think on the spot, organize and articulate your thoughts is critical.



How well you demonstrate your communication skills in the interview will impact the employer's impression of how well you can perform in the job.

Communicating effectively is one of the most valuable assets any job seeker can possess in terms of career advancement and long-term career success.

How to Dress for Success

Dress for the occupation; wear to the interview what you would wear on the job. You may even want to dress one step above that depending on the position. If possible, call and ask or visit the organization and observe what others in similar positions are wearing. Remember it is always better to overdress than underdress. Do not give interviewers a chance to rule you out because you did not feel like ironing your shirt. Remember that you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Although some companies may feel jeans and a clean shirt may be appropriate, others may feel this is far too casual. Casual attire may mean something different to each organization. What one organization accepts as casual attire, may be unacceptable for another. How you dress will always play a role in an interview. If in doubt, dress at least one step above the required dress code.

- Dress comfortably, but respectfully
- Ensure you are clean and neat in appearance
- Avoid ripped clothing, large logos, designs, etc.

Tips – Dressing for Interviews

- Dress one step above the appropriate attire for the job
- Dress conservatively for the field or organization
- Pay attention to personal grooming—neat hair, clean nails, etc.
- Be certain all clothes are clean, well pressed, tucked in and shoes polished
- Avoid busy prints
- Avoid excessive make-up and heavy fragrances—remember, more is not always better
- Wear comfortable—yet still appropriate—clothing and shoes, so that you do not “fidget” during the interview
- Wear jewellery that is simple and conservative
- Have fresh breath—do not eat or drink anything before the interview that will give you bad breath (including coffee)
- Bring a career portfolio or briefcase to help complete the look of professionalism
- Match your belt with your polished shoes



How to Dress for an Interview

	Women	Men
Business Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Two piece business suit (either tailored pants or skirt)BlouseSkirt (knee length or longer) with nylonsPolished, closed-toe shoes with sensible heels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Two piece business suitDress shirt (tucked in)Tie (professional!)Dark socksPolished dress shoes with matching belt
Business Casual – Conservative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Blouse, shirt or sweaterSkirt (knee length or longer) with nylonsDress pantsPolished, closed-toe shoes with sensible heelsCoordinating hosierySimple jewelry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Long-sleeved solid or striped button-down shirtNo tie requiredDress pantsBlazer is appropriate, but not requiredMatching belt and polished shoesDark socks
Business Casual – Contemporary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Appropriate shirt or sweaterPolo/golf shirt or other collared shirtDress/cotton pants or skirtShoes (no sandals or running shoes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">SweaterDress/cotton pantsShoes (no sandals or running shoes)

What to Take to an Interview

What you take to an interview should be guided by what you are asked to bring and what you feel is important. You may not be asked for this documentation but, your preparation will not go unnoticed. Consider:

- Extra copies of your resume
- List of professional references (if references were not included in your resume/application)
- Piece of paper with your key agenda points (in point form)
- Career portfolio or examples of past work
- Letters of recommendation/reference
- Business folder including a pad and pen
- List of questions to ask the interviewer
- Original and photocopies of your current transcript (if indicated)
- Your own business/calling card

During the Interview

Now that you have taken the necessary steps to prepare for the interview, what can you expect during the interview? The following sections will provide you with some information on the basic format and structure of an interview and how to effectively present yourself in an interview.



Arrival & Greetings

Be Punctual

Arrive at least 10–15 minutes prior to the interview. If you are unsure of the exact location of the interview, take a trial run at a similar time of day to determine how best to get there, how long it takes, where to park your vehicle, etc. Being early reflects your promptness and interest. If you are unavoidably detained, call as soon as possible to briefly explain your situation. Offer your apologies, and if the employer is willing, try to reschedule for a more convenient time.

Be Friendly and Courteous

Be friendly and courteous to all you meet. You have to be able to fit into the team at this organization/company. Keep in mind that receptionists and other employees may be asked for their opinion on their interactions with you. Assume that everyone you meet has input into the hiring decision. The interview begins the moment you arrive.

Interview Structure

Introduction

Within the first few minutes of the interview, it is essential to establish a positive rapport with the interviewers. Greet all interviewers by their formal name (i.e. Mr. Job, Ms. Employer) unless otherwise directed, and offer a firm handshake. A firm handshake is often preferred by interviewers—it reflects confidence. Your handshake should never be too firm or too limp. Do not hesitate to initiate the handshake. Direct eye contact and a warm smile complement a strong introduction. Once in the interview room, wait to be seated until invited to do so.

An interview may begin with a few minutes of small talk to help you relax and to get a sense of your personality. Small talk is an important part of the interview process because the interviewers are getting their first impression of you. Show the interviewers that you are friendly and confident. Remember, the interviewers have already started to evaluate you.

Overview

Interviewers will typically provide some structure for the interview process. They may briefly tell you about the organization and about the position for which you are interviewing. Show your interest through your body language and listening skills.

Questions

Interviewers will ask questions and evaluate your answers, assessing your fit for the position. In your answers, provide information that will convince the interviewers that you have the skills and qualifications for the position.

Tips on Answering Questions

What to say:

- Tailor your answers in a way that matches the job – draw parallels between your skills and experience with the current position
- When finished answering the question, stop talking. Do not ramble when there is silence in the room
- Quantify your answers when appropriate
- Always be honest
- Never criticize a previous employer, supervisor, etc.
- Formulate positive experiences throughout the interview
- Give details and examples that are specific
- Highlight your strengths

How to say it:

- There is no single right answer. It is often how you answer that is more important than the exact content • Ask for clarification if you are unsure of the question
- Use the STAR technique in preparing your responses
- Wait until the interviewer is finished asking the question before you begin to answer
- Avoid using any slang or unprofessional words (i.e. ‘kinda’, ‘yah’, ‘stuff like that’, etc.)
- Avoid phrases such as ‘just did’ and ‘only did’
- Stay focused
- Talk confidently about your achievements
- Show enthusiasm
- Your answers should be clear, concise, and well organized



As the interview continues, you will be asked to fill in details. Near the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions.

Closing

The interviewers will typically explain the next steps in the hiring process and how and when a final decision or additional contact will be made.

Presenting Yourself in the Interview

Behaviour

Throughout the interview, sit up straight, look alert and speak clearly. Maintain eye contact and avoid any nervous mannerisms. Maintaining proper posture throughout the interview is very important. Slouching and leaning down in your chair may reflect laziness, a lack of interest or a lack of confidence. In contrast, if you are too rigid and tense it may convey inflexibility and nervousness. Your attitude tells a lot to the interviewer—it should reflect an optimistic, self-confident person who enjoys learning and challenges. If you have a negative attitude, it will be reflected during the interview. Focus on the positive aspects of your life and past work experience. If you had a bad night before the interview, do not let it show. Gear yourself up for the 30–60 minutes and be positive.

A little bit of nervousness is healthy; it keeps you alert and shows you care about what you are doing. However, being too nervous, tense, shy, withdrawn or anxious may be a barrier to a successful interview. If you feel this may be a problem, read some books or seek assistance on stress and anxiety management. Approach the interview as a “two-way street;” the interviewer is assessing you and you are assessing the interviewer as a representative of the company/organization. This approach can sometimes reduce some nervousness. Also consider that you may not be the only individual in the room who is nervous, as many interviewers may feel nervous about meeting with candidates and/or making an appropriate decision. A mistake in hiring the wrong individual could be very costly to the organization (wasted recruitment and training time).

Answering Questions

Give complete and descriptive answers, but keep them concise and direct. Be concrete, detailed, truthful and frank in your answers. Remember that the interviewer chose each question for a reason. Ask yourself why the interviewer chose that question so you can provide a relevant answer. Frame your answers in terms of your past experiences rather than just opinions. Offer examples of work and references that document your best qualities. If you are asked a question that you are unsure of, pause to think about an answer or seek clarification. It is better to pause and organize your thoughts than to ramble through an answer.

Communication Skills

Interviewers will be evaluating your communication skills. It is important to be a good listener as well as a good speaker. Do not try to guess what the next question will be or only listen to the first part of a two part question. If you relax and listen well during the interview, you can formulate additional questions to the ones you have already prepared before the interview. What you say in an interview can clearly have an impact. Grammar usage is very important during the interview. If grammar is used incorrectly even the best answer can sound uneducated. Spend some time analyzing how you say things in addition to planning what you say in the interview. Review your answers before delivering them in a live interview.



Interviewers will listen to what you verbalize, but also what you communicate non-verbally. Non-verbal behaviours convey just as much as verbal communication. Maintain eye contact with the people who are interviewing you. Do not stare at them and do not look down, up or to the side of them; this can suggest a lack of confidence or that you are hiding something. It is okay to look away for a few seconds, especially when you may need to think about a response to a tough question. Look away for a few seconds and then return your focus to the interviewer. If you are in a panel interview, be sure to address all interviewers equally.

Closing

Be sensitive to signs that the interview has run its course. Some interviewers may look at their watches, while other interviewers stand up, extend a hand and thank you for coming. Stay positive and remain confident even if you get the impression that the interview is not going well and that you have already been rejected. The interviewer may be interested, but is challenging you to test your reaction. When the interview is over, be sure to thank the interviewers for taking the time to talk with you. Re-emphasize your interest in the position and your appreciation for being considered. This is also your opportunity to make a strong lasting impression by summarizing your qualifications and expressing your interest in the position.

The interviewer will usually provide information regarding the next steps in the selection process and/or when they will be making a decision. If the interviewer does not disclose this information, be sure to ask about the next steps in the selection process and when you can expect to hear from the employer. Be sure to ask the interviewer(s) for his or her business cards(s) in order that you can send a follow-up correspondence.

Following the Interview

Following the interview, there are a few tasks to perform. This section will review the steps and the timeline for each task.

Within a Few Hours: Analyze the Interview

Evaluating your interview as soon as it is over can help you to understand your interviewing strengths and identify areas for improvement. To serve as a reference for future interviews, write down any details about the interview itself, including the questions that were asked and the answers you provided, to help you analyze your performance. To be objective, try assessing yourself from the employer's perspective.

Consider these questions when evaluating your performance:

Presentation/Performance

- Was I on time?
- Did I perform adequate research prior to the interview?
- How was my body posture? My nonverbal communication? How were my mannerisms?
- Was I too tense? Was I too assertive? Not assertive enough?
- Did I respond to the interviewer's key concerns?
- What points did I make that seemed to interest the interviewer?
- Was I relaxed enough to feel confident?
- Were there things I wish I would have and would not have said?
- Did I take the lead from time to time instead of letting the interviewer control the interview?
- What can I do to improve my next interview?

Responses to Questions

- Were there any questions for which I felt unprepared?
- Were there questions or information I forgot to ask or mention?
- Did I stick to the main facts or did I ramble?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I concise and focused in my responses?
- Did I provide sufficient information and examples?
- Did I present my qualifications well?
- What questions made me feel uncomfortable?
- How could I have better illustrated my skills and abilities?

Company/Organization

- How do I feel about the company and position?
- What impressed me about the organization and its representatives?
- Was I confident in describing my desire to work for the organization?
- Did the interviewers sell their organization to me?
- Did I obtain contact information?
- Did I note the date the interviewer stated I would be notified?



Sample Closing Statement

"This position sounds like an exciting opportunity. I believe my (relate to your most relevant strengths/experience) makes me an ideal candidate for this position. I am looking forward to the next step in your selection process."

Within 24–48 Hours: Send a Thank-you Letter

Even if you do not get a job offer, keeping in contact with the interviewer may lead to further referrals, more interviews and ultimately a job offer. Send a brief thank you (in the form of a formal business letter, thank-you card, or e-mail) to the interviewer, indicating your continued interest in the position and your appreciation to the interviewer for having met with you. It is a professional courtesy and demonstrates your consideration, enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity to interview.

A brief letter can be an effective tool and could make or break a job offer. Attention to detail is critical; remember your written communication ability will be analyzed. Misspelling the interviewer's name /company name could cost you the job! Thank the interviewer(s) for the interview opportunity. Mention any points that you feel are particularly relevant and emphasize the skills, strengths and abilities you can bring to the organization and/or position. If, during the interview, you were unable to demonstrate some of your strengths that make you a good match for the position, use the follow-up as an opportunity to introduce these strengths.

Within Several Days: Check the Status

If you have not heard from the company within the time frame given, do not hesitate to contact the interviewer directly. If you were not given a date, a general guideline is to wait 8–10 working days before contacting the interviewer. If you telephone or e-mail, confirm that the thank-you correspondence you sent was received and enquire about the status of the interviewer's decision.

When contacting the employer on the status of the hiring decision, ensure that you introduce yourself and state the position for which you interviewed. Express your continued interest in the organization and the position. If no decision has been made, enquire when a decision will be forthcoming. It is acceptable to make a follow-up contact as long as you make it in a friendly and courteous manner and at appropriate intervals—do not pester the employer.

In Conclusion

View all interviews as opportunities to further develop your interviewing skills. Try not to be too hard on yourself—job offers can come from the toughest of interviews. With the proper preparation, adequate experiences and controlled confidence, you will continue to improve your interview skills.



How to Prepare for a Job Interview:

An Essential Guide by UCC Career Services

1. [Interview Preparation Checklist](#)
2. [How to Prepare for a Job Interview – Panopto Video](#)
3. [Types of Interview Questions](#)
4. [How to Answer the Most Common Interview Questions: Dos and Don'ts!](#)
5. [How to Predict Interview Questions](#)
6. [List of Sample Competency-Based Questions](#)
7. [How to Prepare for Competency-Based Questions – Panopto Video](#)
8. [STAR How-to Guide](#)
9. [Shortlist.Me](#)



1. Interview Preparation Checklist – How prepared are you?

Would you like to be prepared for your next job interview but are not sure where to start? The following checklist will help to guide you in the right direction.

Read each of the following statements and ask yourself if it is “true” or “false” for you.	True or False?	False? See page...
I know what to expect at a job interview for an internship or graduate role.		Page 3
I know the types of questions to expect at a graduate job interview.		Page 4
I know how to answer the most commonly asked interview questions.		Page 7
I know how interviewers choose which questions to ask, and why.		Page 11
I know how to prepare for a competency-based job interview, using the STAR technique.		Page 14



2. How to Prepare for a Job Interview – The Fundamentals

Every person can learn to perform well at a job interview by following the necessary steps outlined in the following presentation.

Click [here](#) to play the video on Panopto using your UCC log-in credentials. You can also choose to [download the slides](#).

How to Prepare for a Job Interview

UCC Career Services



Career Services



[Back to checklist.](#)



3. Types of Interview Questions

Biographical Questions:

Biographical questions are broad questions about your experience. They are used very sparingly by trained interviewers, usually as an icebreaker at the beginning.

- Tell us about yourself.
- What has been your experience of university?
- Tell us about your work experience.
- How has your education/experience prepared you for this role?
- What kinds of activities do you enjoy outside of work and study?
- What has been your proudest achievement to date?
- Tell us about your summer in the US this year.

Motivation Questions

Motivation questions are used to reveal your motivations, interests and goals.

- Why did you choose your degree?
- What are your most/least favourite modules in the degree and why?
- What your most/least favourite internship/project/role? And why?
- Why did you apply for this job?
- Why would you like to work here?
- What would you like to achieve in the next 3-5 years?

Self-knowledge Questions

~These questions can reveal your self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-assurance.

- What are your strengths?
- What are your greatest weaknesses?
- How would your last manager describe you?
- How would your best friend describe you?
- How would your worst enemy describe you?
- What would people be surprised to know about you?

Strengths-based Questions:

Strength-based interviewing has its foundations in positive psychology. The theory is that by identifying your strengths and matching them to the role you'll be happier in your work, perform better, learn quicker and stay with the company for longer. Unlike their competency counterparts, strengths interviews are more personal and allow recruiters to gain a genuine insight into the personalities of candidates and to see whether they'd be a good fit for the company. They also allow you, as the interviewee, to be selected on the basis of your natural abilities. Be honest in your answers and allow your enthusiasm to show in your body language.

- What energises you?
- Do you most like starting tasks or finishing them?
Do you prefer the big picture or the small details?
Describe a successful day. What made it successful?
What tasks are always left on your to-do list?



Competency-Based Questions:

Competencies are the skills, behaviours and knowledge you'll bring into the role. Employers will use competency-based questions in job interviews to elicit examples from you of situations when you have demonstrated a competency to the required level. The rationale is that there is likely to be a direct link between past behaviour and future performance. That is why competency-based interviews are also known as "situational" or "behavioural" interviews.

Competency-based interview questions are the most commonly used in all sectors due to the espoused link between competency-based interviewing and job performance.

Competency-based questions almost always start with these words:

- Tell me about a time when...
- Describe a situation when...
- Talk me through a situation when...
- Describe a time when you had to deal with a customer complaint?
- Describe a time when you had to present an idea to a group of people?
- Did you ever play a leadership role within a team?
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a colleague?
- Give me an example of a difficult problem you had to solve?
- When did you overcome a difficult obstacle? Describe a situation in which you had to prioritise effectively?
- When did you have to take on board constructive feedback?
- Tell me about a challenging goal that you set yourself, and achieved.

"Growth mindset" Questions:

People who have a growth mindset believe they can expand their abilities through hard work, challenge, and overcoming setbacks. This is a helpful perspective, far more than a "fixed mindset" perspective. People with a growth mindset are more resilient, adaptable, flexible, and demonstrate continuous learning. So be honest when answering these questions – it's okay to admit that you've made mistakes. It's seen as a very good thing to be open about what hasn't worked as well as you'd hoped. It's the only way you can learn and move on. Emphasise what you learned from your mistakes. They won't believe you if you say you've never made a mistake. Obviously, choose your examples carefully – choose minor disappointments rather than major catastrophes!

- When have you failed?
- When have you disappointed yourself?
- When have you been "thrown in at the deep end" at work?
- When have you felt that you were not good at something at work?
- When did you make a mistake?

Scenario-based Questions:

Scenario-based questions ask you how you would respond in various hypothetical work-based scenarios similar to the situations you might encounter in the role. They are used very commonly in interviews for nursing, clinical therapies and other medical roles.

Use your knowledge, professional judgement, knowledge of relevant legislation and organisational policies to answer these. And feel free to bring in a relevant past example if you have one.



What would you do if ...

- ... you made a mistake that no one else noticed?
- ... you witnessed a manager sexually harassing a colleague?
- ... you were assigned a task that you didn't feel competent to perform?
- ... an angry customer attacked you verbally
- ... you received unfair criticism from a manager?
- ... a colleague took credit for your work?

Commercial Awareness

A commercially aware employee is one who understands the inner workings of both the organisation they work for and the industry it operates within. Commercial awareness (also known as “business focus”) is an invaluable skill in a variety of careers, particularly ones such as law, accountancy, management, consulting or engineering. Be prepared to answer these questions intelligently, read an article from a quality business publication daily, follow major news stories and check the news on the morning of the interview.

- What do you know about this company?
- What is our market position? Who are our main competitors?
- What business publications do you read regularly?
- Tell us about a recent new story that caught your interest.
- Which sector is likely to be moved affected by Brexit in your opinion?

Brain Teasers

Brain teasers are sometimes used in interviews for roles requiring Critical Thinking, Mental Arithmetic and/or Creativity. Brainteasers have been created to assess candidates on the key skill such as problem solving (how far can they get without help?), analysis (can they look at the big picture?), creativity (do they think “outside the box”?) and performance under pressure (can they keep calm while dealing with the unexpected? The best advice is to keep calm, take a logical, sensible approach and be ready to explain and justify the steps you took to solve the riddle. Don’t fall apart if you didn’t solve it. They are meant to be difficult.

- How many square feet of pizza are eaten in the UK every year?
- How many gas stations are there in the US?
- How many cent coins, piled, would it take to reach the top of the Eiffel Tower?
- How can you tell if the light inside the fridge is on or off?

“Curveball” Questions

It’s impossible to predict these – that’s the idea! They are to catch you off-guard and reveal your personality and sense of humour. There is no wrong answer, so have fun with these.

- Which book or film has influenced you the most?
- If you were an animal/biscuit, which would you be?
- What would the name of your debut album be?
- Would you prefer to fight one horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?



4. How to Answer the Most Common Interview Questions – Dos and Don'ts!

Tell me about yourself.

May also be phrased as: "Talk us through your CV". "Give us your elevator pitch".

This is one of the most commonly used interview "openers" and, as such, sets the scene for the whole interview. It's vital to get it right.

DO:

Prepare an interesting (for them) relevant, positive, 90 second overview, not your life story.

For inexperienced graduates, this is a good structure to use:

- a. Educational Highlights (qualifications and project/module(s)/result)
- b. Work Highlights (roles, achievements, knowledge/skills gained)
- c. Extra-curricular Highlights (voluntary work/roles/achievements)
- d. Your Current Career Goal and link to this job

Ending with your current goal leads you nicely to why you are sitting in front of them, e.g. I would ideally like to complete my accountancy training in the IT industry which is why I'm delighted to have the opportunity to be interviewed today by your company..."

DON'T:

Ramble; keep things to a brief couple of minutes. They can ask for more details on anything afterwards if they want it



Why do you want this job?

Here, you need to show your ambitions and passion to the role and identify clearly why you should be considered. You need to impress them with your knowledge and effort you put into preparing for the interview.

DO:

- Research the role and organisation fully and highlight the specific things that excite you the most; ensure you demonstrate how your skills will apply to the role.
- Be passionate and discuss your ambitions; talk about how this role will motivate you.

DON'T:

- Avoid giving reasons such as salary, training, holiday allowance or the role being a stepping stone.

What interests you about our company?

The interviewer wants to see if you understand what the company does and what type of employer they are in terms of values and workplace culture. Most of all, make sure to convey genuine enthusiasm for the business.

DO:

- Know all your basic facts on the business, product lines, customers, culture etc.
- Research the HR and career pages of the site, their social media pages, and talk to any current employees you know.

DON'T:

- Have a short, bland, answer that makes generalist statements, e.g. about the company being big, dynamic etc..

What are your key strengths?

Also phrased as...Where do you excel? Why should we hire you? Name three reasons why you should be hired.

To answer this question well, you need 2-3 Unique Selling Points (USPs) that help to differentiate you from the competition.

DO:

- Choose USPs that link to the requirements of the role.
- Support each USP with strong, compelling evidence.
- Use personal qualities as they are perceived as permanent and integral to you as an individual.

DON'T:

- Choose irrelevant or basic, "given" qualities, such as "punctual", "honest" – you'll need to take it up a notch.
- List too many strengths – it sounds unfocussed and unrealistic.



What are your weaknesses?

Also phrased as... Where do you need to improve? What are your developmental needs?

This question is a real test of your self-awareness and willingness to constantly develop and improve. Weaknesses are often more apparent to the interviewer than you might realise.

DO:

- Choose one true weakness that is not a core competency for the role.
- Choose a skill rather than an attribute as skills can be developed through training and practice. A “sub-skill” is even better because it confines the weak spot to one aspect of the skill, e.g. MS Access rather than IT skills in general.
- Be honest but prudent in your choice of words.
- Reflect for a moment before answering to avoid sounding too rehearsed.

If asked for an example of the weakness action (e.g. “when did you make a mistake? Not succeed? Disappoint yourself?”):

- Prepare an honest answer to these questions that you comfortable discussing and that doesn’t show you in a negative light!
- Emphasise what you learned from situation and do differently now as a result.

DON'T:

- Offer more than one weakness, unless you are pushed for a second one – have at least two back-ups prepared just in case.
- Say you have none – everybody has weaknesses if they’re being honest.
- Invent a weakness or provide a clichéd answer (e.g. perfectionist) – people trust others who are open and aware of their limitations.
- Choose a personal attribute that impacts how you relate to other people, e.g. patience, assertiveness, shyness – these can seem entrenched and “soft skills” are difficult to train/fix.



Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

Also phrased as: What are your career goals? How might this role fulfil your longer-term aspirations?

Research the typical career paths of graduates within that firm as much as you can, using the Graduate Recruitment pages, their social media pages and the LinkedIn Alumni Tool. Then research the paths of successful graduates within the industry/field, wherever you intend to build your career. Where are the really successful role models that graduated five years ago. How did they get to where you want to be?

DOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline a career plan relevant to that role, company and industry. • Ensure you sound committed to the company. • Be able to explain, step-by-step, how you think you would reach your longer-term ambitions. • Demonstrate enthusiasm for the immediate role. 	DON'T <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about doing your manager's job! • Talk about an ambition that could not be fulfilled within the company (e.g. become self-employed). • Show a lack of ambition.
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Have you any questions for us?

It is vital to have prepared some questions to ask your interviewers at the end of the interview. Ask questions focused on the role, company that you really want to know the answer to.

DO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions that reveal the perspective and priorities of the interviewer, e.g. What is your greatest concern in hiring for this role? What will be the greatest challenge in this role for the first 2 months? What would an ideal candidate achieve in the 1st year? 	DON'T: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't ask too many questions or none at all. Gauge the body language of the interviewers – are they rushed? • Ask questions that veer into negotiation (e.g. salary, working hours, funding for training etc.) – this can wait until you have a job offer.
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5. Want to Predict Interview Questions? Think like the interviewer!

How can you tell what questions you will be asked at the interview?

It is possible to predict the questions to a large extent... you just need to think like the interviewer! Put yourself in their shoes... what would you ask if you were them?

Imagine that you are the IT Manager of a large, national recruitment consultancy and you are currently hiring a graduate to manage a number of projects simultaneously in a role that requires ongoing travel across the country and direct contact with SME clients. 100 graduates applied for the role and you have shortlisted 6 candidates to interview.

Given the demands of the role, you need an organised, adaptable team player with influential communication skills, business awareness and a strong customer focus.

The role also requires a high degree of self-motivation and problem-solving skills as the successful candidate will need to work largely without supervision and will have to manage their own schedule and activities.

Like most employers, you have listed all of these requirements in the job specification, for candidates to review in advance. By carefully underlining the relevant text, it is easy to identify at least 10 competencies!

What questions will you ask to ensure that you choose the best candidate?

Like all trained interviewers, you have a set list of sample interview questions that choose from, tweak and expand as your see fit.

Review your list of competency-based questions on the next page and decide what question you will ask to test for each competency.



6. Set list of Sample Competency-Based Interview Questions

PLANNING AND ORGANISING

- Tell me about a time when you have had to plan a project/task/ event.
- Tell me how you schedule your time on an unusually hectic week.
- Describe a time when you had several deadlines falling at the same time. How did you cope?
- Tell me of a time when you have had to re-prioritise in response to unforeseen circumstances.

TEAMWORK

- Describe the team of people you work with and how you fit into the team. What obstructs the progress of the team you work in?
- Give me an example of where you had to work as part of a group to achieve a goal.
- How do you deal with conflicts, disagreements or misunderstandings within a team?
- Tell me about a time when you have had to join a new team.

CUSTOMER FOCUS

- When have you exceeded customer expectations?
- Give me an example of a customer complaint you have dealt with.
- Can you describe a situation where a customer tested your patience?
- Describe a situation when you acted as an “advocate” for your customers’ needs.

ADAPTABILITY/FLEXIBILITY

- Can you describe a time when you had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had little control?
- How did the changes impact on you?
- Can you think of a time when you changed your plans as a result of new information?
- Describe a time when you altered your own behaviour to fit the situation.

SELF-MOTIVATION

- What motivates you? And how do you motivate yourself in challenging circumstances?
- Give me an example of a challenging goal you set yourself and achieved.
- When have you failed or disappointed yourself?
- Tell me about a difficult obstacle you have overcome.
- Tell me about a time where you went above and beyond your role and expectations. Why did you do this? What exactly did you do?



INNOVATION AND CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

- Describe a situation when you came up with a solution to a difficult problem.
- Describe an occasion when you solved a problem with an unconventional solution.
- Give me an example of a situation where you've found a better way of doing things.
- Give me an example of a problem you were unable to solve.

INFLUENCING

- Describe a time when you have had to enlist the help, support or cooperation of other people to complete a piece of work.
- Tell me about a time when you found it very difficult to get the agreement of a person or group.
- Have you ever been in a group in which some of the members did not work well together?

BUSINESS FOCUS/COMMERCIAL AWARENESS QUESTIONS

- What do you know about this company?
- What is our market position? Who are our main competitors?
- What are the greatest challenges facing our sector in the next five years?
- Tell me about a recent business story that grabbed your attention.

[**Back to checklist.**](#)



7. How to Prepare for Competency-Based Interviews

Hopefully, thinking like an interviewer has helped you to realise the importance asking of asking interview questions that related directly to required competencies. This approach is known as “competency-based interviewing”.

Competency-based interview questions are one of the commonly used types of interview questions and require thorough preparation.

Learn how to prepare for competency-based interview questions in the following presentation. Click [here](#) to play the video on Panapto using your UCC log-in credentials. You can also choose to [download the slides](#).

Competency-Based Interviews and the “STAR” Technique

UCC Career Services



B



8. The STAR Interview Technique: A “How-To” Guide

This is a guide to using STAR to create excellent answers to tough interview questions. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action(s), Result(s) and is a vital framework for structuring answers to interview questions. Search YouTube using “STAR interview technique” as a search term and find numerous videos by top graduate employers, to see practical examples of people using STAR to answer interview questions.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| Situation /Task | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose a situation that is as similar as possible to the type of situations you will encounter in the job you seek.• Be very specific rather than general – these specific examples have a much more powerful impact.• Avoid spending a lot of time describing the problem – state the problem as briefly as you can while ensuring that the listener understands the situation.• Do not discuss a situation you are angry about. Do not discuss a problem that you caused. |
| Action | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe in detail the positive and appropriate action you took to resolve the issue or to get the task completed.• This step should be the focus of your answer (60%+).• This part of the story is often overlooked.• Provide good detail – it will show the employer that you know how to take appropriate steps to resolve work-related issues. |
| Result | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the positive result of your action.• If no positive result, choose a story that does have a positive result!• If you can quantify the result, do so.• Don’t forget to mention the positive result! |

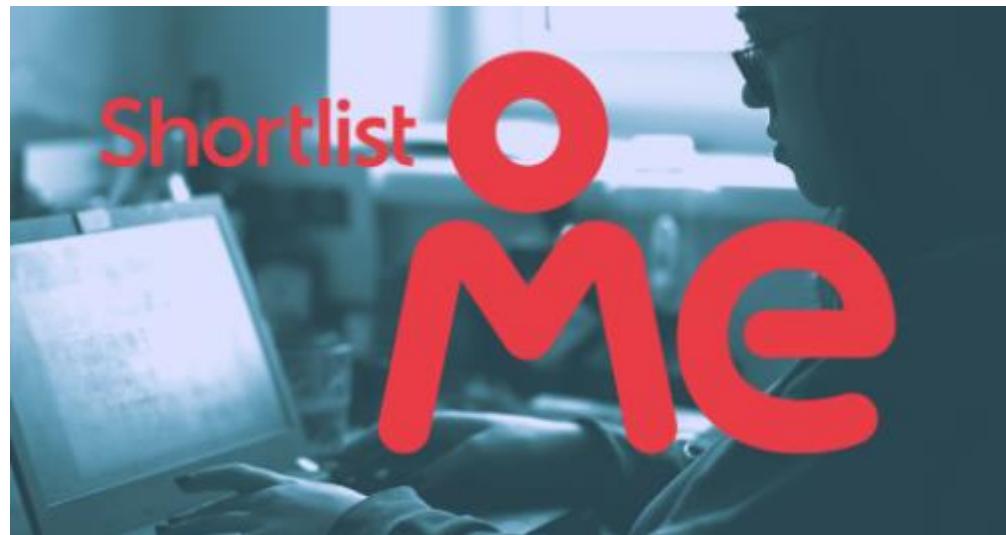
	SITUATION	TASK	ACTION(s)	RESULT(s)
Final Year Project	Did you choose the topic? Was it an individual or group project? Did you choose your team mates? How many credits was it worth?	What was the objective of the project?	How did you go about achieving your objective? What was your rationale? What methods did you use and why?	What were the positive results? E.g. academic result (if good), new skills/knowledge/insights gained, publications, contribution of data to a larger project etc.
Additional Projects	With which module was this project associated?	What was the objective of the project?	How did you go about achieving your objective? What was your rationale? What methods did you use and why?	What were the positive results? E.g. academic result (if good), new skills/knowledge/insights gained, publications, contribution of data to a larger project etc.
Job	How did you get the job? Where did you work? Where did you fit within the wider team or organisational structure?	What was your role? (What were you hired to do?) Keep this brief.	How did you fulfil your role? What methods, approaches did you take and why?	What evidence do you have that you did a good job? <i>I.e. achievements (promotion, awards) or quantifiable results (e.g. sales targets) or new skills/knowledge/insights gained</i>
Role of Responsibility	How did you land this role? What was the organisation? Where did you fit within the team or structure?	What was your role? (What were you appointed to achieve? What were your aspirations?)	How did you fulfil your role? What methods, approaches did you take and why?	What evidence do you have that you were successful in the role? (e.g. new initiatives or improvements/ enhancements to existing programmes or quantifiable increases such as # of events, attendees, funds raised etc.)

Competency:	SITUATION	TASK	ACTION(s)	RESULT(s)
Teamwork	When was your best example of teamwork?	What did the team aim to achieve?	How did the team approach the task? <i>How did you personally contribute to the team effort? (Most Important)</i>	What evidence do you have that the team achieved their objective? How much of the overall team success can be attributed to you personally?
Interpersonal/ Customer Service	When did you help/support/mentor/console another person? What was your relationship to the person and why did they need you?	What did you aim to do for them?	How did you help/support/mentor/console the person? What words, body language, tactics did you employ and why?	What evidence do you have that you were successful? What new knowledge/skills/insights did you gain from this experience?
Problem solving	When did you solve a difficult problem or generate a creative solution?	What was the problem you aimed to solve?	How did you solve the problem? What methods did you adopt and why?	What evidence do you have that the problem was solved? What evidence do you have that the solution has been an effective one?
Initiative	When have you used your initiative?	What did you set out to achieve?	How did you go about achieving your objective? What actions did you take?	What evidence do you have that your efforts were worthwhile? (E.g. improved system, leaner service etc. etc.)
Multi-tasking (Prioritising)	When have you juggled conflicting demands?	What did you set out to achieve?	What system did you use to prioritise tasks? Talk me through the steps you took.	What evidence do you have that you prioritised effectively?
Failure	When have you failed or disappointed yourself?	What were you trying to achieve?	What did you do wrong (with benefit of hindsight)?	What did you learn from this experience?

With what you've done you've completed this essential guide to interview preparation, it's time to get that all-important practice of answer questions out loud.

Use Shortlist.Me to practise answering different types of interview questions and to receive detailed, question-focused feedback to achieve your “personal best” at the real-life job interview:

<https://go.shortlister.com/marketplace/unicollegecork>





INTERVIEWING

Undergraduate Resource Series

Mignone Center for Career Success | 54 Dunster Street

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ACE THE INTERVIEW

During an interview, potential employers ultimately want to know: *Why should we hire you?* They try to assess the following:

- Your qualifications for the position.
- Your "fit" with the employer or organization.
- How well you have considered your reasons for applying.
- How clearly you can express your potential contributions to the organization.
- Your "transferable skills" such as communication and professionalism.
- Your knowledge of the organization and level of interest in the position.

It's important to be as prepared as possible before your interview. Employers are looking for applicants who are focused and mature, understand the work the company is doing and the requirements of the position, and can communicate how their skills can be used to meet those requirements. They want to hire people who are cooperative, organized, and hard-working.

Ways to improve your interviewing skills:

Research the company, field, and position—

- Before the interview, read the employer's website and review any online content relevant to the role and position or (when applicable) print material you may have previously picked up at career fairs or other hiring events.
- Stay current on industry news by reading daily news sources. Conduct a Google search on the organization the day of the interview to be current on any new developments.
- Utilize Harvard online subscriptions such as Firsthand Vault Guides (which can be found in the eResources on our website) for additional industry and company information.
- Whenever possible, attend any employer networking events and information sessions or connect with someone who works there to increase your visibility and to gather additional information. Use the Harvard Alumni Association alumni database and LinkedIn to identify alumni contacts.

Know your resume—Be prepared to discuss everything on your resume. Remember that your resume is the only information most employers will have about you. Expect questions about your choice of activities, professional experiences, concentration, and thesis (if applicable). Employers and organizations are interested in knowing how you've chosen to spend your time and energy, and why. Help your interviewer get to know you and differentiate you from other students. Don't be too brief when answering "what and why" questions, but don't ramble, either. Expand on your experience and skills. **Focus your responses on how these relate to the position.**

From a recent employer:

"All Harvard candidates are capable of doing the job. What distinguishes the candidates is the level of interest."

Practice answering interview questions—Practice doesn't imply that you are memorizing answers to questions. It is an opportunity to assess *how* you answer questions, whether you're making eye-contact and seem interested, seeing if your explanations are clear, and understanding the reasoning behind certain questions as well as how to connect your experience to them. You can practice with roommates, family, friends, tutors, and by appointment with our advisors. The more experience you have articulating your thoughts and highlighting your skills, the more effective and polished you will be.

AI is also a useful tool to use in your interview preparation. Generative AI can be used to conduct background research, generate potential interview questions, brainstorm answers, and evaluate your potential answers. For more examples see careerservices.fas.harvard.edu/ai-interviews-and-offers/.

Two AI-powered resources for practice interviews are Big Interview, offered through the MCS website at careerservices.fas.harvard.edu/resources/big-interview/ and LinkedIn's interview prep tool: www.linkedin.com/interview-prep/. Additionally, MCS offers a number of in-person interviewing workshops. Refer to the "Events" section of our website for dates and times.

Prepare some questions to ask an employer—These questions will help you obtain the information needed to make an informed decision and also reiterate your interest in the position. Make sure you know the next step in the process before you leave. Ask, "When might I expect to hear from you?" and, if applicable, indicate your continued interest in the position.

Be sure your attire is appropriate—A well-groomed, professional appearance is essential. Anything else will detract from the best possible presentation you can make. Decide what to wear well before the day of the interview. A good way to determine suitable attire is to look at what people typically wear in the organization or industry for which you're interviewing. In general, plan to wear a fairly formal outfit in a dark color. In some creative and technical fields you may have more leeway in terms of formal vs. casual attire, but it's always safe to err on the formal side. Avoid wild ties, attention-grabbing jewelry, strong scents, and bold colors.

Attire	
Corporate Dress (for interviews)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• dark suit with a light shirt or tailored dress• conservative tie/simple jewelry• dark/polished closed-toe shoes
Business Casual (for employer events)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• khakis, dress pants, dress, or skirt• button-down long-sleeve shirt, sweater set, or blouse

Map out the location or test your technology—Confirm your day, time, and method of communication. For virtual interviews, check your tech and internet connection. If traveling, plan your trip ahead of time, especially if you're in a major urban area or interviewing at a time when traffic may delay your travel. Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early so that you can compose yourself. If you arrive earlier, wait, and review your notes. For virtual interviews you can show up 1-2 minutes early.

Have a good attitude—Project enthusiasm, confidence, and a positive attitude! Convey the message that you are the best candidate for the position, and that this is the employer for whom you want to work. A job interview is not the place to be "laid-back"; it's up to you to "sell" yourself for the position. Market your skills and experience to fit the job requirements (utilizing your research of the employer). Be professional, polished, and confident.

What to bring with you to an interview:

- Extra copies of your resume
- Pen and paper or padfolio
- Writing samples or portfolio (if appropriate for the industry)

When invited to a full day of interviews, bring a bottle of water and a snack such as a granola bar in case the employer doesn't provide refreshments. Take a moment between interviews to "recharge" out of sight of your interviewers.

Don't Forget To:

- **Confirm the location of the interview or virtual meeting link.**
- **Arrive to an in-person interview 10-15 minutes early.**
- **Bring extra copies of your resume.**
- **Smile and make eye contact.**
- **Send a thank-you email after the interview within 24-48 hours.**

TIP: Turn off your cell phone before the interview begins! Interruptions from a phone call, text, or notification can be very disruptive and seem unprofessional. For virtual interviews, close all tabs and silence email/text alerts on your computer.

Behavioral/Fit Interviews

Many employers use a "Behavioral Interview" to assess candidates' skills and fit with their organization. The principle behind this type of interview is that past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior.

In most cases, the employer has predetermined a specific set of characteristics, often referred to as "competencies," that are required to be successful in the available position. Some examples of competencies include problem-solving, teamwork, communication, writing skills, and leadership. The employer then designs open-ended questions that ask you to refer back to a particular situation and describe your actions.

INSIDER TIP: When you are asked a behavioral interview question, think about the situation you want to describe. What action(s) did you take related to the question asked and what was the result based on that action?

For example, an interviewer may ask, "Tell me about a time when you were on a team that wasn't working well together." The expectation is that you will cite a specific situation from your own experience. Unless the interviewer indicates otherwise, this example can come from your work, school, extra-curricular activity, or volunteer experience. It's important that you have something specific to say, and that you can describe your own role and what you learned from the particular situation. Be as concise as possible while getting your point across.

This type of interview is a great way for you to tell the story behind your resume. Rather than merely presenting a list of your achievements, you have the opportunity to elaborate on some particularly impressive accomplishments. Keep a few "storytelling" guidelines in mind:

- **1. Situation, 2. Action, 3. Result**—Follow this framework to answer behavioral questions.
- **Show, don't tell**—Use a specific example and only include relevant details.
- **Stay on topic**—Remember the question you're trying to answer; don't get sidetracked.

- **Have a conclusion**—Be sure to include the outcome or what you learned from the situation.
- **Make it resonate**—Touch upon why your behavior or response would be useful to the employer or in the position.

The qualities listed below are sought by many employers, and you'll want to continue to develop these across your career. To prepare for interviews, identify and practice telling stories for each of these eight competencies, demonstrating at least one of the related qualities in your example.

Critical Thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with complexity • Handle ambiguity • See issues from multiple perspectives • Uncover flaws in arguments • Ask informed questions 	Learning Orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual curiosity • Quick learner • Flexible and adaptable • Open to new ideas • Innovative • Reflect on mistakes, able to make improvements
Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate initiative • Justify decisions • Advocate • Motivate/empower • Demonstrate conviction • Show good judgment and integrity • Resolve differences 	Problem Solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See multiple possibilities • Evaluate options • Synthesize/integrate information • Multidisciplinary approach • Entrepreneurial • Think on your feet • Resourceful
Teamwork <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus builder • Listen to others • Collaborative • Ability to work in diverse teams • Aware of diverse/global perspectives • Able to build professional relationships and network 	Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong writing skills • Public speaking and presentation skills • Influence and persuade effectively • Communicate globally—culturally sensitive/aware
Concrete/Technical Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research skills • Laboratory skills • Analysis of large data sets • Tech/social media savvy • Qualitative/Quantitative analysis • Coding Languages 	Professionalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a strong work ethic • Time management skills • Responsive and punctual • Take accountability for work • Learn from feedback and mistakes • Ethical and responsible

Be sure to practice your interview skills using Big Interview, an AI-powered interview preparation tool for Harvard degree students: careerservices.fas.harvard.edu/resources/big-interview/. Search by industry to practice interview questions and get AI-generated feedback.

How Employers Assess “Fit”

In addition to determining how your interests and skills “fit” with the position and organization, the interviewer is also assessing how you might fit with the company or team culture. Sometimes this is simply about whether you can connect with the interviewer on some other topic apart from your work or Harvard experience. Consider how you want to discuss another interest that you have, whether it be art, current events, gaming, etc., should an interviewer ask you about them—especially if you’ve referenced these interests on your resume!

Many interviewers also apply what is colloquially referred to as the “airport test,” especially in fields where people work for long hours in teams. While listening to your responses, the interviewer is mentally asking him or herself, “Is this someone I could be stuck with at an airport for 12 hours?” It’s important to keep in mind that this question is *not* a social question about friendship—this is in a professional context to encapsulate other questions like: “Can you make the most out of a bad situation?” and, “Can you get along with your colleagues for long periods of time under less-than-ideal circumstances?” You may consider applying this test yourself as you evaluate whether this is an organization or field where you want to work.

Answering Negatively Framed Questions

Interviewers will often ask negatively framed questions as part of a behavioral/fit interview. These questions, such as “Tell me about a time when you made a mistake” or “What is an area of weakness for you” can be the most difficult to answer, and it is important to prepare for them. These questions are being asked in order to understand how you handle challenging and tough situations, and to gauge how much insight you have into yourself and areas where you need improvement. Be honest and truthful in your answers, take responsibility for mistakes you have made, and be accountable for areas in which you need improvement. Try to focus on behaviors, not personality traits, and talk about ways in which you are working to improve upon weaknesses. Know that everyone has weaknesses, and everyone has made mistakes. If you are thoughtful and strategic in your answers, you will provide the interviewer a full picture of you as a candidate.

Phone Interviews

The phone interview has traditionally been used to screen a candidate’s communication skills, interest in the position, salary requirements, and other qualifications. This method also helps minimize the cost of bringing in an applicant from a distant location by first determining whether they are a strong candidate.

It is becoming common practice for employers to use the phone (and video) interview more comprehensively beyond a general pre-screen. In light of this, we encourage you to prepare as you would for any interview. Be ready to answer challenging questions and provide feedback on a variety of issues related to the field and the organization.

The main difference between a phone interview and a face-to-face interview is the absence of non-verbal cues. There is a certain amount of energy shared between the interviewer and interviewee that is somewhat lost in a phone interview. Make sure you compensate for this by being prepared, focused, and able to communicate clearly.

A few tips:

- Enunciate slowly, clearly, and with adequate volume.
- Convey, through your voice, enthusiasm, passion, and competence. Avoid “up-talk”—the verbal punctuation of each sentence with a question mark.
- Plan the time and place of your phone interview so that you know you’ll have privacy, a quiet space, and good reception.
- Dress as you would for a real interview. Dressing the part will help you focus on the importance and purpose of the conversation.
- Have plenty of notes in front of you as reminders of questions to ask, background information about the employer, and perhaps even strategies for answering tough questions.
- Use your time wisely to earn a chance to meet the employer in person for a follow-up interview.
- Don’t be afraid of silence. If you’ve given a strong answer and there is no response, the interviewer is most likely taking notes. Don’t ruin a great response by rambling on with more details!

Video Interviews

For similar reasons to those described for phone interviews, employers are using technology to make a long-distance interview seem as close to a face-to-face interview as possible. Zoom, Teams, Webex, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, and other video conferencing technologies have made it possible for employers to interview candidates in a more efficient and cost-effective way. In addition, these technologies have made it easier for employers to interview students when they’re studying abroad or otherwise off campus.

Prepare for a video interview as thoroughly as you would for any interview. However, there are some additional things to keep in mind:

- Become familiar with the technology. Ask what product or service will be used, download it to your computer (if possible), and practice with your friends and family if you can. This will make you more comfortable in the interview, allowing you to focus on the conversation.
- Remember that the interviewer will be able to see you AND your surroundings. Items in the background can reflect on you as a candidate. Find a location with a neutral background or consider using a simple virtual background.
- Maintain eye contact. Many technologies allow you to view yourself simultaneously, and it is tempting to monitor yourself rather than stay focused on the interviewer.
- Consider capturing the names of those who attend your virtual interview, as you may not have an opportunity to receive business cards or follow-up contact info.
- As with an in-person interview, dress appropriately for the position and organization.
- As with a phone interview, make sure that you have privacy, a quiet space, and a good connection.

On-Demand/Recorded Video Interviews

In an on-demand or recorded video interview, employers use cloud-based software to relay written or pre-recorded questions, and the student uses the same software and their webcam to record and submit responses in the allotted time. Some examples of the tools being used include HireVue, InterviewStream, WePow, and Yello. An advantage of this method for both the employer and the

interviewee is that an organization can share the candidate's video across a wider team or different units to find a good fit without needing to schedule multiple interviews. While some students have complained that this process feels impersonal and does not allow for them to ask questions, note that you will most likely have at least one real-time interview before receiving an offer.

Some employers consider the recorded interview to be a way of augmenting the resume or application as opposed to thinking of it as replacing one of the interview rounds. Either way, it is still a critical evaluation tool for the employers who use it, and students should take time to prepare accordingly.

Tips to prepare for recorded interviews include:

- Practice by using a tool like Big Interview (available for free through our website). Record yourself answering interview prompts and use the self-assessment checklists in Big Interview to evaluate your responses.
- Schedule plenty of time. Typically you will need to complete the interview in one sitting and cannot pause and come back to it later. Each interview response will have a time limit (e.g. three minutes), but some employers will allow you multiple attempts at a given question. Make sure you allow enough time to take advantage of this without rushing the end of your interview.
- Pick a time to record your interview when you will be at your best, mentally and physically.
- As with any video interview, make sure you have a quiet, private space with a neutral background. Dress in interview attire, make eye contact, and practice with the specific software in advance whenever possible.
- Accept any help offered by the employer. Many employers will provide tip sheets on their website, and other preparation tools specific to their organization.

Technical and Finance Interviews

Technical interviews are often used in fields such as finance and technology. They seek to assess two things in a candidate:

1. fit for the job and the organization, and
2. technical knowledge.

Assessing “fit” for a position usually involves questions you're familiar with such as “Tell me about yourself,” and “Why are you interested in working for our organization?” It may also include behavioral questions such as “Tell me about a time when you had to work with people who were different from you.”

The technical questions will be specific to the area for which you're interviewing. For example, technology companies, such as Google or Facebook, will likely require those applying for technical roles (e.g. software engineer, data scientist, product manager) to spend time writing code via a whiteboard or an online tool and will evaluate and assess your work. There are many websites that offer coding practice questions such as LeetCode.com, but you may also consider reading *Cracking the Coding Interview* by Gayle Laakmann McDowell.

Finance is another industry that is likely to have more technical interviews. Common questions for investment management positions might include: “Tell me about your dream stock portfolio. What is your investment strategy? If you're given a market or an industry, what would be the steps to evaluate them?” Employers aren't looking for a deep mastery of technical concepts, but rather a

basic understanding of finance concepts related to the area of finance you are interviewing for (e.g. investment banking). Make sure that you keep up to date on the literature, terminology, and news in the field. **It is especially important to review the industry news on the day of the interview.**

Finance interviews may also use case questions as part of their general interview format. Although the use of case questions in finance interviews varies depending on the employer, it's important to be prepared.

Case Interviews

The case question, inherent in many consulting interviews, is one way of determining whether the candidate has an aptitude for handling complex business problems, and can reveal a candidate's ability to think like a consultant and perhaps even level of desire to do the job.

Case questions most often illustrate the nature of the employer's work. Questions are sometimes drawn directly from the employer's experience or can be crafted on the spot from news of the day. Most employers don't expect in-depth business knowledge or high-level business terminology (there are exceptions, usually on the individual interviewer level). What they're looking for is whether the student has the analytical or problem-solving ability and the business sense to know what matters in a specific situation and can clearly explain it.

Most often, the employer verbally presents a business challenge to the candidate and asks how they would approach the problem. Sometimes, most notably in later round interviews, employers will present the candidate with a case study in print and allow the candidate a designated period of time to analyze the data either alone or in a group. If the case question is presented verbally, make sure you understand what's being asked of you. Reiterating the question is an effective way of confirming that you're on the right track to begin with, and it gives you a moment to think about the situation.

Once you're sure you understand what has been presented, don't be afraid to ask questions. A few clarifying questions may well save you from launching into an elaborate analysis that lacks focus and misses the point.

Case interviews step by step:

- **Repeat the question.**
- **Ask a few clarifying questions.**
- **Organize your thoughts.**
- **Share your thoughts on how you are solving the problem with the interviewer.**
- **Suggest solutions.**

In preparing to answer the case question, don't feel that you need to dive headfirst into immediate solutions. **Remember that it's not the solutions they're looking for, it's the analysis.** They want to hear how you're thinking about this problem. Organize your thoughts. Think of a systematic way to look at the evidence that has been presented to you. The guidebooks to answering case questions offer a variety of frameworks and strategies that can be useful tools for organizing your thoughts, but none take the place of common sense. You may not have taken business courses at Harvard, but you most certainly learned how to think analytically and use reasoning.

Begin by talking about how you “might” want to look at the situation. Share your thoughts with the interviewer to illustrate that you’re thinking about the broadest dimensions of the problem before you begin suggesting potential paths that you might follow in pursuit of a solution.

Taking the time to introduce your approach allows the employer to see that you get the “big picture.” In a first-round interview it’s unlikely that you’ll have time to proceed through all of the necessary analysis. Upon demonstrating an understanding of the scope of the problem and developing a strategy, the employer may very likely suggest that you spend the rest of your time on one area of the analysis. For example, “Let’s talk about the customer. How would you carry out that analysis?” The case interview is not something you want to try without careful preparation and practice.

Case Interview Tip: Don’t make things overly complicated. For example, if you need to know population sizes and quick math is needed, round the numbers to make them easily divisible.

For more resources to prepare for case interviews, see:
careerservices.fas.harvard.edu/channels/consulting-business-strategy.

We offer several opportunities to learn more about interviewing and to practice. Refer to the “Events” section of our website for dates and times.

Resources include:

- **Mock interview guides and practice resources**
- **Interview workshops**
- **Employer interview and case workshops**
- **Online interview tutorial**
- **Big Interview online interview practice tool**
- **Firsthand Advisors (connect with Harvard alumni)**

Preparation is the key! Plan to spend time each week preparing for interviews and continue doing so until you get an offer for a job or internship.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General Introduction Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would a friend or professor who knows you well describe you?
- What strengths would you bring to this position?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
- What are your long/short-term goals and objectives? How will this job help you achieve them?
- Why did you choose Harvard? Your concentration?
- What class has had the greatest impact on your thinking?
- If you could change something at Harvard, what would it be and why?

- How do you choose your extracurricular activities? Or, why did you choose those you're currently involved in?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this position/organization/field? In what ways does this fit you?
- What about this organization impresses you in comparison with others in the field?
- What do you believe are the key issues and problems in the field/industry today?
- Why do you want to work here?
- Why should we hire you?

Behavior-Themed Questions

- Describe a situation in which you were required to work with people different from you.
- Describe a time/activity when you were highly motivated to complete a task.
- Tell me about a time when you were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.
- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
- Tell me about a time when you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.
- Tell me about a time when you were creative in solving a problem.
- Describe a time when you were a leader. What is your leadership style?
- Tell me about a time you made a mistake or failed at something.

Questions to Ask Employers

- What is your timeline for the interview process?
- What do you see as the challenges for the person taking this job?
- Do you have new initiatives planned for the next year?
- What role will this position play in addressing these new initiatives?
- Can you tell me how your career has developed at the organization?
- I read on your website that you have a new office in Mumbai. Could you tell me more about what you're working on there?
- Describe your ideal candidate to fill this position.
- What do you enjoy most about working here?
- Can you tell me about your own career path?

Questions the Interviewer Should Not Ask

(You are legally not required to answer these questions so feel free to politely decline to answer by saying "I would prefer not to answer this" or "I'd like to keep the focus to my qualifications for this role.")

- What is your age? What is your date of birth? Were you born in the U.S.? Are you a citizen?
- What is your race, religion, national origin, gender identity, or sexual identity?
- Do you have disabilities of any kind?
- Have you ever been treated by a psychologist or a psychiatrist?
- Are you taking any prescription medications?
- Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?
- Are you married, single, or divorced?
- When do you plan to start a family?
- Do you observe the Sabbath or any days that would interfere with this job schedule?