

INTERVIEW PACKET

What is the Purpose of an Interview?

The purpose of an interview is to persuade an employer that you have the needed qualifications, background, and ability to be a successful employee. The interviewer also wants to ensure that your personality will be an appropriate fit for the organization. While you must be qualified for the position, the interviewer is also measuring your interpersonal skills, communicative ability, personality, and the confidence you exude.

During the interview process, you should be attentively listening and gathering information about the company or organization. You, therefore, can ask appropriate questions and truly see if the position matches your personality, qualifications, and career direction.

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT INTERVIEW TYPES?

Phone Interview: Common for jobs that are out-of-state. These positions attract many applicants and require superior verbal communicative skills and a strong telephone demeanor.

Screening Interview: Narrows down a relatively large number of likely candidates to a smaller list of possibilities. Companies use screening tools to ensure that candidates meet minimum qualifications. The interviewer's primary goal is not to determine whether you are the best candidate for the position. The interviewer is instead seeking to eliminate candidates who do not meet the qualifications.

Directive Style: The interviewer has a clear agenda that he or she follows. Interviewers ask each candidate the same series of questions. This technique allows them to more easily compare results.

Meandering Style: Relies on the candidate to lead the conversation during the interview. The interviewer asks open-ended questions like "tell me about yourself;" the candidate controls the interview.

Stress Interview: Designed to see whether you have the ability to withstand the company culture, the clients, or potential stress. You might face long silences by the interviewer; the interviewer might openly challenge your answers.

Behavioral Interview: A technique that focuses on demonstrated behaviors as the best evidence of future performance. Open-ended questions are asked to see how you acted in previous situations.

The Audition: Tests how you'd perform on the job by having you perform as part of your interview. The interviewer devises a simulation to gain a clearer picture of your likely job performance.

Group Interview: An interview with other candidates, which shows a glimpse of how you interact with peers. The interviewer might call on you to discuss an issue with the other candidates or discuss your qualifications in front of them.

Tag-Team Interview: You are interviewed by a group of individuals from the company. They usually alternate in asking questions. This interviewing method is often attractive for companies that rely on team cooperation.

Mealtime Interview: An interview over a meal. Particularly when the company desires an individual with superior interpersonal skills, the interviewer will conduct a mealtime interview to see how you act in a social setting.

Informational Interview: An interview you initiate. It is an opportunity to learn firsthand about a particular career by speaking with someone who works in the profession.

HOW TO PREPARE BEFORE THE INTERVIEW?

- **Do advance research on the company:** You should be familiar with the employer before the interview. This preparation will allow you to be educated about the position and ask questions when prompted by the interviewer. Employer research can be conducted with the following resources: company websites, The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Fortune, and the Chamber of Commerce. Additional helpful websites include: www.salary.com and www.hoovers.com. Current news about employers is often found in the Business Section of any local newspaper. Company information is also available on www.greaterlouisvilleworks.com
- **Questions to consider when doing research on a company:**
 - What does this company do?
 - How long has it been in the area?
 - Does it have other offices, stores, or locations?
 - How has the company been doing recently?
 - What kind of positions does it have available?
- **Bring extra copies of your resume:** The interviewer might want to give copies of your resume to other hiring personnel. You also might be in an interview with more than one interviewer.
- **On the day of the interview, know where you're going and arrive 10-15 minutes early:** If you're unfamiliar with the area, you should practice the driving route prior to the interview. Be sure to always give yourself additional time! You can never be sure about parking and traffic.
- **Be sure to take a pen and notebook to the interview.**
- **Have reference names and contact information.** Refer to resume packet for information on how to compose a reference sheet.

HOW SHOULD YOU DRESS DURING THE INTERVIEW?

First impressions are critical in an interview. Your appearance is the first observable factor an employer will see. To be successful, do the following:

General Guidelines

Avoid trendy fashions
Hide body art and tattoos
No perfume/cologne
Conservative makeup

Neat hair
No jeans/sweats
Pressed clothing
Minimal jewelry

Women

- Acceptable dress includes: a skirted suit, pantsuit or conservative dress. Skirts should be knee-length or longer. Avoid pants that are too tight. No Capri pants.
- No spaghetti strap or sleeveless shirts. Also avoid shirts that are too tight fitting, have low necklines, or revealing waistlines.
- Always wear plain-style, non-patterned hose to interviews.
- Wear flat shoes or low pumps in colors that avoid making your feet a focal point. Avoid open-toed shoes; they are inappropriate for interviews.

Men

- Conservative dark navy or gray two-piece business suit.
- If you do not own a suit, then you should wear a conservative dress shirt (always collared) and nicely pressed slacks.
- Wear conservative, clean, and polished shoes.
- A short hair cut and no facial hair is expected.

Much of this information was gathered from Washington State University's website. Remember that each industry or career field has different standards of professional dress for the interview. What is appropriate in one career field could possibly be inappropriate in another industry. If in doubt of how to dress appropriately, then ask an individual in that career field, a Career Counselor, or contact the company.

HOW SHOULD YOU ACT DURING THE INTERVIEW?

- Turn off your cell phone before the interview.
- Have a positive attitude and be optimistic.
- Provide a firm handshake and make eye contact when greeting the employer.
- Sit still and upright in your chair.
- When asked a question, be thoughtful about your answer.
- Give specific examples to support your answers.
- Don't get personal in the interview.
- Never bring up salary.
- Thank the interviewer for his/her time and find out when you may get back to the interviewer.
- Ask for the employer's Business Card. You can use this to write your thank-you letter at the conclusion of the interview.

POPULAR QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE INTERVIEW

1. **What can you tell me about yourself?** Don't give the interviewer your life history. Instead, specify how your background relates to the position.
2. **Why should we hire you?** This question is critical. You should emphasize in what ways you will be a value to the organization.
3. **What are your major strengths?** The interviewer is looking for you to emphasize your skills, especially your adaptive skills. Adaptive skills are defined as personality traits such as honesty, dependability, and enthusiasm.
4. **What are your major weaknesses?** This is a hard question for many job seekers to answer. The interviewer wants to know that you are aware of your weak points and in what ways you are working to overcome them. A helpful hint would be to articulate a weakness that is also a strength. For example: *I'm a perfectionist, which is sometimes problematic with my co-workers, but I always want our finished product to be of high quality.*
5. **What are your short/long term goals?** The interviewer wants to see that you have considered plans for your future. Outline your career objectives before the interview!

MORE COMMON QUESTIONS

- How did your education prepare you for this position?
- What is your greatest accomplishment?
- What do you know about this field?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a position?
- What do you know about our company?
- How well do you accept criticism?
- What is the most difficult decision you have ever had to make?
- How do you handle stressful situations?
- Where do you see yourself in three years? Five years?
- What did you like best/least about your last position?

EXAMPLES OF DIFFICULT/INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

- Examples of inappropriate and/or illegal questions:
 - Age ("What year did you graduate from high school?")
 - Disability/Medical History
 - Race
 - Marital Status ("Do you have a spouse?")
 - Religious preferences ("Where do you go to church?")
 - Country of origin ("What country are you from?")

You can ask the interviewer (if the question is inappropriate) "Does this have job relevancy?" or "is your question relevant to the job?" You want to stir the interviewer away from inappropriate questions. A great way to do that is to bring attention to your skills/qualifications.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

1. Give an example of an instance when you had to deal with frequent changes or unexpected events on the job. (or at school)
2. Describe a situation in which you had to draw a conclusion quickly and take speedy action.
3. Tell about a time when your ability to listen helped you communicate better.
4. Give an example of when one of your ideas was well received by others.
5. Tell about a time when you were particularly driven and highly motivated. (school or work)
6. Tell about when you had to deal with a difficult person at work.
7. Describe a time when you had to say something difficult or unpleasant to your employer or professor.

When answering behavioral based questions, use the **S.T.A.R.** method (Situation, Task, Action taken, and Result). For example, if the interviewer asks you, "Tell me about a time when you had to handle an angry customer," your response could be: "When I was working at a department store, a customer was mad about our return policy. I listened to the customer express her frustration, and calmly explained to her why the company has this policy. I then offered her the opportunity to exchange the item. She was still angry because she wanted to return the item. I called my manager for assistance and he was able to make a special consideration for the customer, allowing her to return the item. The customer was happy and my manager was proud of the way I professionally handled the situation."

QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

You should always prepare questions to ask employers. Do not ask questions that are clearly stated on the employer's website or in company literature. This would only show that you have not done previous research on the company. Instead ask strong, probing questions. These will demonstrate that you have studied the company and are sincerely interested in working for them. The following are some sample questions to consider:

- Could you explain your organizational structure?
- Can you describe the work environment at this company?
- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- What skills are especially important for someone in this position?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom?
- What particular computer equipment and software do you use?
- What is the company's policy on providing seminars, workshops, and training so employees can keep up their skills or acquire new ones?
- How would you characterize the organization? What are its principal values? What are its greatest challenges?
- How much guidance or assistance is made available to individuals developing career goals?
- How do you like your employees to communicate with you?

TWO-MINUTE PRESENTATION

What is a two-minute presentation and why is it important?

A two-minute presentation is long enough to keep the attention of the interviewer while also giving just enough information about you. The interviewer can take notes and ask follow-up questions for additional information. This is the time to make your “sales call!” Compare yourself to a new product that has just come onto the market, something you cannot live without or something your potential new employer cannot live without! **As you create your Two-Minute Presentation, review your skills and consider what employers want.**

My career objective is:

My background includes:

The strengths/abilities/skills I have developed are:

I am particularly good at:

I can help an organization with:

I'm especially proud of:

I'm looking for an opportunity:

Sample—TWO-MINUTE PRESENTATION

My Career Objective is:

- **An inside technical sales position that will allow me to use my sales experienced coupled with my mechanical and electrical background.**

My background includes:

- **Twenty-three years experience in outside and inside industrial sales.**
- **Managing inside sales departments including inventory control and warehouse management.**
- **Associate of Science degree in Business Management.**

The skills I have developed in addition to those already mentioned:

- **Problem solving.**
- **Interpersonal for working with people at all levels.**
- **Planning and marketing.**
- **Computer.**

I am particularly good at:

- **Communicating with customers and vendors, building strong relationships that continue to grow business, and targeting new customers or markets to achieve sales goals.**

I can help an organization with:

- **Marketing new products.**
- **Increasing sales and profits.**
- **Solving problems.**
- **Strengthening its customer service.**

I'm especially proud of:

- **My proven track record in reaching sales goals.**
- **A customer-oriented approach to solving problems and building customer relations.**
- **My status as a sales representative with customers and my competitors.**

I'm looking for an opportunity to use the skills I've acquired to:

- **Continue serving customers through an inside sales position, and applying my technical background to solve problem and grow sales.**

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Send a thank-you note immediately after the interview.
- In your thank-you note, refer to specific details about the interview.
- Remind the potential employer of your qualifications.
- Include any key information you forgot to bring to the employer's attention during the interview.
- A thank-you note serves to confirm your interest in the company and also shows appreciation for the interview.
- The thank-you note can either be typed or handwritten. If you know the company is going to make a quick decision about the candidate or if you have poor handwriting, then go ahead and email the letter. Under any other circumstance, handwrite the letter because it is more personal.

EXAMPLE THANK-YOU NOTE AFTER INTERVIEW

Your Name
Address
City, State Zip Code
Phone Number

Today's Date

Name of Person who interviewed you
Their title
Name of company
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. or Ms. (last name of person who interviewed you):

Thank you for discussing the Customer Service/Sales Representative position with me today. I believe this position matches my personality, abilities, and interests and I want to express my continued interest in the job.

In the interview you mentioned that the person in this position must be energetic, outgoing, and a problem solver. I hope that you were able to witness these qualities in me during our meeting, as well as my positive attitude and desire to learn all that I can from your company.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (your phone number) should you need further information from me. I am very excited at the opportunity to join your team.

Sincerely,

Sign your Name here

Your name

WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Informational interviewing is an opportunity for you to learn first hand about a particular career by speaking with someone who works in the profession. By asking questions about work tasks, work environment, educational background, and how the person obtained the position, you can begin to decide if a particular job is or is not the right career choice for you.

Who should I speak with?

Consider everyone you know as a potential resource for an informational interview. Ask your parents, friends, siblings, and family members. Eventually you will find someone working in the occupation you want to research.

How do I arrange for an informational interview?

Call, write or email the person requesting an informational interview. In your communication, indicate how you got their name, the reason why you want to meet, and request to make an appointment. Be clear that you are not looking for a job but rather you would like to find out more about their job and background.

What questions do I ask?

- What is your typical workday like?
- What do you like the most and the least about your job?
- What skills or abilities do you need to have to do well in this position?
- What advice would you give to someone interested in this position?
- What is the path of career advancement in this field?
- What is the work environment like regarding work hours, vacation, and office attire?
- What is your educational background?
- Why did you decide to pursue a position in this field?
- What courses would you recommend I take?
- Do you know of others I may speak with?
- Are there books or articles that you recommend I read?

SAMPLE ONE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LETTER

9910 Thompson Drive
Cleveland, Ohio 43382
June 21, 2005

Mr. Ronald T. Smith
Cell Technology
363 Palm Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15232

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday. Your advice was most helpful in clarifying my questions on careers in pharmaceutical industry.

I have taken your advice and have made appointments to talk with three of the people you suggested. I am sure their advice will also be helpful to me. Please keep me in mind if you know of someone in the near future who is looking for an individual with my background.

Again, thanks so much for your help. I will keep in touch with you and let you know what opportunities I take during the rest of this year.

NEXT STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

- Schedule a Mock Interview with a CREW Counselor. The interview lasts an hour and will greatly assist in strengthening your interviewing skills. If you are interested, then let a CREW Counselor know so your interview can be scheduled.
- Remember that your interviewing skills will only improve through practice!
- Let a CREW Counselor know if you have any further interviewing questions.