Interviewing Skills

From the Office of Career/Transfer Services
Table of Contents

What is the purpose of an interview?...............................................3
Stages of an interview..................................................................3
Seven factors of the interview.........................................................4
Preparing for an interview...............................................................5
Interviewing quick tips..................................................................6
Things to avoid................................................................................6
Interview reminders........................................................................7
What are employers looking for?.....................................................7
Who gets the second interview?.......................................................8
Sample interview questions..............................................................8
Questions for the employer...............................................................9
Pre-employment inquiry guide.........................................................9
What is the purpose of an Interview?

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

- To supply information about yourself that is not contained in your resume.
- To describe, explain, and expand on skills and experiences contained in your resume and why you believe you are the best person for the job.
- To enable the employer to evaluate your personality and attitudes in terms of the demands of the organization and the possible position.
- To enable you to gain information about the organization and the job.
- To give you and the employer an opportunity to discuss the desirability of further contact or an offer of employment.

Stages of an Interview

Though each interview is unique, many seem to follow these basic stages:

- **THE ICE BREAKER**
  Introductions, handshake, small talk, and establishing rapport are basics. Research indicates that interviewers make tentative evaluations of candidates in the first two to four minutes. The first 5 minutes matter!

- **EXCHANGE OF BASIC INFORMATION**
  In this stage you talk about training, education, experience, career goals, strengths, weaknesses, and personal traits. Your preparation will show in this stage. Concise, concrete, well-rehearsed answers are a must!

- **ASKING ABOUT THE EMPLOYER**
  The employer will give you a chance to ask questions. Questions should show your basic knowledge of the employer and the career field and should allow you to discover more about what the employer has to offer. Don’t ask about salary or benefits at this time. Definitely have questions in mind before you arrive and it is appropriate to have them written down in a portfolio for your reference.

- **SAYING GOODBYE AND EXPRESSING ENTHUSIASM**
  You will know when the interview is over. Be sure to get all the information you need, including any instructions concerning future action expected of you and when you might hear from the employer again. If it is genuine, you should express eagerness to work for the employer or to participate in further interviewing. Plan a graceful exit.

- **FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW**
  You are expected to write a follow-up thank you letter soon after the interview—not an email. In it, you can make points you have thought of since the interview, finish unfinished business, thank the interviewer for his/her time and consideration, and express eagerness to interview further.
Seven Factors of the Interview

1. PERSONAL IMPRESSION
   This factor comes into play immediately. Knowing how to dress is important. Know what is suitable for the work environment and dress about 10% better than the norm. Take note of your non-verbal communication and body language, making sure that what you say corresponds with your non-verbal cues.

2. COMPETENCE
   The interviewer wants to learn whether you can do the job. Even though you’ve submitted a resume, assume that the interviewer wants to know more. Tell the interviewer what he/she wants to know. If past experience does not directly relate to the job you are applying for, try to make valid connections. Draw on past experiences and relate them to responsibilities of the new occupation.

3. LIKEABILITY
   This factor is a powerful yet always unspoken factor in hiring decisions. Most people will hire individuals they like. People who are positive get along with colleagues, receive better cooperation from other workers, and usually have greater potential for advancement.

4. MOTIVATION/ENTHUSIASM/COMMITMENT
   This factor indicates to the interviewer how enthusiastic and motivated you are about the position you are applying for. You reveal this factor by your responses to the interviewer’s questions throughout the interview and by your body language.

5. LEADERSHIP
   All employers are looking for leaders for their company. This does not necessarily mean that they want someone who has an established leadership role, but rather someone who can take charge when called upon. It is important that past leadership roles be conveyed to the interviewer.

6. COMMUNICATION SKILLS
   How you communicate verbally and non-verbally is important to every employer regardless of the type of work you will be performing. Your resume and cover letter will indicate your written communication ability. Every time you speak you are demonstrating your verbal communication skills. Speak concisely, don’t mispronounce words, and take care not to speak too softly or too loudly.

7. OUTSIDE INTERESTS
   Only if you are asked, it is good to mention some of the personal interests or hobbies that you have, especially any that may relate to the job you are seeking in some way. This can indicate that you are a balanced individual, and balanced individuals make good employees.
Preparing for an Interview

- Select appropriate attire for the interview the day before. Be sure they are freshly laundered and ironed. Woman be sure to wear modest skirts (preferred) blue as a chosen color, hair pulled back from face, jewelry min. Men suits with tie, appropriate dress shirt and tie minimum, blue good color, facial hair neatly trimmed, jewelry to a min. Fresh breath is a must.

- Set all necessary papers such as extra copies of your resume (on quality paper), references, application forms, pens and pencils out the night before so you don’t have to search around for them prior to leaving for the interview.

- Know where your interview is and how much time is needed to get to the interview so you are not late. You should arrive 10 minutes before the interview is scheduled.

- Know yourself (your strengths, weaknesses, why you are the best candidate for the job). Learn to talk about your skills with ease and confidence. Practice in front of a mirror.

- Know the company you are interviewing at. Do your homework. You can usually obtain information from the library, Internet, or publications and brochures. The more you know about the company the easier it will be. It will help you draft questions for the employer and it will help you relate your skills and abilities to the new position.

- Think of any questions you may have regarding the job or organization and write them down if necessary.
Interviewing Quick Tips

- Try to introduce yourself first
- Have a strong handshake
- Maintain excellent eye contact
- Be conscience of your body language
- Sit up straight and lean slightly forward
- Use the interviewers name
- Take a few seconds to think before answering a question
- Get excited about yourself
- Do not use “emmm” or “uhh” or other similar fillers
- Avoid words “believe”, or “feel”, or “think” when describing yourself
- Refrain from using slang
- Be sure to have 3-5 questions prepared to ask the employer
- Say thank-you at the end of the interview. Smile and shake hands.
- Be friendly and polite to everyone you come in contact with. They may end up being your coworkers

Things to Avoid

- **DON’T be late, there is no excuse**
- Never place any articles on the interviewer’s desk
- Mumbling
- Slouching
- Giving a ‘wet fish’ handshake
- Crossing your arms or putting your hands in front of your face
- Playing with your tie, rings, bracelets, etc.
- Making jokes or arguing with interviewer(s)
- Gossiping about or “knocking” former supervisors’ or fellow workers
- Answering questions in generalities
- Answering a question before it is completely asked
- Making excuses or being on the defensive
- Saying ANYTHING that isn’t true
- Being negative about yourself or your background
- Pleading your need for work
- Forgetting to thank the interviewer for his/her time and courtesy
- Forgetting to ask the employer’s decision date on hiring
Interview Reminders

- Remember the interviewer’s name and use it during the interview
- Do not chew gum during the interview
- It’s OK to be nervous, interviewer’s expect it, just take a breath and be confident
- Remove your coat before entering the interview room
- Sell yourself…if you don’t know why you should get the job, how do they?
- Be alert
- Show enthusiasm, sincerity and interest
- Be confident about your abilities and values
- Honesty is vital
- Have a positive attitude
- Be cooperative
- Show patience
- SMILE!!!!

What are employers looking for?

- Personality – Talk about how your personality fits the demands of the job and the company.
- Organization – Demonstrate your ability to be organized. Talk about one thing at a time, and answer questions with detailed examples.
- Motivation and attitude – Talk about what motives you to do better than average work, and give examples of when you’ve gone above and beyond “the call of duty” to get the job done well.
- Expressiveness – Show your enthusiasm when you talk about your value and skills.
- Achievements – Back up your success stories with detailed proof. This way you’re not bragging, just stating facts.
- Leadership – Tell about instances when you’ve had to take on more than just an employee’s role.
- Skills – You must be able to identify your 60 most marketable skills, or you are not job search ready.
- Education – Can you tell the employer how your education has helped prepare you for this job?
- Test results – More and more companies are using ability testing, personality profiles, and drug tests to predict employment success. Can you pass the necessary academic and job skills test?
- Company knowledge – Explain what you’ve learned about the company and how you found out about it.
- Decision making – Give examples of when you faced tough problems and had to make difficult choices to get the job done.
- Company loyalty – You want to be in a relationship that lasts and interviewers want people who want to stay with a company. How will you convince them of this?
- Promotability – The future is important. Describe yourself as a “go-getter”, and discuss your plans for taking your next big career step.
- Altruism – Mention your volunteer activities. If you work for nothing to help other people, you will probably be a more “giving” employee.
Who gets the second interview?

People who exhibit these traits and talk about these issues:

- Appearance
- Friendliness
- Poise, stability
- Experience
- Personality
- Organization
- Motivation
- Expressiveness
- Learning ability
- Leadership
- Skill match
- Education match

- Career knowledge
- Test results
- Company knowledge
- Achievements
- Decision making
- Company loyalty
- Work attitude
- Promotability
- Problem solving
- Retention factors
- Volunteering

Sample Interview Questions

- Why do you want to work for this company?
- So tell us a little about yourself.
- Give 5 adjectives that you believe your previous boss would use to describe you.
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What is your definition of leadership? Give two examples of when you demonstrated leadership.
- What makes an effective communicator? Give an example of when you used exceptional communication skills.
- What did you like most about your last job and what did you like least about your last job?
- What makes you the best candidate for this job?
- Tell us about a failure you had and what did you learn from it?
- What type of supervisor do you prefer to work with?
- How would you handle a conflict with a co-worker or customer?
- What motivates you professionally?
- How many phone books are in New York City? (Logical thinking question to see how fast you can think when thrown off guard)
- What three words would your current co-workers use to describe you?
- Describe the qualities your ideal supervisor would possess.
- What is your greatest strength?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- Do you work well under pressure?
- Are you able to multi-task?
Questions for the Employer

- Having no questions doesn’t say much about your interest and alertness. Having irrelevant questions says even less.
- The questions you ask should show that you’ve listened attentively to the employer’s needs, concerns, and questions. Good questions to ask the interviewer should focus on any of the following:
  - Job specifications – better define the position’s duties and responsibilities
  - Job satisfaction – be sure the position will motivate you to do good work
  - Work conditions – understand, exactly what you’re in for – overtime, stress, people
  - Advancement – make sure you know what’s expected for upward mobility

Sample questions

- Does your company promote from within?
- As an employee, how would I best prepare myself for future growth within the company?
- Who will be my supervisor and how long has he/she been with the company?
- What characteristics do you feel are most important for a person in this position?
- Is this a new position?
- How would I be trained or introduced to the job?
- What are the department’s goals for the year?
- How would I get feedback on my job performance?
- Could I have a brief tour?
- Could you describe in more detail the responsibilities of this job?
- When can I expect to hear about your hiring decision?