The Interview

The interview is the last step of the hiring process - and the most important. It offers both you and the employer the opportunity to meet one another, exchange information and come to tentative conclusions about one another.

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 the short amount of time that you will spend with a potential employer, you will either be screened in or screened out, so you must project yourself in a positive, enthusiastic manner.

The interview gives the employer the opportunity to meet you in person and to evaluate the "total" you. This includes your attitude, appearance, personality, confidence, knowledge about yourself, and knowledge about the company, as well as basic ability to do the job.

The interview stage is regarded as the most important step in the job search process. A decision to hire an applicant will not be made until the interview has occurred. Ultimately, the decision to hire someone oftentimes is based on the interview results.

Interview Preparation

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. As you're becoming prepared, learn what's expected before, during, and after the interview.

Before the Interview

Research the Employer
Thoroughly research the organization to impress those with whom you meet and to allow more time for you to tell your story and discuss specifics of the position. Some of the information you will want to know includes:

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

You can find this information in the following places:
• Employer brochures
• Local newspapers
• Library materials
• Internet
• On file in the Office of Career Services
• Contacting the organization directly for information (only if you can't find anything elsewhere)

Know Yourself

• Analyze your strengths and weaknesses and know exactly what you want to say and do not want to say during the interview.
• Evaluate problem areas in your record and be prepared to offer a strong case for these during the interview, if necessary. Do not volunteer negative information about yourself or a former employment situation.
• Write out answers to possible questions from the interviewer, as a practice activity. Do a mock interview with a staff member in the Career Services office, a friend or relative, etc.

Prepare Yourself

• Know the name, role and level of responsibility of each individual with whom you are to meet.
• Know exactly how to get to the organization and be prepared to arrive early and stay late.
• Dress to project an image of confidence and success; your total appearance should be appropriate to the job.
• Dress conservatively:

  **Gentlemen:** A dark, preferably single breasted, suit (navy blue or charcoal grey in solids or subtle striped patterns) is recommended. A crisp, white shirt is also best with a no-shine silk tie. The tie should have a small print pattern and meet the belt buckle. The shoes should be laced, in black or cordovan, and be shined. The belt should match. The socks should be dark solid or a small pattern. Wear a minimal amount of jewelry and cologne.

  **Ladies:** A well-tailored suit with the skirt length approximately at the knees is recommended. Mini skirts are not acceptable. A conservative dress is acceptable. The suit jacket may be single or double breasted in navy blue, charcoal grey, or black. The blouse should be cotton, silk, or rich looking artificial fibers in white or light blue. Always wear a classic low to medium leather heel. Neutral hosiery should be worn. Use a conservative amount of jewelry, perfume, and makeup.
Prepare to bring additional materials to the interview such as copies of your resume, a list of references, samples of your work, or transcripts. Be prepared to verify and explain everything that your resume contains.

**During the Interview**

Before the interview you should have considered **what** you want to communicate and **how** you are going to communicate. What you will want to communicate are: personal qualities, functional skills, and special areas of knowledge that relate to the particular interviewer or organization. How you communicate those personal attributes and background facts is indicated by your attitude, non-verbal behaviors and verbal responses.

Your first task will be to **build rapport** with the interviewer(s). The characteristics of building rapport involve your attitude and your verbal and non-verbal behavior.

1. **First contact:** When meeting your interviewer, establish direct eye contact, address him or her (formal name only), introduce yourself and give a firm handshake (not *too* hard!). Smile! Don't chew gum, have candy, or look at your watch at any time.
2. **Keep the following in mind:**
   
   a. **Be aware of your grammar.**
      
      - Avoid fillers (ya know, like, okay, etc.)
      - Avoid tentative (I guess, I feel, etc.)
      - Avoid ambiguous/negative terms (pretty good, fairly well, etc.)
   
   b. **Be aware of your body language, how you communicate non-verbally.** Try to appear relaxed and self-assured. You will want to convey sincerity, a dedication to achievement, confidence and a high energy level. These attributes are communicated through your attitude and actions as well as through your verbal responses.
   
   c. **When you communicate verbally be sure to:**
      
      - use active verbs.
      - use concrete examples.
      - be concise and complete.
      - summarize and make transitions.
      - be positive and "own" what you have done and what you know.
   
   d. **Your knowledge of what contributes to a "strong answer" also contributes to effectiveness.** A strong answer does not create more questions than it answers. The components of a strong answer include:
      
      - backing up a statement with a *specific example*.
      - sharing your role (the challenge and accomplishments).
- sharing the outcome or solution.
- summarizing to emphasize your strengths.

e. Always arrive 15-20 minutes before the interview.

f. Look professional: carry a portfolio, take extra copies of your resume and have appropriate interviewing attire (see above).

g. Exude confidence and be convincing.

h. Maintain good eye contact. Show your interest and your professionalism. Nod your head and smile at appropriate times.

i. Be positive during the interview, because it's not the time to be negative about past employers, co-workers, or professors.

j. Listen and be sure to answer every question completely. If you do not understand the question asked, ask for clarification.

k. Do not monopolize the conversation; be specific with your answers and relay only experiences that relate to the job for which you are applying.

l. Project enthusiasm by selling yourself, your qualifications, experience, skills and your personality.

m. Always have a list of prepared questions that are relevant. Do not ask about salary or benefits unless they initiate the discussion or until it strongly appears that they will offer you the position.

n. Seize an opportunity to express your interest in the job towards the end of the interview.

o. Never make false statements; always be honest and sincere.

p. Remember to thank the interviewer for inviting you for the interview.

Closing the Interview

Prior to leaving the interview, be sure to reiterate your interest in the company and the employment opportunity. Thank the interviewer for his or her time. If no indication of your standing is offered, you may ask when a hiring decision will be made.

After the Interview

Use the interview as a learning experience. Evaluate your performance and make a note of important information you gained.

Follow Up

Always send a follow-up letter. This should include an expression of thanks and should reiterate your interest in this employment opportunity. It is fine to check back with the employer if you have not received word within the allotted time. When you do contact the employer's office, be polite, pleasant and straightforward.
If you do not get the job, you may want to ask the interviewer for some constructive criticism or recommendations for future interviews. If you are consistently passed over for positions, try to identify potential problems, then seek guidance for improvement.

Types of Interviews

As a job applicant, you will encounter a variety of interviewing styles and mannerisms. The interviewer may be just as nervous as you are. A very high percent of all interviewers have never had formal interview training. You may be asked inappropriate questions that may have nothing to do with job performance; or you may be asked illegal questions that indicate discrimination. The interviewer should not ask questions about age, race, religion, nationality, or disabilities unless the answers are job-related.

Learn to recognize the different types of interviews. Some of the most common interviews are screening, one-on-one, serial, stress, panel, and behavioral interview.

Screening Interview

- This is a very formal interview that will occur during stage one of the interview process. The interviewer is usually a human resources representative who is very well trained. The type of interview questions asked will be designed to gather specific information and will be asked of every applicant interviewing for that position in order to narrow down the applicant pool.

One-on-One Interview

- This is the most common type of interview. The interviewer is usually a hiring supervisor and may not be very well trained as an interviewer.

Serial Interview

- This is a variation of the one-on-one interview that involves a series of sequential interviews with several interviewers, mostly hiring managers. It usually occurs in the selection at the employer's location. Usually, the interviewers have hiring authority, and chances are if you are hired, one of these will be your boss. You should treat each interviewer and person you meet as if he/she were a key player in the decision-making process, even the boss's secretary. Make a negative impression on anyone, and it will probably be reported in the evaluation phase. You will be faced with getting similar questions from different interviewers throughout the half day or even full day at the employer's location. You must be consistent with your responses. Chances are they will compare notes and evaluations before a hiring decision is made.

Stress Interview
• Be aware of stress and expect it during the interview. The technique is supposed to test a candidate's ability to react articulately and gracefully under pressure. Always maintain your composure during a stress interview situation. The interviewer's goal is to make you feel uncomfortable.

Panel

• This is another form of the stress interview. You are interviewed by several interviewers who are familiar with various aspects of the job and the organization. It is very important to relax and maintain good eye contact. Be sure to pace yourself, since questions may come to you in a very rapid manner. Companies use panels because they're convenient and helpful in building rapport. People who do well verbally and enjoy performing do best in the panel interview.

Behavioral Interview

• This is a structured pattern of questions designed to probe the applicant's past behavior in situations similar to those the job will entail. This type of interview is based on the premise that the best predictor of future behavior or performance is past behavior or performance in similar circumstances. You can't bluff your way through a behavioral interview, because the open-ended questions are designed to determine whether you possess necessary qualities to do the job.

How to Answer Inevitable, Tough Questions

Tell me about yourself. Be careful! After qualifying whether the interviewer wants to know about our professional or personal life, use this opportunity to stress your positive character attributes - especially ones that tie in strongly with what the company is looking for in an employee.

What is your greatest weakness? You can get through this one in several ways. You can mention a weakness that is not really a weakness in the eyes of your prospective employer. ("I often put in overtime when necessary. This leaves less time for my family and friends, so I make my time with them quality time.") Or you can tell of a past weakness you've since overcome. ("When I first started working, I had a difficult time juggling work demands and setting priorities, but now I am much better organized.")

Why should I hire you? Base your answer on the experiences and skills you have that meet any needs already mentioned by the interviewer. Add any additional skills you think are especially pertinent for this position.

How do you handle rejection? Point out that you realize rejection is not rejection of you, but of what you are selling or proposing, and you thus use this information to strengthen your next attempt.
Do you consider yourself a leader or a follower? Both! No one wants to hire you if you lack aspirations to move up, but no one wants you to lack the ability to follow directions either. The main asset here is in knowing when to do which.

What do you think of your current or previous boss? Never discuss any dislikes or differences you may have had with your supervisor. Instead, simply point out his or her positive attributes.

Why do you want to leave your current job (or why did you leave your previous one)? Whether it was because of a bad location, lack of challenge, or little or no opportunity for advancement, mention it and reiterate that working for this new employer would be a positive career step for you.

Tell me about a time you put your foot in your mouth. Always discuss an instance outside work and one that had no great negative consequences.

What was the last book you read? You don't necessarily have to mention the last one you read, but do mention one that has a tie-in with your positive qualities (i.e. How to Be a Better Manager).

What is your current salary? You need not be exact here. You may also want to include the worth of benefits you receive in the dollar amount you reveal. For example, if your employer pays your insurance premiums, add that annual amount to your base amount.

Why are you interested in this position? This may really mean: Do you have a realistic idea of what's involved in this job? This is where your research comes in. Answer in terms of wanting the type of work for the type of employer that this position offers you. Be specific.

Which of your accomplishments has given you the greatest satisfaction? This may really mean: Are you good at any of the things that are important for this job? Tie any solid accomplishments or experiences into the employers' perceived needs.

What are your outside interests? Use caution here. It is advised never to mention religious or political activities. However, if an employer would not hire you on that basis, would you want to work there? This is an individual decision.

How would you define your long-range career goals? This may really mean: If we hire you, are you likely to stay awhile and is this job really the kind of work you're interested in? Your best bet is to mention a more advanced position, either within that organization or in the same field.

**Appropriate Pre-employment Inquiries**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Unacceptable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Have you worked for this company under a different name?&quot;</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Former name of applicant whose name has been changed in court or otherwise.</td>
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<td>Question</td>
<td>Data Category</td>
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<td>&quot;Have you ever been convicted of a crime under another name?&quot;</td>
<td>Address or duration of residence</td>
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<td>Applicant's place of residence</td>
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<td>How long applicant has been resident of this state or city</td>
<td>Birthplace</td>
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<td>Birthplace of applicant</td>
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<td>Birthplace of applicant's parents, spouse or other relatives</td>
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<td>Requirements that applicant submit a birth certificate, naturalization or baptism record</td>
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<td>&quot;Can you, after employment, submit a work permit if under eighteen?&quot;</td>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>&quot;Are you over eighteen years of age?&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;If hired, can you furnish proof of age?&quot; /or/ statement that hire is subject to verification that applicant's age meets legal requirements</td>
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<td>Religious</td>
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<td>Applicant's religious denomination or affiliation, church, parish, pastor or religious holidays observed</td>
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<td>&quot;Do you attend religious services /or/ a house of worship?&quot;</td>
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<td>Statement by employer of regular days, hours or shift to be worked</td>
<td>Work days and shifts</td>
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<td>Inquiries about work availability used to screen out applicants because of obligations to the military reserves or National Guard, or religious affiliation</td>
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<td>Race or color</td>
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<td>Complexion, color of skin, or other questions directly or indirectly indicating race or color</td>
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<td>Statement that photograph may be affixed</td>
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<td>Requirement that applicant affix</td>
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<td>Required after employment</td>
<td>photograph to his application</td>
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<td>Request applicant, at his option, to submit photograph</td>
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<td>Requirement of photograph after interview but before hiring</td>
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<td>Statement by employer that if hired, applicant may be required to submit proof of authorization to work in the U.S.</td>
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<td>Citizenship</td>
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<td>Whether applicant or his parents or spouse are naturalized or native-born United States citizens</td>
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<td>Date when applicant or parents or spouse acquired U.S. citizenship</td>
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<td>Requirement that applicant produce his naturalization papers or first papers</td>
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<td>Whether applicant's parents or spouse are citizens of the U.S.</td>
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<td>Applicant's nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent</td>
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<td>Date of arrival in United States or port of entry; how long a resident</td>
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<td>Nationality of applicant's parents or spouse: maiden name of applicant's wife's mother</td>
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<td>Language commonly used by applicant: &quot;What is your mother tongue?&quot;</td>
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<td>How applicant acquired ability to read, write or speak a foreign language</td>
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<td>Applicant's academic, vocational, or professional education; schools attended</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Date last attended high school</td>
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<td>Applicant's work experience</td>
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<td>Experience</td>
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<td>Applicant’s military experience (general)</td>
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<td>Applicant's military experience in armed forces of United States, in a state militia</td>
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<td>Type of military discharge</td>
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(U.S.) or in a particular branch of U.S. armed forces

"Have you ever been convicted of any crime?" If so, when, where, and disposition of case.

Names of applicant's relatives already employed by this company

"Have you ever been arrested?"

Character

Relatives Marital status or number of dependents

Name and address of parent or guardian if applicant is a minor Name or address of relative, spouse or children of adult applicant

"With whom do you reside?"

"Do you live with your parents?"

 Relatives Marital status or number of dependents

Name and address of person to be notified in case of accident or emergency Name and address of relative to be notified in case of accident or emergency

Notice in case of emergency Name and address of relative to be notified in case of accident or emergency

Organizations List of all organizations, clubs, societies, and lodges to which you belong

Organizations

"By whom were you referred for a position here?"

"Can you perform all of the duties outlined in the job description?"

References Requirement of submission of a religious reference

 By whom were you referred for a position here?"

"Do you have any physical disabilities?"

Physical Condition "Can you perform all of the duties outlined in the job description?"

Questions on general medical condition inquiries as to receipt of Workman's Compensation

Miscellaneous Any inquiry that is not job-related or necessary for determining an applicant's eligibility for employment.

Interview process: questions

Next, the interviewer will guide you to the purpose of the meeting and will then begin inquiries about your qualifications. In most instances the interviewer will ask questions relating to the applicant's resume. You can expect other commonly asked questions about your education,
career goals or plans, experience and questions specific to the company/job for which you have applied.

**Interview Questions**

**Questions about academic and extra curricular considerations:**

- Describe your educational background.
- What additional courses or workshops have you attended since graduation?
- Why did you select your college or university?
- What led you to choose your field of academic study?
- Which college subjects did you enjoy the most? Why?
- Which college subjects did you enjoy the least? Why?
- How would you have planned your academic study differently? Why?
- Do you have plans for continued academic study? When?
- Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic ability?
- What have you learned from your participation in extracurricular activities?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- Do you believe that you have received a well-balanced college education? Please explain.
- Describe how your college experiences have prepared you for your chosen career.
- Did you ever change your academic major while attending college? Please explain.
- Which of your college years was the most difficult?
- What has been the greatest setback in your college career?
- Do you believe you have done the best scholastic work of which you are capable?

**Questions about your work experience:**

- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- In what part-time or summer jobs have you been the most interested? Why?
- What features of your previous jobs have you disliked?
- In what ways do you think you can make a valuable contribution to our company?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- If you could have any job in our organization, what would it be?
- What interests you about our products and/or services?
- In what work environment are you most comfortable?
- How would you describe your ideal job after graduation?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a work setting?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Do you have any geographical preference(s) for work?
- If you were offered employment with our company, would you be willing to relocate?
- Are you willing to travel as part of your job?
• Are you willing to spend at least six months in a training program?
• What do you expect to be earning in 5 years?
• What criteria should determine a person's progress in a company?
• Describe your work habits.
• Describe the type of relationship that should exist between a supervisor and his/her employees.
• Which is more important to you - the salary you are earning or the type of work you are doing? Why?
• What have you done in the past which demonstrates your initiative and willingness to work?
• What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
• What were your major achievements in your past job(s)?
• What did you do well in your last job(s)? What were your accomplishments?
• What did you like most in your last job(s)?
• What is your typical workday like?
• Why do you want to leave your current job?
• What did you like most about your last manager?

Questions about your career goals:

• Why do you feel that you're qualified for this position?
• Why do you want to change jobs?
• Why should I hire you?
• What would your ideal job involve?
• What is important to you concerning a job?
• What do you want to be doing five years from now?
• What other kinds/types of jobs are you considering?
• What attracted you to this job?
• How will you contribute to our area?
• If I asked your current manager about your work, what would I be told?
• What are your short-range goals (in the next 5 years)?
• What are your long-range goals (in the next 10 or more years)?
• How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
• Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
• How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
• What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

Questions about your personality:

• Tell me about you.
• What are your major weaknesses? Strengths?
• What causes you to lose your temper?
• What do you do to relax?
• What types of books do you enjoy?
• How well do you work under pressure? In meeting deadlines?
• Are you a team-player? Give me an example.
• What types of people do you enjoy working with?
• If you could change your life, what would you do differently?
• How would you describe yourself?
• What are your hobbies?
• How do you spend your spare time?
• What have you learned from your mistakes?

Possible questions to ask employer:

• Please describe the duties of the job for me.
• What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
• Are salary adjustments geared to the cost of living or job performance?
• Does your company encourage further education?
• How often are performance reviews given? Who gives them?
• What products (or services) are in the development stage now?
• Do you have plans for expansion?
• What are your growth projections for next year?
• Have you cut your staff in the last three years?
• How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
• Do you offer flextime?
• Is your company environmentally conscious? In what ways?
• In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?
• Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
• What is the largest single problem facing your staff (department) now?
• Is it possible for me to speak to a recent graduate who has held this position?
• What is the usual promotional time frame?
• Does your company offer either single or dual career-track programs?
• What do you like best about your job/company?
• Once the probation period is completed, how much authority will I have over decisions?
• Has there been much turnover in this job area?
• Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?
• What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
• What skills are especially important for someone in this position?
• What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?
• Is there a lot of team/project work?
• Will I have the opportunity to work on special projects?
• Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?
• How much travel, if any, is involved in this position?
• What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?
• How much opportunity is there to see the end result of my efforts?
• Can you briefly describe your training program?
• How much opportunity will I have for decision making in my first assignment?
• Why did you decide to work for XYZ company?