Interviewing Tips

Compiled by Career and Counseling Services, University of Houston - Clear Lake

An interview is a key step in the job search process. It provides an opportunity for the employer to determine the candidate’s qualifications and for the candidate to assess the organization’s environment and culture. Ultimately both parties are looking for a good fit. Successful hiring only occurs when both parties are making informed decisions.

PREPARATION

Research the Company: Become familiar with the company/employer with whom you are seeking employment. Be familiar with the organization’s products, structure, services, financial status, competitors, reputation, and any recent major changes. The following sources are available to assist in your research.

- Public & University Libraries (ask for assistance from reference librarians)
- Literature from the Company’s Public Relations Department (marketing materials, annual reports, financial reports, etc.)
- Electronic Sources of Information (Internet)
- University Career Centers (companies interviewing on campus)
- Individuals in the Field

Ask about the Interview Process: When the interview is scheduled ask about the interview process to discover what kind of interview to expect, the timeframe for the interview, how many individuals will be involved in the interview, will the interview be with individuals or groups, and if the interview process will include multiple interviews (phone interview, site interview, group interview, and/or second, third interviews). For site interviews know exactly where you are going and who you will be meeting with when you arrive. Always get the name and phone number of the contact person.

Know What You Have to Offer: Be able to express the marketable skills that you have to offer the organization. Be prepared to provide illustrations of how you developed and used these skills. Employers often ask questions regarding past performance and experiences. Be prepared to discuss!

Know Frequently Asked Questions: Be prepared for standard interview questions by thinking through your experiences and practicing your responses. Be prepared for illegal questions and have tactful responses ready.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your abilities?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- What are your strongest skills or strengths?
- How would you characterize your weaknesses?
- Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?
- What did you like/dislike about your previous jobs?
- What work experience has been the most valuable and why?
- How would your previous boss describe you?
- What do you know about our company?
- Why should I hire you?
- How has your educational and work experience prepared you for this position?
- How do you work under pressure?
- What do you expect from this job?
- What have I forgotten to ask?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Practice: If inexperienced in interviewing, practice with a career counselor or other experienced interviewer.

Have Questions You Want To Ask: Prepare questions you wish to ask during the interview. Use these questions to demonstrate your research of the employer, your interest in working for the company, and to determine how well you would fit in the organization.

References: Identify your references in advance and verify the individuals selected are knowledgeable about your job-related skills and will provide a positive reference. Give each reference a copy of your resume and let them know the positions for which you have applied.

OVER
APPEARANCE
It only takes 20 seconds to formulate an opinion, so professional appearance matters. Dress conservatively and be well groomed. **Remember: You never get a second chance to make a positive first impression.**

Males
- A dark colored (navy, gray, olive green) two piece suit is recommended.
- Wearing a nicely pressed dress shirt is recommended. A white T-shirt should be worn under the dress shirt.
- Ties of medium width are considered classic and should be tied to hang at the tip of your belt buckle; it is recommended to avoid wearing a clip-on tie.
- Socks should match the shoes or slacks whichever is darker.
- Do not forget to polish your shoes, it says a lot about you and your attention to details.

Females
- Women should wear a suit with pants or a skirt that is neatly tailored. Conservative colors such as navy, black, olive green, and camel are suggested.
- Dresses are also appropriate, as long as they are not too frilly, too short, or too tight. The tailored look is most appropriate.
- The length of the dress or suit skirt should be either just above the knee or at mid-calf level; mini-skirts are never appropriate for an interview.
- Solid colored blouses and skin colored hosiery are recommend.
- The classic two inch pump generally works best for presenting a professional image. Shoes should be polished with the heels and soles in good repair.

Grooming for Males and Females
- Hair should be trimmed or pulled away from the face. It is suggested that you do not get a trim or experiment with a new look the day before your interview.
- Jewelry should not be distracting. Avoid wearing multiple rings and earrings that are dangling. One ring on each hand may be suitable. Men who wish to present a conservative image should not wear earrings.
- Be sparing with fragrances. Some people are very sensitive to colognes and perfumes.
- Don’t forget to give your hands a good washing and your nails a trim. Women should avoid bright, vibrant nail polish that could draw attention to your hands and away from you.

THE INTERVIEW
Arrival: Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early. Allow enough time to take care of last minute details such as adjusting your tie, combing your hair, etc.

Bring: Bring extra resumes, list of references, and portfolio (notepad and pen). Take notes after not during the interview.

Names: Be sure you know how to pronounce the interviewer’s name correctly, and get the names of all people you meet throughout the interview. Asking for business cards is a good method of collecting names.

Manners: Be personable as well as professional, and above all be polite to everyone you meet.

Gum: Do not chew gum, smoke, swear, or use slang.

Body Language: Be aware of body language, vibes, reactions - use your instincts to keep things on course. Maintain eye contact. Watch your posture and be aware of your mannerisms.

Questions: Assume all questions are asked for a good reason and answer accordingly. Do not assume that your interviewer knows how to elicit the information he/she is seeking. Feel free to ask for clarification before answering a question. Take some time to formulate your answers before you speak. Answer all questions honestly, but in the best, most positive light. Be specific and give examples of your past behavior to illustrate skills.

Former Employers: Do not, under any circumstances, speak ill of former employers.

Interview Closure: Indicate your interest in the position. Ask about the next step, when a decision will be made, and how you’ll be notified. Ask for a business card. Remember to shake hands and thank the interviewer(s) at the end of the interview.

Follow-up: Mail a thank you note/letter on resume paper within 24 hours of the interview. Reiterate your interest in the position. Show positive “matches” between what they want and what you have to offer. Refer to previous experience or education. Reinforce your positive qualities. Thank the interviewer(s) for their time and the opportunity to interview. Call no more than once a week to check in. Do not ask for a decision or leave the impression you want a return phone call. Simply emphasize you are still interested.

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