

Interview Preparation Guide



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THE JOB INTERVIEW

“Candidates with marvelous qualifications lose out, not because they couldn’t do the job or even lacked confidence they could do the job. They lose out because their confidence didn’t come through in the interview.”

- Robert Half, author and employment recruiter

Think of the interview as a sales call to sell a product in which you are confident...YOU! As in any sales call, you must be prepared, make a good first impression, build rapport, understand the needs of the customer (employer), sell the benefits (of hiring you), overturn objections and close the sale.

Everything you have been doing in your job hunt – putting together a strong résumé, researching companies, developing a network of contacts, writing cover letters – has been leading to this point: the interview with a prospective employer that lands you the job.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PERCEPTION IS REALITY

Dr. Albert Mehrabian of UCLA has studied how people respond to us when we first meet. The average person gives us 30 seconds to four minutes in which they decide whether or not they want to interact with us. The more decisive the decision maker, the less time given.

55% of the decision is based on how we look (age, sex, color, dress and grooming, posture, eye contact, movement and gestures, facial expression), 38% on the tone of our voice (projection and volume, breath support, pitch and inflection, enunciation, pace, phrasing and warmth), and 7% on the words we use (knowledgeable, direct, concise, enthusiastic, use of interviewer’s name). Once a person forms a positive perception of us and makes the decision to deal with us, our performance then becomes critical.

When two candidates are equally qualified for a job, the one who makes the best impression will get it!

PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

STEP 1: RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION/INDUSTRY

Why should you research the employer/grad school and industry? Because when you know all about the organization and/or the industry, and other candidates don’t, you will have the advantage. This knowledge and enthusiasm can sometimes make up for *perceived* flaws (i.e. lack of experience, age, unrelated major, etc.).

A. Learn as much as you can about the company.

- How large is the organization?
- How long has the organization been in operation?
- What are its products and/or services?
- Does it have a good reputation?
- Does it have regional or branch locations?

B. Learn career vocabulary or “buzz words” in your industry.

C. Consult the following resources:

- The organization’s website or industry sites on the Internet (Use Google to search through the first 5 pages in addition to *CareerBliss.com*)
- The Kenyon Career Network (Find mentors who work for the organization/industry and conduct an informational interview to learn more.)

- Professional organizations/associations (search <http://www.weddlles.com/associations/> or <http://www.ipl.org/div/aon/>)
- Newspaper and magazine articles (many sources, such as <http://www.bizjournals.com>)
- Industry and organization reference books (e.g., *Moody's Industrial Manual*, *Standard & Poor's Register*, *Hoover's Handbooks*, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, etc.)

D. Discover as much as you can about the interviewer.

- The interviewer's name, including the correct spelling and pronunciation
- The interviewer's title (This information may give you a clue about whether it will be a general, pre-screening interview conducted by a human resources representative or an in-depth interview conducted by your prospective supervisor.)

STEP 2: WHAT TO (AND NOT TO) WEAR – INTERVIEW ATTIRE

As we mentioned earlier, 55% of a first impression is based on how you look. Dress and grooming are two of the easiest aspects to change in order to achieve your desired image. Project an image that you are successful and professional. You can demonstrate a bit of initiative and imagination within the confines of conservative dress, but when in doubt, play it safe and dress on the conservative side.

Don't know what to wear for an interview? Here are some helpful tips:

- In general, dress above what the job requires
- Wear clothing that is both professional and comfortable for you
- Be clean, which goes for you and your clothing
- Be fairly conservative in dress - a two-piece suit, light colored dress shirt, and coordinating tie for a man. Women should wear either a suit or a dress, also along the conservative lines.
- Wear clean dress shoes
- Use a simple, clean hairstyle
- Avoid excessive jewelry, make-up, or perfume/cologne – less is best!

STEP 3: PLAN WHAT TO BRING

Whether you are participating in an interview on or off campus, it is important to have a few essentials for your interview:

- Two or three (2-3) additional résumés on clean, neat paper (résumé paper is preferred).
- Pad of paper and a pen in a folder or padfolio.
- Portfolio which includes a sample of your work, certificates, awards, etc.
- References with phone numbers (be sure your information is at the top, matching the header on your résumé and cover letter to continue your “brand”).
- Your questions for the employer. Avoid questions readily answered by the position description or through basic research on the employer's website.

STEP 4: PRACTICE INTERVIEWING

Interviewing is a skill. Improvement comes from practice. Use these practice methods to improve your interviewing skills.

- Use videotaping to review speech patterns and body language.
- Practice responses; Try to keep your answers brief and to the point.
- During the interviews, observe your performance.
 - How are you doing?
 - How is the interviewer responding to you? Does the interviewer seem interested in you?
 - Do you sound confident? Are you organized?

- Debrief after each interview.
 - What went right? What went wrong? What do I want to do differently next time?
 - Ask for honest, specific feedback from your rehearsal partner.
- Think about how your experience and education relate to what you have read or heard about the employer and the available position

QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED IN THE INTERVIEW

NOTE: *These questions are presented as a guide, not a comprehensive or exhaustive list. We encourage you to research industry specific questions, as some of these questions may or may not be appropriate for your interviewing situation.*

1. Tell me about yourself? (try to hold your response to 2-3 minutes)
2. What do you know about our organization?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What do you look for in a job?
5. What skills and qualifications are essential for success in the position of _____?
6. How long would it take for you to make a meaningful contribution?
7. Why did you select your college?
8. What led you to choose your major?
9. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
10. How does this assignment fit into your overall career plan?
11. Describe your leadership style.
12. What do you believe is the most difficult part of being a supervisor of people?
13. How would your colleagues describe you?
14. How would a past supervisor describe you?
15. How would you describe yourself?
16. What do you think of your present or past boss?
17. Can you work well under deadlines or pressure?
18. How much do you expect if we offer you this position?
19. Why do you want to work for us?
20. What other positions are you considering?
21. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
22. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
23. What college subjects did you like the best/least? Why?
24. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
25. What position do you expect to have in 2 to 5 years?
26. What are your long range career objectives?
27. What was wrong with your current or last position?
28. What do you *really* want to do in life?
29. How would you describe yourself in one word?
30. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
31. What questions didn't I ask that you expected?
32. Do you have any question for me? (*See next column for Questions for the Interviewer that you might want to ask*).

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

NOTE: *It is important that you ask questions, not only to gain important information about the position and the company, but also to show your interest in the position.*

1. Why is this position open?
2. How often has it been filled in the past five years? What were the main reasons?
3. What would you like done differently by the next person who fills this position?
4. What are some of the objectives you would like to see accomplished in this job?
5. What is most pressing? What would you like to have done in the next 3 months.
6. What are some of the long-term objectives you would like to see completed?
7. What skills do you think are most important for this position?
8. What are the major challenges in this position?
9. How do you think these could best be handled?
10. What freedom would I have in determining my own objectives and methods of measurement?
11. What advancement opportunities are available for the person who is successful in this position, and within what timeframe?
12. Where would you like this department/organization to be in five years?
13. What accounts for success within the company?
14. How are performance evaluations conducted?
15. How would you describe the organization's work environment or culture?
16. What characteristics do your best employees have in common?
17. What education and training programs are provided?
18. How would you describe your management style?
19. Is there anything else I need to know?
20. What is the next step? If I do not hear from you in (time period, such as 2-3 weeks), would it be okay to call you?

LEGAL AND ILLEGAL JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Here's a rundown of what can and what can't be asked, based upon current laws. Of course, you may volunteer any of this information if you think it is in your interest to do so. Much as they might like to, interviewers are not allowed to ask such questions as "Do you plan to start a family soon?" or even "How old are you?" Only questions dealing with the actual requirements of the job may be asked. Thus, photos (for example), might be appropriate for modeling and acting, but not other professions.

OPTIONS FOR ANSWERING...

If you are asked an illegal question, you typically have three options.

1. You are free to answer the question – but if you choose to do so, realize that you are giving information that is likely not job related. And, you could harm your candidacy by giving the "wrong" answer.
2. You can refuse to answer the question. By selecting this option, you'll be within your rights, but you're also running the risk of coming off as uncooperative or confrontational – hardly the words an employer would use to describe the "ideal" candidate.
3. Your third option is to examine the *intent* behind the question and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For instance, the interviewer asks, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" or "What country are you from?" You've been asked an illegal question. You could say, however, "I am authorized to work in the United States." Or if your interviewer asks, "Who is going to take care of your pets when you have to travel? You might answer, "I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires."

	These Questions <u>ARE</u> legal...	You are <u>NOT</u> required to answer these...
Birthplace/Citizenship	"If hired, can you show evidence of being legally allowed to work in the United States?"	"Where were you born?" "What is your native language?"
Family Status/Gender	May ask for name and address of parent, if candidate is a minor.	"With whom do you live?" or any questions which would indicate whether the candidate is male or female.
Race	Almost nothing is legal, until after the candidate is hired.	"What is your racial/ethnic group?" or anything dealing with color.
Age	May verify that the candidate meets minimum requirement such as "Are you 18 or older?"	"How old are you?" or "When did you finish high school?"
Military Service	May ask about job-related skills acquired during military services.	Questions dealing with dates of military service and type of discharge.
Names	"To help check prior employment, list any other names you used."	"What is your maiden name?"
National Origin	"These positions require language skills. What languages do you speak?"	"How did you acquire your language skills?" "What did your family speak?"
Physical Characteristics	May require a photo only after hiring.	"Please submit a recent photo with your application."
Religion	May tell candidates the hours when they would be required to work.	"Do you belong to a church?" "What is your religion?"
Criminal Record	"Have you ever been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor, other than a minor traffic offense?"	"Have you ever been arrested?" or "Have you ever been in trouble with the law?"
Physical Condition	"If hired, you will have to pass a physical based on actual job requirements."	"What is your physical condition?" "Do you have any disabilities?"
Memberships	"Please list all job-related organizations to which you belong. You do not need to list any which indicate your race, religion, sex, or other personal characteristics."	"Please list all the organizations to which you belong."

JUST BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Arrive at the interviewer's reception area no later than 10 minutes prior to your appointment.
- Observe the office environment while waiting, and be polite to all those you come in contact with.
- Manage your nerves with deep breathing and positive self-talk.

STAGES OF THE INTERVIEW: WHAT TO EXPECT

A skilled interviewer will have a plan for the interview. Most interviews are organized into predictable stages or steps. Remember, you must build rapport, understand the needs of the employer, sell the benefits (of hiring you), overturn objections and solidify their confidence in you as a hire.

STAGE 1: BUILDING RAPPORT

This stage includes *shaking hands firmly*, being offered a seat and *small talk* about the weather or other topics. A skilled interviewer will plan for a few minutes of conversation to put you at ease.

STAGE 2: UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF THE EMPLOYER

The purpose of the interview is the exchange of information about the job and company and your skills, experience, strengths and personality. The interviewer may briefly discuss the job and the company/organization. You may also have the opportunity to ask questions. Listen carefully and think about how you can fit in and help them.

STAGE 3: SELL THE BENEFITS OF HIRING YOU

You will be asked questions about your skills, abilities, experience, strengths and weaknesses, education and training, and work history.

- **PRESENT A CONCRETE EXAMPLE:** Employers relate to and remember stories about your accomplishments. Just stating you have a skill is not as effective as describing a situation where you used that skill to benefit a previous employer or campus organization.
- **QUANTIFY:** Whenever possible, quantify and provide data regarding your accomplishments. For example, give a percentage of increase in membership or fundraising from a campus leader role.
- **LINK IT UP:** Make sure the employer understands the link between your accomplishments and doing a job well, leading them to the conclusion that you can do the same for them. Recent graduates and others entering the job market should discuss internships, part time jobs, and campus activities.

STAGE 4: OVERTURNING OBJECTIONS – THE “HOOK”

The purpose of the interview is twofold: it will help you decide whether or not the job seems like a good fit, and the interviewer will decide if you are an appropriate candidate for the position. When you sense the interview is winding down, use the “hook” to improve your chances and convey how you stand as a candidate.

Many job applicants cannot wait for an interview to be over because they are so nervous. As a result, they fail to deal with some unanswered questions or doubts that the interviewer may have. The “hook” is a combined statement/question you ask that gets the interviewer to speak up about how you are doing, such as: *“I’ve answered your questions by telling you some facts about my education and experience. Can you tell me if there are any questions or doubts you still have?”*

If the interviewer does have a question or expresses a concern, you have an opportunity to address it immediately. Be sure to practice your own version!

STAGE 5: THE TURNING POINT

At the conclusion of the interview, thank them for their time, restate your interest in the position, summarize the benefits of hiring you and identify the next step. There are several possibilities of what may happen during the turning point.

The interviewer may want you to have a second interview with the hiring manager or supervisor. YOU:

1. Set up the appointment.
2. Prepare as thoroughly for the second interview as you did for the first. (Do not assume the information will be passed on to a second interviewer).
3. Send a thank-you/follow-up letter to the first interviewer.

The interviewer says he or she has other applicants to interview or in other ways indicates he or she is not ready to make a decision. YOU:

1. Politely ask when the interviewer thinks the final decision will be made.
2. Send a thank-you/follow-up letter.
3. Continue to job hunt and set up other interviews while you wait.

The interviewer offers you the job. YOU:

1. Ask now about pay rate or salary, fringe benefits, advancement and any other questions you need answered so that you can decide if you will accept the job.
2. Ask for a short time to think over the job offer. Use this grace period to study the job offer. Respond in a timely manner *verbally* with your acceptance or rejection.
3. Additionally, follow up with an acceptance or rejection letter.

The interviewer may decide you are not right for the job. YOU:

1. Ask if there might be another position for which you would be better suited.
2. Ask for names of other employers that you could contact.
3. Send a follow-up letter, thanking the interviewer for the opportunity to have interviewed and expressing your interest in future positions.

NOTE: Lastly, SHAKE THEIR HAND and tell him/her you are looking forward to hearing from him/her in the near future and the possibility of joining their team.

PHONE AND SKYPE INTERVIEWS

When employers have a large pool of candidates, they may conduct phone or Skype interviews to narrow the pool before inviting you on-site for an interview. These types of interviews allow the recruiter to evaluate your ability to convey your experiences and ideas effectively. While this may seem as less formal to you, it is important to prepare for these types of interviews just as you would an on-site interview!

TIPS TO HELP YOU WITH THE PHONE INTERVIEW

- Smile; It will come through in your voice.
- Ensure that the recording on your voicemail is appropriate. It should be what you would have on your work line when you are not at your desk to take calls.
- Choose a time and location without other distractions and good reception.
- Be concise. You have less time to talk. However, you do not want to sound rushed – people may miss what you want them to hear.
- Avoid the use of words such as “like, yaa, aaa, ummm, you know.” Be direct in conveying what you mean as this will demonstrate your communication skills.
- Remember to ask for the name and contact information of the interviewer.

TIPS TO HELP YOU WITH THE SKYPE INTERVIEW

- Smile and Dress Up; you are on camera!
- Ensure that you have proper lighting in the room, and that everything behind you is appropriate for the interviewer to see (this includes your Skype profile picture).
- Choose a time and location without other distractions.
- Handle any glitches in technology with grace. Just because you have a disrupted video or audio connection, doesn’t mean that individual you are interviewing with does!
- Be aware of your voice, your body language, and the way you phrase your sentences. Avoid the use of words such as “like, yaa, aaa, ummm, you know.” Be direct in conveying what you mean.
- Remember to ask for the name and contact information of the interviewer.

SECOND INTERVIEWS

Good news! You've done well in your first interview, and now the employer has invited you back for a second interview.

PURPOSE

- To re-affirm the initial impression of you.
- To evaluate your skills and competencies in depth as they relate to the position.
- To determine if there is a "fit" between you and the organization.

FORMAT

The format for a second interview will vary greatly; however, most will be at the organization's facility. These on-site interviews can last from an hour to an entire day or longer, and may even require long distance travel. To be at your best, prepare for:

- Multiple interviews, scheduled back-to-back with very different interviewers.
- A combination of interviews with groups and individuals.
- More in-depth questioning than in the first interview.
- An expectation that you have MANY questions.
- Interviewing over a meal, and no matter how causal and informal the atmosphere, you are still interviewing.
- The possibility of testing, usually directly related to the job's requirements (i.e. a writing assignment for a technical writing position, psychological testing, foreign language exams, teaching a class, etc.).
- A tour of the offices and facilities.
- An evaluation of you that starts when you enter the building – you never know who's riding in the elevator with you!

TIPS FOR SUCCESS DURING A SECOND INTERVIEW

- Keep your responses to interview questions fresh and enthusiastic! Treat each interview throughout the day as if it is your first and only.
- Observe and ask about the organization's culture. Watch how people treat each other. How do the senior staff members treat the junior staff?
- Listen carefully for policy positions, objectives, problems, etc. If you listen carefully and ask the right questions, there are many things you can learn during the second interview that could affect your satisfaction with the employer.
- Communicate your interest! Among equally qualified candidates, the person who communicates their strong interest and enthusiasm for the job will get the offer.
- Be reasonable and appropriate with your expenditures if the employer is reimbursing you for long distance travel. Also, keep your receipts. The employer should tell you in advance what kinds of travel expenses will be covered. If not, ask.
- After the second interview, record your impressions, lingering questions, and any new or remaining concerns. These notes will help you organize your thoughts about the organization and position.
- Send a tailored thank-you note to each interviewer as soon as possible. Many organizations make decisions soon after second interviews have been completed.

BACKGROUND SCREENING

Although the employer has gathered quite a bit of information during the initial and second interviews, they may still want to know more. Many employers will want some background information on candidates prior to making an employment decision. Background screening of candidates is an increasingly common and legal practice.

EMPLOYERS WILL CHECK:

- References (most employers call, rather than relying on written reference letters)
- College transcript (employers will verify graduation date, coursework and GPA)
- Employment history (employers may even contact people whom you did not list as references)
- All the information you supply on an employment application. This information must be truthful or you run the risk of having the job offer rescinded.
- Criminal background check (Anything above a minor traffic offense will show on your record. If you have any questions about your history, please speak to a CDO Advisor.)

EMPLOYERS MAY CHECK:

- Credit history
- Driving record
- Pre-employment drug test results
- Test scores
- Fingerprints/FBI files

FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Following up is a necessity after the interview. To make the best impression, write and send a thank-you note or email on the same day as your interview.

To write an effective thank you note, be brief and include the following:

- Thank the interviewer for his or her time and helpful information.
- Restate your interest in the position.
- Remind the interviewer of one specific aspect of your conversation to set you apart.
- Repeat your strongest selling point(s) that match the job description, which recap the benefits of hiring you.
- Confidently close with a request for the position or a second interview.

You may consult our Cover Letter Development Guide for a sample Thank You Note.

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST: ARE YOU READY?

Have you:

- ☐ **Researched the employer?** Conduct even more research than you did for the first interview. Continue to peruse their homepage, in addition to news sites and Google. Do you know if there are any alumni working there (check with the CDO)?
- ☐ **Practiced your interviewing skills?** Are you prepared for behavioral interview questions that help an employer determine if your past actions predict future behavior patterns? Have you done a mock interview with the CDO?
- ☐ **Planned your agenda?** Know three to five points you want to communicate about yourself in relation to the job. You are not preparing to take control of the interview, but you are determining much of the content.
- ☐ **Prepared a list of questions for the employer?** It is a good idea to prepare different kinds of questions for employees with different roles (i.e. ask different questions of the CEO than of the new hire). A lack of quality questions implies insufficient interest in the position, so prepare more questions than you did for the first interview. It is okay to write them down and bring them with you to the interview.
- ☐ **Obtained information about your interview schedule, the logistics and directions?** Ask the employer in advance about how many interviews you will have, how long they will be, the job titles of your interviewers, etc. Make sure you know how to get where you are going, and where to park if transporting yourself.
- ☐ **Made extra copies of your résumé?** Along with these copies, bring a typed reference sheet (with phone numbers and addresses), an unofficial transcript, any questions you have prepared, and a notepad. A leather or vinyl padfolio holds these items nicely.

IN THE END

IF YOU'RE OFFERED THE JOB...

- Thank them and ask if you can have some time to think about it. Do not accept the position, and get a clear answer from the employer as to when they need to know of your acceptance/rejection.
- Feel free to contact a career advisor in the CDO to discuss the job offer.

IF YOU'RE NOT OFFERED THE JOB...

- Rejections are inevitable. Do not take them personally.
- Obtain the benefit from each rejection. You cannot let a simple “no” affect you in a negative way; do something positive about it.
- Speak with the individual who informed you of the rejection and thank him/her for his/her consideration.
- Ask for feedback so that you can improve your résumé, interview skills or job search direction.
- Above all, never give up. Keep trying, keep learning, keep improving and you will be successful.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR INTERVIEW PREPARATION

For more interviewing tips and information, come to the Career Development Office to utilize our books, internet resources, and the staff for mock interviews.