

How to Prepare for a Successful Interview

In order to have a successful interview experience, it is important to prepare thoroughly. This handout provides guidelines and information on how best to prepare in order to be ready for an interview.

1. Perform a self-assessment

- Have a clear picture of your interests, skills, values, and individual characteristics as they relate to the position for which you are applying – in order to make a positive impression on a prospective employer, you must first know yourself well.
- Look closely at yourself and the experiences that have shaped you as a person as well as a candidate for the job.
- Have discussions with a friend, relative, advisor, career consultant, or faculty member to help clarify your strongest qualities.
- *Self-awareness will allow you to better articulate to a prospective employer who you are and what you can offer to the organization.*

2. Research the employer

- Gather information about the organization's goals, history, competitors, and culture to allow more effective communication with the company.
- Conduct a web search and visit the company's website and social media platforms for more information on the company's goals and current initiatives.
- Ask alumni who work at the company for input about the company's culture.
- Seek printed literature and well-known business databases for more information.

3. Prepare questions to ask during the interview

- Brainstorm a list of questions to ask during the interview; keep in mind your goals and expected outcomes of the interview when composing this list.
- Create intentional and intelligent questions from information that you have gathered about both the position and the company.
- *If meeting the employer for a first interview, it is discouraged to ask questions about salary – convey enthusiasm for the job, not how much money you will make.*

4. Practice for your interview

- Ask a friend or family member to help you practice answer common and potential questions that may come up in the interview.
- Rehearse responses to some common interview questions and polish your presentation in front of a mirror.
- **Sign up for a practice interview in the Center for Career Development and receive feedback on your interview skills.**

5. Gather relevant information and materials for the interview

- Gather information (e.g., transcripts, list of references, materials related to past educational and employment experiences).
- Prepare extra copies of your résumé in addition to the list of questions that you plan to ask the employer.
- **Carry these additional materials in a padfolio for easy reference during the interview.**

Interviews can take a variety of formats. The two most common interviewing formats include the traditional interview and the behavioral interview.

Traditional Interviews

- Traditional interviews consist of questions that can apply to all candidates in a variety of career fields, regardless of the position for which the candidate is interviewing.
- The goal is to determine how well a candidate knows him- or herself, as well as how familiar the candidate is with the prospective employer.
- Practice speaking confidently and articulately about your skills and accomplishments – employers are looking for responses that demonstrate the candidates have thought about his/her abilities and the employer in advance of the actual interview.
- Sample questions include:
 - *Tell me about yourself.*
 - *What accomplishments are you most proud of?*
 - *How has your college experience prepared you for a career?*
 - *What quality or attribute do you feel will most contribute to your career success?*
 - *What specific goals have you established for your career?*

Behavioral Interviews

- Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past performance; questions require the candidate to provide information about how he/she behaved in certain situations in the past – it provides the employer with insight into how you might behave in a similar situation as an employee.
- Reflect on circumstances that required you to use problem solving skills, adaptability, leadership, multi-tasking, and initiative.
- Describe details of circumstances utilizing the S.T.A.R. method to organize your thoughts into Situation, Task, Action, and Result so that responses are both thorough and concise.
- Sample questions include:
 - *Describe a time when you demonstrated leadership abilities.*
 - *Describe a time when you faced a challenge or a difficult situation.*
 - *Give an example that demonstrates your ability to make important decisions.*
 - *When have you had to resolve a problem in your supervisor's absence?*
 - *Give an example of a time when you accomplished something with the help of another.*

Tips for preparing for the day of the interview

- Review directions in advance – know exactly where to go for your interview and how long it will take to get there.
- Dress to impress. Avoid anything that could be distracting for the interviewer (e.g., jewelry, perfume/cologne, short skirts, revealing blouses, visible body piercings) – you should look neat, clean, and professional.
- Arrive for your interview 5-10 minutes early; this will give you an opportunity to relax.
- Bring paper and a pen (to take notes or remind yourself of questions to ask) and any other materials (i.e., resume, list of references, supporting documents).
- Leave your phone in your car or silence/turn off your phone to prevent ruining your interview.

After the interview, do not forget to follow-up with a thank you letter to all interviewers present. Express your appreciation for meeting with you and reiterate your skills, education, and experiences that make you uniquely qualified for the position. A thank you letter may also take the form of an email, but be sure to keep in mind that this is still a professional communication (i.e., avoid using “text language”, inappropriate punctuation, or emoticons). Be sure to send out the thank you letter within 24 to 48 hours.