

## The Interview Guide

Now that the resume and cover letter are completed and all your hard work has paid off it is time to get ready for your interviews. As you move through your career and experience interviews you will see that they can be very different, some are very challenging while others are a breeze. Regardless of the type of interview you have the best advice we can give is to fully prepare yourself. The following information will give you a solid guideline to prepare for your first interviews out of college or during your college years.

### Before the Interview

**1. Know Yourself!** Review lists of typical interview questions and think about the answers in relation to your interests, skills and values. Consider a visit to the Career Development Center to help you focus on your goals, values and skills. After all you should be comfortable talking about yourself! You are their potential employee! A list of sample interview questions is provided at the end of this booklet. Before you enter the interview, you need to be prepared to answer some basic questions about yourself:

- Who are you? Be prepared to discuss your education, experience, interests, skills, values, strengths and weaknesses. Elaborate upon this information and the information provided in your resume. Use concrete, behavioral examples to support your statements.
- What type of job would bring you the most satisfaction? Explain.
- What do you have to offer to this company and this position?

**2. Do Your Research!** Your goal is to obtain information on the company, the potential position and your potential boss. Use the Internet to learn about company products, services, average salaries and budget. Stop by the Career Counseling Office to see if current literature is available on your company. Through networking with alumnae, family, friends, current employees and other professionals learn as much as you can about the responsibilities, challenges and rewards of the position as well as the background of the supervisor. This information will assist you in understanding the companies' goals, challenges, and priorities as well as help you anticipate and prepare for some of the tougher questions.

Information to gather before the interview:

- Key people in the organization
- Major products or services
- Size of the company
  - For a school system, check the overall numbers of students and staff, and the ratio of students to teachers
  - For a hospital, check the ration of staff to patients on each unit
- Latest news reports on the company from the television, newspapers, journals, and Web Sites

**3. Develop a List of Questions!** At some point during the interview, you will probably be asked if you have any questions for the interviewer. Before the interview, prepare a list of at least ten questions that you can ask. Although you probably will not use the entire list, you need to anticipate that the employer may have already answered many of your questions. From your employer research, think about some specific questions regarding the company, the position, and/or the boss which are of particular interest to you.

In asking your questions, remember that the interview is a two-way street. This is an opportunity for the employer to decide if you fit within this company. However, and most importantly, it is also a chance for you to decide if this company is a good fit for you.

What would you like to know before accepting this position? In answering this question remember that discussions of salary and benefits will occur after the offer has been made. During the interview is not an appropriate time to discuss salary, unless the employer asks the questions. The interview is a time to learn about the details of the position, and your role within the company.

A sample of questions to ask the employer:

- What do you like best about working for this company? Least?
- How long have you worked here? What attracted you to this company?
- What type of training is provided for new employees in this position? Who conducts it? When does it begin and end?
- What special projects are currently going on in this department?
- Describe the ideal person for this job.
- Describe a typical workday.
- What is the opportunity for advancement within this company?
- Who are the people I would be working with most closely and what do they do?
- If hired, would I report directly to you, or to someone else?
- If you were to offer me this job, where could I expect to be in three to five years?
- Could you give me a brief tour? I would enjoy seeing where people work.
- What could I say or do to convince you to offer me this job?
- When can I expect to hear back from you?

**4. Develop an Action Vocabulary!** Review the following list of action words and incorporate them into your vocabulary. The best way to incorporate these words is to review the list weekly, creating a positive statement about yourself, using one word per sentence. Follow this list and you will be amazed at the improvement in your speech:

Ability	Direct	Improve	Professional
Accelerate	Drive	Instruct	Responsible
Accurate	Dynamic	Initiate	Results
Active	Effective	Innovative	Simplify
Affect	Efficient	Lead	Skill
Analyze	Energy	Listen	Solve
Assertive	Enthusiasm	Motivate	Strengthen
Attitude	Establish	Participate	Success
Capable	Evaluate	Perform	Supervise
Careful	Excel	Persuade	Systematic
Common Sense	Excellence	Potential	Thorough
Conceive	Expand	Pride	Taught
Control	Expedite	Produce	Tabulated
Conscientious	Focus	Proficiency	Train
Contributed	Generate	Provide	
Develop	Guide	Recommend	
Diplomatic	Implement	Reliable	

**5. Gather Your Interview Packet!** Be sure to organize the following information, and bring it with you to the interview:

- copies of your resume and a copy of your cover letter both on the same resume grade paper
- a list of 3-5 references on matching resume grade paper
- a list of at least ten questions to ask the interviewer(s)
- copies of your letters of recommendation
- samples of your work/a portfolio (this may be optional)
- a pen and paper

6. **Dress for Success!** Unfortunately the way we dress to an interview does have a significant impact on the way we are judged as a future employee! Be sure that your attire is appropriate for the interview. A conservative suit is standard for most interviews.

**The rules for dress-**

1. Always assume business attire unless some research you have done says otherwise. Dress for the interview one step up from what you would wear to work on a normal day, and always err on the conservative side.
2. Do not attempt to wear something you are physically uncomfortable in. You will look uncomfortable if that is the way you feel. Looking uncomfortable will not make a great impression.
3. Always avoid: wrinkled clothing, scuffed shoes, sandals, open toed shoes, dirty fingernails, bright or ostentatious finger nail paint, sneakers, jeans, short or mini skirts, low cut or revealing tops, and excessive makeup.

**Business Attire Guidelines:**

- Two piece suit with a jacket. Make sure suit is a solid color (not mixed colors); most colors are acceptable, darker colors are more professional.
- Skirt suits tend to be more formal or professional but pant suits are definitely acceptable. Remember if you wear a skirt make sure it is knee length or not much shorter and it should be professional not 'sexy'.
- Tailored pant suits.
- Skin tone hosiery, always keep an extra pair on hand, just in case.
- No visible piercings, except ears, one pair in ears. Remove other piercings for the interview, if you get the job you may discuss their piercing policy at a later date.
- Clean, polished, classy shoes. Clunky heels and platforms shoes are not professional or advised.
- Jewelry should be limited to earrings, a simple necklace or pearls, watch and rings should be only one per hand.

**Business Casual Attire Guidelines:**

- Two piece pants suit
- Slacks or Khaki's; absolutely no jeans
- Flat shoes
- Dresses or skirt/blouse combination
- Hosiery not necessarily required in summer though you should check the employee handbook for specific company policies.
- Sandals are usually appropriate, but not flip-flops

Keep in mind the organization for which you are interviewing. For example, if you are interviewing to work at a fashion magazine, it may be more important that you are wearing the latest styles. If you are having a hands on interview as a skydiving instructor, wearing a business suit is probably inappropriate.

7. **PRACTICE! PRACTICE! PRACTICE!** The best way to prepare is to practice. Stop by the Career Development Center to learn about mock interviews, helpful videos and other resources. Practicing with friends, family or alumnae can also be useful.

8. **Learn How to Address Inappropriate Questions!** While it is unlikely that you will be asked inappropriate interview questions, it is important that you understand which questions are inappropriate and how to answer them. At the end of this packet, there is a list of inappropriate interview questions. These include questions about your personal life, which are generally not related to your job performance. There are many ways to address inappropriate questions. This is a judgment call. Remember that the Career Counseling Office staff is always available to talk with you about this issue.

### **During the Interview**

On the day of the interview:

1. **Use This Checklist!** The following list has been prepared to assist you in making the best possible impression during the interview. Review this list prior to the interview.

- Be well rested and alert
- Take a shower/Brush your teeth
- Have clean & neat hair, nails, and clothes
- Iron your clothes!!!
- Dress appropriately for the interview
- Wear conservative amounts of perfume and makeup
- Gather your interview packet
- Gather any additional information requested by the interviewer
- Leave enough time to arrive 10-15 minutes early
- Review your company research
- Get ready to make a good impression

2. **Review Your Interview Packet!** Be sure that you have all of the materials with you, and be prepared to answer any questions regarding this information.
3. **Arrive 10-15 Minutes Early!** Use this time to become familiar with the interview setting, to review your resume and the sample interview questions, and to check your appearance in the mirror.
4. **Relax!** Each person needs to determine the relaxation technique that works best for them. One technique is to close your eyes, and concentrate on tightening and then relaxing each muscle in your body, beginning with your toes and ending with your head. Then take three slow, deep breaths. For some people, relaxing comes from knowing when to stop preparing, and to begin focusing their mind away from the interview for a few minutes.
5. **Remember Basic Courtesy!** Be polite to everyone you meet. Interviewers expect that you will be polite during the interview. However, many will also ask a co-worker for their impressions. Remember that you are being judged from your initial contact with the company through the time when the offer is made.
6. **First Impressions are Lasting Impressions!** What is said and done in the first twenty seconds often sets the tone for the entire interview.
- Smile.
  - Introduce yourself.
  - Give a firm handshake.
  - Know who you are there to see and how to pronounce their name.

7. **Start on a Good Note!** Many interviews begin with the initial question, “Tell me about yourself”. Be sure that you have prepared a strong answer to this question. Think of yourself as a salesperson, and the product that you are selling is YOU. The interviewer is providing you with an opportunity to market yourself. Use this chance to convince the employer that you are the most qualified candidate for this position. Remember to focus on the professional versus the personal and since college is your most recent endeavor you can begin with that.

8. **Support Your Statements!** Avoid yes or no responses, unless it is requested. Provide concrete examples to support each of your statements. For example:

Interviewer: “Describe for me your leadership experience.”

Response: “I was a leader of a student organization.”

Stronger Response: “As President of the Student Nurses Association, I coordinated weekly meetings, developed three new programs each semester, oversaw two annual fundraisers, and developed a new marketing strategy which increased membership from five members to twenty members within a year.”

9. **Remain Poised and Confident!** Many interviewers are not human resource professionals, and may be as nervous as you. Some interviewers conduct “stress” interviews to see how you handle pressure.

*One of the most stressful times during the interview is periods of silence. Allow natural silences to occur during the interview, and only break the silence to ask a question or provide relevant information.*

10. **Be honest!** Present your answers completely and factually. Do not exaggerate or lie!

11. **Listen Carefully!** The secret to answering the question correctly is to listen and understand what is being asked.

12. **Be Positive!** Even questions that begin negatively should be answered in a positive manner. If the interviewer asks about your weaknesses, answer the question; however, follow this statement by explaining the steps you are taking to overcome this or discuss the ways in which this same quality is also a strength.

*For example:* If you feel that being quiet is your weakness, you might want to explain that you often approach situations by listening before speaking. As a result of being quiet, you have developed your listening skills and this has been very useful in developing a greater understanding of the situation before responding.

13. **Close the Interview Naturally!** When the interviewer appears to be ending the interview, allow this to occur naturally. Do not try to prolong this. Ask if the interviewer needs any additional information from you (i.e. transcripts). Find out the next step in the interview process. Ask the interviewer if he/she has a business card, so that you will have their name, title, and address for writing a thank you note. When you stand, firmly shake the interviewer’s hand, and thank them for the interview.

### **After the Interview**

1. **Take Notes!** Immediately following the interview, take notes on important parts of the interview. Keep track of questions that you found especially challenging, questions that you felt you answered well, and any new information provided about the company or the position. These notes will assist you in writing a thank you note and during follow up conversations with the interviewer.
2. **Send a Thank You Note!** If possible, send a thank you note on the same day as the interview. Send a thank you note to each person with whom you interviewed, and try to personalize your notes to address specific aspects of the interview. For example, you may want to restate your strengths for the position or offer additional information that you did not provide during the interview.

At the end of this packet you will find a sample thank you note. Remember that this is only a sample. Personalize the thank you note to fit your style and the interview.

3. **Follow up on Your Interview!** If the interviewer tells you that they will be making a decision in the next two weeks, call them in two weeks and one day if you have not heard back. Simply state that (1) you interviewed two weeks ago, (2) you heard that a decision would be made within two weeks, (3) you are still interested in the position, and (4) you are calling to follow up on the status of your application. If they say that a decision is still being made, be sure to thank them once again for their time, and state that you are looking forward to hearing from them.

### Conclusion and Remember...

1. **You are what you wear.** Your interviewer makes note of your dress more than you may think. Make sure you are ironed, well tailored and professional.
2. **Do not over accessorize.** Take out extra piercings.(tongue, nose)
3. **Hair should be neat and well groomed.** Avoid big hair, when in doubt or having a bad hair day, pull it back.
4. **Hands are noticeable.** Keep nails looking clean and well groomed; avoid lots of length and color.
5. **No gum chewing or hard candy.** Finish or swallow gum or mint before you go to interview.
6. **Turn off accessories.** Cell phone, pager, etc. must all be turned off and never ever answered during an interview.
7. **Carry a good briefcase or portfolio.** Equip it with pen and paper, open it upon sitting down.
8. **Keep odors to a minimum.** The interviewer should not smell smoke or perfume. Bathe and use deodorant.
9. **The Natural look.** Makeup should not be garish or incredibly noticeable. Keep it natural.

### Fifty Interview Questions

**Practice** your responses to each of these questions. Being prepared for the interview is the greatest indicator of success. Many interviews will begin with question #1, so think about this question carefully. Career counselors are available to meet with you to discuss your interview responses and to provide feedback.

1. **Tell me about yourself.**
2. Describe three of your strengths and three of your weaknesses.
3. What motivated you to apply for this position?
4. Describe your greatest achievement in life.
5. Describe three individuals who have influenced you to most. In what ways have

they impacted your life?

6. List three things about you that you believe to be most important.
7. List three major goals that you have for the next five/ten years.
8. List three words to describe how you see yourself in ten years.
9. Tell me about your current job responsibilities.
10. What type of job are you looking for?
11. Why do you want to work for this company? in this position?
12. Why should I hire you?
13. Describe your past experiences which make you qualified for this job.
14. Why do you want to leave your current job?
15. What is your record of days absent on the job?
16. Describe your supervision style.
17. Describe one major problem which you have encountered and the way in which you handled it.
18. What was your favorite course? Least favorite? Why?
19. What do you know about our company?
20. Tell me about your leisure activities?
21. What do you really want to do in life?
22. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
23. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to this company?
24. How would you describe yourself?
25. How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?
26. What brings you satisfaction?
27. How do you define success?
28. If you were having difficulty with your supervisor/co-workers/employees, how would you address the situation?
29. Describe the relationship that should exist between supervisor and employee.
30. If you were hiring someone for this position, what qualities would you look for?
31. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
32. What changes would you make in your college or university? Why?
33. Do you think that your grades are an indication of you academic achievement?
34. What have you learned from participating in extra-curricular activities?
35. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
36. In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested?
37. How do you work under pressure?
38. How would you describe your ideal job?

39. What three things are most important to you in your job?
40. Do you have a geographic preference?
41. Are you willing to relocate?
42. Are you willing to travel?
43. What do you know about the community in which our company is located?
44. What have you learned from your mistakes?
45. How did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
46. What are your salary requirements?
47. Have you ever been fired?
48. Would you describe yourself as a risk-taker or someone who plays it safe?
49. Do you anticipate problems well or simply react to them?
50. This is a larger (or smaller) company than you worked at before. How do you feel about that?

### **Illegal Interview Questions**

(Excerpted from <http://www.collegegrad.com>)

- Questions related to location of birthplace, nationality, ancestry, or descent of applicant, applicant's spouse, or parents.  
(Example: Pasquale--Is that a Spanish name?)
- Questions related to your sex or marital status.  
(Example: Is that your maiden name?)
- Questions related to race or color.  
(Example: Are you considered to be part of a minority group?)
- Questions related to religion or religious days observed.  
(Example: Does your religion prevent you from working weekends or holidays?)
- Questions related to physical disabilities or handicaps.  
(Example: Do you have any use of your legs at all?)
- Questions related to health or medical history.  
(Example: Do you have any pre-existing health conditions?)
- Questions related to pregnancy, birth control, and child care.  
(Example: Are you planning on having children?)

### **Example of a Thank You letter**

After an interview, follow-up with a thank you letter to the person(s) who interviewed you. The purpose of such a letter is first to thank the interviewer for his/her time and interest and to reemphasize the qualities you would bring to the position if hired. Type this letter, ideally on stationary that matches your resume and cover letter. Below you will find the general format for this letter. When your letter is finished it will probably be from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to one page in length and consist of three to four paragraphs. If you ask for the business card of each of the people

you talk to, you will know how to correctly spell the individual's name and will be informed of the person's job title and correct address when you prepare your thank you letter.

Your Address

Date

Interviewer's Name

Job Title

Company Name

Mailing Address

Dear Ms./Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

In the first paragraph, thank the interviewer for her/his time and interest in meeting with you.

In the second paragraph, mention some of the qualities that you think make you a good candidate for the position. You have probably talked about these things during the interview but this is an opportunity to reemphasize why the employer should hire you. It is also a good idea to mention the reasons why you are particularly interested in this company.

In the closing paragraph, say that you look forward to hearing from her/him in regard to her/his decision. You can also mention that you would be happy to provide other materials to support your application (transcript, letters of recommendation, samples of your work) and to meet with her/him again. Tell the interviewer to feel free to call you if she/he has any questions (include your phone number here).

Sincerely,

(Your Signature)

Your Name

**GOOD LUCK!**

**RELAX!**

**SMILE!**

**The Career Development Center  
McDonough Hall, Room 111**

