



The Career Center

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THE ART OF JOB INTERVIEWING

No matter what company you work for, in what industry, in what position, your success depends on your ability to persuade others to your own point of view. You pitch a prospective employer to get a job. You pitch your boss to approve a project. You pitch your subordinates to live up to the spirit of your instructions, not just the letter. You pitch prospective customers to become current clients, or current customers to buy more.

Sometimes you are invited to an interview because there is a definite and specific position they are trying to fill, you know it, and you know what they are looking for. In other situations, they don't have a specific job opening, but more likely, you have made them curious enough to want to meet with you and explore ways in which you could be useful to their organization.

In either situation, your goal for this meeting is to satisfy their concerns about your ability to do the job, but more importantly, you are here not so you can talk to them, but so *they* can talk to you. You want all decision-makers to talk about their needs, problems, and challenges. You make that happen through the questions you ask.

If there is an opening, what is the interviewer looking for? What does she really want? What type of a person will get along best with her? With this information, you will know how to make your pitch in terms that will fit this company, make them *believe* that you are giving them the best deal, and make them *feel* good about hiring you.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Before you go on an interview, you will need to research the interviewer, the department, the company, and the industry. So much information is available today on the internet, that the first place to go is the company's own web site. Follow each link on the site to see where it goes. Print off anything that interests you. Find their internal search engine. Enter the name(s) of the interviewer, the department, their products or services, the name of the president of the company, key words like annual meeting, prospectus (if they are publicly traded), customer service, public relations, whatever you can think of. Print off everything, because until you have it all, you won't see the connections between items you read. Next you need to research the industry. Some web sites to use include:

<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/cg/home.htm>, <http://www.hoovers.com/free/>, <http://company.monster.com/>,
<http://home.sprintmail.com/~debflanagan/>, <http://bwnt.businessweek.com/company/search.asp>,
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/business/companyresearch/>,
http://www.quintcareers.com/researching_companies.html,

However, there is a variety of other printed material available at The Career Center to help you. Stop by our office and let us help you.

When you begin to run out of places to look, sit down and read through it all. Sort the sheets into piles of similar information. Next highlight the key points on each sheet. Transfer and consolidate all the key points onto sheets of paper by topic. What additional questions does this uncover? What are the key

problems of the industry? The company? The department? Prepare open-ended questions that probe into these problem areas. Write them on the back of a 3x5 index card. Make up a second card with the key information you find out in your research and bring it with you.

DRESS

The standard rule of thumb for work attire is to dress for the job you want, not the job you have. Your goal is to fit in, but still look like you are dressed up. So dress the way the people there will dress, except dress just a little better. If the men wear collared shirts, wear a tie (but not a suit). If the men wear suits, wear a dark grey or navy blue suit with a white starched shirt and tie. If the women wear suits, wear a gray or navy blue suit with a white blouse and accessories. On the other hand, if the women who work there wear blue jeans and you show up in a suit, you're over-dressed and won't fit in. The best way to find out what you should wear is to go to the company and see what the employees in your area wear at work. If you live in the same city, you can do that by going a week or so early and asking for a tour of the facility. This has the added advantage of allowing you to find the place before the day of the interview so you won't be late. Tell the tour guide what department you want to make sure to visit. Look at what the people who work there are wearing.

FOR THE INTERVIEW

Preparation is the key to a good interview. Do everything you can to reduce your anxiety. Drive by the interview location a couple of days ahead of time so you can work out how to get there. On the day of the interview, arrive ten minutes early. If you get there before that, sit out in the car and wait. You don't want to appear over-anxious. Walk up to the receptionist and tell her/him, "Hello, My name is _____ and I am here for an interview with _____. Do you happen to have some literature on the company I could read while I wait?" Now read it. You will find nine times out of ten that whatever they hand you will have information that will turn out to be useful in the interview.

MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

There are four specific things you need to do in order to insure a good first impression:

- 1.) Smile (show your teeth). Interviewing is hard work and you need to make it look easy.
- 2.) Make direct eye contact. Even if you are interviewing with a committee, always look people in the eye. Pretend you are having a conversation with one or more members of your audience, then look at them and talk to them. Don't look at their mouths, or their chests, or their hair. Look only in their eyes and don't look away more than 50% of the time even if this is uncomfortable and not what you would normally do.
- 3.) Know and use their name. Call the day beforehand to confirm the appointment. Speak to the secretary and say, "Hello, this is _____, I am calling to confirm my 10 o'clock appointment with _____. Can you please tell me who will be attending besides _____?" If there is anyone else, get his/her name, title, and role in the company. Then research that person as well. You will be amazed how often the secretary will give you this information, because so rarely does anyone ask this question, that no one will have told him or her not to give the information to you. In addition, if for some reason the meeting has been changed in some way, you will be informed.
- 4.) Be the first person to extend your hand to be shaken and match their style of hand shake. You are demonstrating how well you fit in, so regardless of how the person shakes your hand, **match that style**.

These four things need to be repeated at the close of the meeting as well. The interview is over, you walk to the door of their office, stop at the doorway (or at the exit door to the building or wherever the parting moment will occur) and repeat these same four steps exactly (smile, direct eye contact, use their name, and shake hands). Don't forget!

JOB INTERVIEWING IN BRIEF

I. PREPARATION

- A. Identify the tasks you would perform on the job.
- B. Research the needs, problems, and challenges the company is facing that might cause them to hire you.
- C. Create at least ten open-ended questions probing into the issues you've identified to ask the interviewer.
- D. Identify what you have to offer the employer and how this position is a good fit for you.
- E. Create stories using Situation, Action, Consequence (SAC) format to demonstrate your ability to assist in solving the problems identified. Pick up a handout on this format from The Career Center.
- F. Obtain a list of common interview questions and write out your answers (pick one up at The Career Center)
- G. Practice answering these questions paying particular attention to your non-verbal body language.
- H. Review the common illegal questions and decide how you will respond.
- I. Review your resume and identify the questions it creates.
- J. Prepare a list of possible situations you might face on the job and how you would handle each one.
- K. Print off extra copies of what you submitted for the job (e.g., resume, application, etc.).
- L. What type of interview will you be having? How might that affect your preparation?
- M. Call the day before to confirm your appointment and find out with whom you will be meeting.
- N. Identify how employees in your area of the company dress to aid in your outfit decisions.
- O. Outline what you plan to do and say to create a great First and Last Impression (see handout).

II. SELLING YOURSELF IN THE INTERVIEW

- A. Turn off your cell phone and leave it in the car.
- B. Your goal is to avoid being screened out.
- C. Visualize yourself being successful in the interview.
- D. Enter the office no more than ten minutes beforehand.
- E. Start the interview off right with a great First Impression and a Power Greeting (see handout).
- F. Expect the Interviewer to take notes during the meeting, but resist the urge to do so yourself.
- G. Create a discussion environment instead of a cross-examination environment by how you position yourself, your non-verbals, the questions you ask, and your efforts to put the interviewer at ease.
- H. Look for opportunities to give SACs followed by probing questions.
- I. When you don't know how to answer a question, give them a SAC.
- J. Use their last question as an opportunity to summarize their needs, why they should hire you, and ASK for the job.
- K. Do not negotiate anything until they make you an offer – dodge salary questions until then.
- L. End the interview with a strong Last Impression.

III. INTERVIEW FOLLOWUP

- A. Complete an After-Interview Questionnaire (The Career Center) before you leave the parking lot.
- B. Write down what new things you learned about their needs, problems and challenges.
- C. Write down what you need to do differently at the next interview.
- D. Prepare an After-Interview Thank You letter for everyone who interviewed you.
- E. Be prepared to follow up with the interviewer using various forms – letter, email, phone call – over time until a hiring decision is made but not to the extent that it will be seen as harassment.
- F. When calling the decision-maker, don't leave a message – keep control of the process by asking when would be a better time to reach him/her.

LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES

If your sole criterion for evaluating your effectiveness as an interviewer is whether or not you get a specific offer, then you are likely to experience considerable disappointment. After all, there is always a great deal of rejection in sales, because you don't have all that much control. Sometimes, in spite of all your preparation, and for reasons beyond your control, people don't buy. However, if you set as a goal the objective of making each interview the best one you have ever done and you strive to get several interviews for different jobs, you will find yourself with multiple job offers and real control over your future. Concentrate not on simply getting through this interview, but on improving your interview skills every time.

It is not unusual for you to be blocked mentally, and suddenly not be able to remember any of the questions or stories you prepared. At a time like that, it is a good idea to have notes available. But instead of a notebook with a pad of paper, use 3x5 cards that will easily fit in your pocket or purse. Take one card and on one side put the names of all your stories. On the other side, write the key questions that you need to cover and other secondary topics that might lead to a useful discussion.

SENTENCE COMPLETION EXERCISE

Most students lack sufficient work experience to qualify outright for the jobs they are pursuing. Therefore it becomes critical that you learn how to communicate your potential. You go to school to gain knowledge and develop skills through coursework, Internships, class projects, and homework. We know that the best predictor of future performance is past behavior, which tells us that sharing examples of your related school work is an effective job search tool. The tendency is however, to downplay the significance of those projects because we didn't get paid to do them. We often fail to recognize them as significant accomplishments worthy of being mentioned. After all, these projects are tangible evidence that you are a qualified, effective worker who is able to utilize particular skills to produce results.

A story is an excellent way to demonstrate our potential, but it is really hard to come up with stories to tell. Please complete as many of the following sentence fragments as you can. Quantify your examples using dollars, time, percentages, of increase or decrease, or cost reductions, as much as possible. From these examples you will be able to create stories to tell employers.

IN SCHOOL

1. One project I did in school that I felt really good about was _____

2. One time that I went beyond what was asked of me by the professor was _____

3. One group project where I ended up doing most of the work was _____

4. One homework assignment in my major I really enjoyed was _____

5. One project I did for extra credit was _____

6. One time the teacher told the whole class about my project was when _____

7. One time I got an "A" on an assignment that surprised me was _____

8. One time I won an award in school was for _____

9. One time my grade on a project was near the top of the class was when _____

10. One time the teacher complimented my work was _____

11. One time I helped someone else in my class by _____

ON AN INTERNSHIP/JOB

12. One time I solved a problem was when _____

13. One time I reduced complaints by _____

14. One thing I did at work that I felt really good about was _____

15. One time I reorganized a mess when _____

16. One time when I was able to do more with less was _____

17. One time I improved a process or procedure that _____

18. One good thing my boss said in a performance review was _____

19. One time I went beyond what was required to just do the job by _____

20. One good thing my boss said about me was _____

21. One time I dealt with an angry customer/client/co-worker by _____

22. One time I streamlined a program/project/operation by _____

23. One time I received a compliment or award for _____

24. One time I made a customer happy by _____

25. One time I saved the company money by _____

26. One time I made the company money when _____

27. One time I coordinated a project with _____

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY USING STORIES

We live in a story-based society. Our society uses stories to communicate importance, meaning and values. Urban legends, for example, are stories filled with subtle meaning used by members of society to pass on to others the rules whereby we live. Parents have utilized stories for generations to pass on values to their children. They frequently gossip about neighbors' problems and use those stories to pass on to their children their understanding of how to live successfully and effectively within our society.

Over the generations of story-telling, we have developed an almost innate ability to decipher stories. This becomes important to the job seeker because it makes stories an effective job search tool. The job seeker tells a story and decision-makers use their own ability to draw meaning from that story to interpret the job seeker's potential as a problem-solver.

The best predictor of future behavior is past performance. Job seekers are trying to demonstrate to others that they will be high performers in the future and valuable employees. The best way to do that is to tell stories of past situations where they were high performers and where their efforts made a difference.

Unfortunately, American society has complicated matters by also teaching us that it is inappropriate to brag about ourselves and aggrandize our accomplishments. As a result, when we do a good job of overcoming an obstacle, the tendency is to downplay the significance of our efforts and depreciate our worth. Instead we live by the philosophy that we should let our actions show what type of people we are and we leave it up to others to tell stories about us. As a result of this societal training, we have real difficulty coming up with stories about our accomplishments and in fact we rarely acknowledge to ourselves that we even made a difference.

This is where the acronym SAC becomes a useful tool to the job seeker. When you are telling a SAC story, you are not bragging, you are simply telling a factual story. We need a way to present our stories in a short and concise manner fitting the time limitations of an interaction with a potential employer, yet one which will also do the job of communicating our potential.

SAC stands for: Situation
Action
Consequence

Review the sentence completion exercise you just completed. Identify the accomplishments which are most closely related to the work you will do in this careers. Use the SAC form on the following page to develop at least TEN stories about events/exercises/volunteer and work experiences before your interview. Photocopy this next page and write one story on each page.

SAC Stories

TITLE _____

SITUATION: (Describe the class assignment, problem, condition, situation, need, or challenge presented by this story.)

ACTION: (What did you do to complete the assignment, correct the problem, resolve the situation, or take advantage of an opportunity?)

CONSEQUENCE: (What were the results of your actions? Quantify the benefit wherever possible by presenting the result in dollars, percentages, decreases, increases, reductions, time, numbers of people or products, etc.)

QUESTION: Pick a topic covered by your SAC and ask an open-ended question about that topic to help you learn additional information.

GENERATING QUESTIONS TO ASK

Questions help you learn about available jobs and the companies themselves. Some job seekers seem to learn more and get farther in the interview faster than others. If you were to tape record the conversations of effective job seekers and analyze those conversations, you would find that the types of questions being asked are formed differently and cause company representatives to do more of the talking and reveal more important information. The most effective questions are ones that focus on the company's needs, problems and challenges. Sometimes you find out that they are not even aware that these issues are problems. Often you find that they are not devoting the time, energy, and resources to solving the problem. But the crucial motivator is when you help them begin to realize what the costs are for not solving these problems now. That is when they will hire you. Our goal in this lesson is to teach you the secrets of asking questions that focus on the needs, problems, and challenges of the organization so you can become an expert at asking questions.

QUESTION COMPOSITION

Questions are either open or closed. Closed questions are ones that can be answered with a yes or no, or request specific information. Open questions cannot be answered by yes or no and force the speaker to talk about a subject.

CLOSED questions often begin with:

Are	Did
Do	Would
Can	Is
Does	Which

OPEN questions begin with:

Who	At what time
What	Tell me about
When	In what way
Where	In which way
Why	Describe
How	To what extent

After all, the company will not hire you because you are a nice person. They will not hire you because they like your resume. Only if the company has or anticipates having a problem that must be solved and you are able to demonstrate that you have the ability to solve that problem, will they hire you. The difficulty job seekers face is how to identify those problems. As a job seeker, you don't know what it is that you don't know and you must ask open-ended questions that bring out into the open what problems the company is having in your area of expertise. You are trying to get them to identify what those pivotal needs, problems and challenges are. To do that, you must ask open-ended, fact-finding questions.

SAMPLE PROBING QUESTIONS

Here are examples of questions that may be useful to you as you prepare questions for companies you are interviewing. Identify about ten questions you like the best. Write them on a 3x5 card and take them to the interview with you.

1. What areas of the company do you believe offer the greatest opportunity for growth?
2. How has the growth of your company made it difficult to get tasks completed?
3. What is your current rate of turnover in this department?
4. To what extent has the rate of employee turnover caused problems for you?
5. How well do you feel your company is meeting customer needs?
6. What issues are you currently facing with staff productivity?
7. What are some of the services you'd like to offer customers, but can't right now?
8. How do you collect information on quality control efforts?
9. What programs or services are not cost-effective? Why?
10. What would you like to see employees do differently to save you money and improve profits?
11. How do you stay current on new developments in the field?
12. How do the results of this department affect the rest of the company?
13. What are the most difficult projects the company is currently working on?
14. How does your company compare to that of your competitors?
15. What are your goals for the future of the company?
16. How well do your current employees work together?
17. What types of problems/situations give the company the most trouble?
18. What would be the most difficult problem I would face if you offered me this job?
19. Tell me about the last time the company had to choose between producing a quality service and meeting a deadline.
20. Tell me about a current project where the company had to overcome major obstacles to get it completed.
21. What types of situations cause your employees the greatest amount of stress?

SCREENING-OUT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Instructions: Please write out an answer for each question as you would in an interview. Use additional paper as necessary. (Hint: Look for opportunities to tell stories.)

1. Tell me about yourself. (Hint – Select four words that describe you and build an answer around them)
2. What do you know about our organization?
3. What are your qualifications for this position?
4. Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud of your contribution.
5. What aspects of this position interest you the most?
6. Why should we hire you?
7. What are your short and long term career goals? (Short-term is to make this transition, get into this field, get this job. Long-term is to be an effective leader/manager and make a difference)
8. What are your greatest strengths?
9. What is your greatest weakness?

10. Tell me about your experience in school.

11. What are your salary requirements?

12. What else do you think I should know about you?

ANSWERING “WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESS?”

Ideally you want to answer every interview question in the positive. Because this question asks for negative information, it’s difficult to answer correctly. Giving careful thought to your own uniqueness, you should try to come up with an answer that is both true and causes the interviewer to think well of you. Here are some examples.

1. I’ve been told that I set my standards for myself too high.
2. Sometimes I come on too strong with my ideas.
3. I’m something of a “workaholic” and need to develop a better balance between my commitment to the tasks I have taken on and my outside activities.
4. I’ve been known to get upset with others who are _____ (late to meetings, don’t have their facts straight, obviously lying, lazy, take advantage of the system for their own personal gain, etc.)
5. I prefer to think of it not as an area of weakness, but as an area I am working to improve. For example, I would really like to improve my communication skills.
6. Sometimes I expect too much from those I work with.
7. I am a very detailed person and when I do problem-solving, I strive for the best answer I can find, when in fact something I come up with right away, would often work just as well.
8. Sometimes I’m impatient with people who are slow to grasp new ideas.
9. I have a strong need for organization and order. I have found that being a neat and tidy person can bother other people.
10. I’m a very creative person and sometimes others feel I’m trying to show them up when I come up with new ideas before they do.

AFTER INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

After each job interview and before you have even left the parking lot, while the details of the interview are fresh in your mind, answer these questions. (Use additional paper as necessary.)

1. How did the interview go?
2. What did you do or say that you feel went well?
3. What did you do or say that you think needs improvement or practice?
4. What needs, challenges, or problems did you uncover?
5. What questions asked were you unprepared for?
6. What would you do differently to demonstrate your value?
7. How were you able to create a positive image?
8. Which answers to questions need to be shortened next time?
9. What seemed to be the interviewer's greatest area(s) of concern?
10. What could you have said to minimize or eliminate those concern(s)?

SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

Every salary negotiator goes through two negotiations; the first is with yourself to decide what you want, and the second is with the employer to finalize employment terms. Preparation is necessary to help you identify what the ideal variables. Once you can define the ideal, you can make better decisions about any compromises you may have to make.

Part of the negotiation process is to identify what they will automatically give you as a standard benefit and what would be considered additional benefits. In your exploration questions, ask them to detail the standard benefits you could expect to receive.

Know the going rates in your field. Go to <http://www.careeronestop.org/> and find out what are the salaries in your area. Don't forget to use the Detailed Wages link to obtain wages on your specific city.

Know the differences in cost of living between where you live now and where you would live if they hire you. For example, if you made \$35,000 in Greenville, it would take \$80,000 for the same standard of living in New York City. If you accepted a job in New York at \$25 an hour, it might seem like a great deal of money until you learned that the cost of housing is 400 times higher there. Go to www.bestplaces.net/html/cost_of_living.html and compare your current cost of living to the cities you are considering.

Know what it is about your skills and abilities that interests them the most (that is, understand your bargaining power).

Plan what you will say and how you will say it. Develop convincing rebuttals to possible objections. Remember, the employer *expects* to have to bargain. Your job is to convince him or her that what you bring to the relationship is valuable and should be compensated accordingly.

Improve your delivery by practicing with us in The Career Center, your roommate, your girlfriend, your spouse, or even a tape recorder.

TIMING

There are three phases of salary negotiations.

First Phase

Whoever names a salary figure first loses, so discuss salary only *after* you have been offered the job, in all other cases dodge the topic.

In the initial screening process, they will ask: "What are your salary requirements?"

You respond, "In the past I have always been paid according to the responsibilities of the position. I really don't know enough about this position to say. Tell me, what did you like best about the performance of the person who held this position last?" (DISTRACT THEM WITH A QUESTION).

Second Phase

After rapport and interest has been established, but before they are convinced that you are the right person for the job, they ask: "What salary are you expecting?"

You respond, "What salary range have you budgeted for the position?" Once they give you a range, you can position yourself in the top half of that range. They say, "The range is \$35-45,000." You say, "Well that's about what I had in mind, but I see myself between \$40-50,000."

Once they understand what it will take to get you, they won't pursue it any further until they are ready to make an offer. If they continue to pursue a specific figure say, "Does this mean that you are prepared to make me an offer?"

Third Phase

Once they have made you an actual offer, you begin the process of negotiating first the salary, then the benefits.

If they offer you the job *without* talking about salary and benefits, you say. "I am thrilled to hear that you want to hire me. What is the offer you are making?"

Negotiate benefits only after your salary has been agreed upon.

Set realistic, achievable salary and benefit goals. Remember, pigs get fatter, hogs get slaughtered.

HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Remember, the company would never have made an offer if they didn't want you and that they tend to put a higher value on something if they have to pay a higher price for it.

When you feel you have the least leverage to negotiate, is when you must demonstrate the most self-confidence. If you cannot communicate a fundamental regard for yourself and your skills, then successful negotiations will elude you.

Contrary to public belief, standing up for yourself does not threaten the likelihood of the company hiring you, it *strengthens* it. Employers quickly conclude that confident negotiators, who can look out for their own interests, are probably better equipped to look out for the company's interests as well.

You may feel that you cannot afford to negotiate, when in fact, you cannot afford *not* to negotiate. If you don't place a high worth on your skills and talents, neither will the employer and vice versa.

DO'S & DON'TS

1. DON'T be the first to mention a figure or a range.
2. DO know what you are worth.
3. DON'T accept an offer at the time it is made.
4. DON'T be afraid to ask for more time to make the best decision (especially if you have other options).
5. DON'T accept any counter offers from your current employer. Forget it and move on (More than 50% of all employees who accept counter offers change companies within the following 24 months).
6. DO sidestep the money question until you know the employer is definitely interested in you.

7. DO negotiate an early salary and performance review regardless of what they offer you.
8. DO negotiate only with the decision-maker.
9. DON'T start negotiating until *after* you have received an offer.
10. DO write a thank you letter immediately after your interview and *mail* it. Don't email the letter unless they will make a decision before the letter could reach them.

If the salary and benefits you are asking for are realistic, approach the negotiation with a cooperative and friendly, but persistent attitude. If you have effectively presented what you can do to make a difference within their organization, they will hire you.