

Surveys of employer point to the interview as the single most important measure in determining whether or not to offer employment to a candidate. The resume and cover letter may get your foot in the door, but it is the interview that determines whether or not you will get the job. Preparing ahead of time is essential.

Be Prepared

- Focus on your goals; know what you want from this position and this company.
- Identify your main strengths; why you would be good at this job.
- Assess all pertinent information concerning your other strengths, skills, abilities, and interests.
- Learn as much as you can about the job description and the organization. Info on the organization can be found on their website, in article searches, in company presentations, career fairs, or on-line at www.wetfeet.com or www.vault.com. It would be useful to arrange informational interviews with others in the field
- Anticipate the questions an employer will ask and practice your responses **out loud**.
- Prepare your own questions to ask (see list below).

Types of Interviews

One-on-one: the most common type.

Panel: when you are interviewed by more than one person, respond to each individual's question, focusing on that person, and then including the others in your eye contact.

Demonstration/Test: the candidate is asked to demonstrate their skills (computer, writing, etc.).

Tour: a combination of techniques described above in a series of one-on-one interviews.

Group: a rare situation; several candidates are interviewed simultaneously in the same room.

Stress: a technique that purposefully attempts to make you uncomfortable to see how you will respond. Used primarily for stressful jobs.

Informational Interviews: are not job interviews, but ways to learn about careers, and develop opportunities and contacts. See SSU handout "Networking Guidelines."

Remember that the interview is being done by individuals of varying expertise. Some are novices and others are extremely sophisticated in the art of the interview. Pay attention to your interviewer's body language and your own. Give them a firm handshake, make good eye contact, and remember to smile!

The intent of the interview for both you and the employer is to determine if you are a good fit for the team and organization.

Interview Questions

The employer has to determine which candidate is best suited for the actual duties of the position, and also for the make-up of the team, as well as the organizational goals and culture. If you prepare adequately, the interview will be your best opportunity to demonstrate how you are a good fit for this position, and would be an asset to the organization.

Common Interview Questions

- What are your short- and long-term goals? How does this position fit into your goals?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

(**Hint:** Describe 4-5 strengths with a very brief example of each, and one weakness that is not a negative factor for the position. Follow it up on a positive note with your recent progress in managing your weakness. Ex. "I tend to take on too much to do, and have to burn the midnight oil to finish, but recently I've been developing better time management skills.")

- What motivates you to put forth your best effort?
- Why should I hire you?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- Describe your most rewarding experience or accomplishment.
- Describe a time when you worked with a team to accomplish a challenging task.
- What led you to choose your college major?
- What were your favorite college courses? Least

favorite? Why?

- What jobs have you held? Why did you leave your previous job?
- What jobs have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
- What training or qualifications do you have for a job like this?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like this?
- What kind of people do you most like working with? What type of supervisor?

Behavioral-Based Interviewing

Employers often ask "behavioral" questions such as "Describe a time you faced a challenge with a team, and how you handled it." Prepare specific examples from your work, school, or extracurricular life to demonstrate your job-related behavior in real-life terms. This is a powerful way to respond to questions, even if they are not framed in behavioral terms. More examples:

- Describe an innovative idea you produced that led to the success of a project.
- Think of a difficult situation with a co-worker, and describe how you handled it.
- By providing examples, demonstrate that you can adapt to diverse people and situations.

Sample Questions for You to Ask

An indication of your motivation and interest can be presented in the form of questions asked of the potential employer. It is good to have several questions formulated to ask both about the organization and about the specific position. Use the list below as a guideline to formulate questions that are relevant to you personally.

- What kind of person are you looking for?
- Describe typical first-year assignments. What is the career path for this position?
- What kind of training is given to new employees?
- What are the challenging facets of this job?
- What is the biggest challenge facing this group/organization right now?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?

- What is the organization's record of employment stability?
- What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
- What makes your firm different from your competitors?
- Can you describe the work environment?
- How would you describe your organization's culture and preferred management style?
- What are your expectations for new hires?
- What characteristics does a successful person have in your company?

Communication in the interview situation involves dialogue — listening as well as presenting information. The interview is the place where each party gets the opportunity to look, listen, and learn about the other. Some key information for you to request includes the time-line for hiring, and when to expect to hear from the prospective employer. Follow-up is important! Ask for your interviewer's business card to make it easier.

Follow Up

- Write a professional thank-you letter, stressing how interested you are in the position. Contact the company if you do not hear from them by the agreed upon time. This demonstrates your motivation and ability to follow through.
- Realize that the job market is competitive. Analyze each interview as a learning experience. Each one is a chance to polish your interviewing skills.
- Keep a log. Addresses, phone numbers, and dates are the most consistently used information. Make sure you note who refers you to whom and any further instructions given by the interviewer.
- Searching for employment can feel like a roller-coaster. Remember that you can do everything right and still not get the job. Do your best and then let go of the past. Your worth as a person does not depend on landing any particular job. Use a support system of family and friends to help you keep up your positive attitude.

Appearance and Attire

The first impression you make when you arrive for your interview will create an image in the mind of your interviewer that can have a profound effect on your success or failure with that organization. According to research, at least 80% of the interviewer's opinion about you is derived from your body language, tone of voice, and appearance (which is a combination of your dress and grooming). It is important for you

to understand the appropriate "dress code" expected for your interview (you can ask). Some tips on dressing for your interview:

- Dress conservatively, to look professional and competent. A suit is usually the best choice (unless you are interviewing in an extremely casual workplace – in which case you should dress a level more formally).
- Coordinate your colors and patterns. Darker colors are usually preferred. Black shoes best, with no open toes for women.
- Pay attention to your grooming.
- Men should avoid earrings.
- Use little or no perfume with minimal jewelry.
- Make sure your hair is well cut and groomed.
- Your clothes should be neat, pressed, and clean.
- Make sure your shoes are clean and polished.
- Check your appearance in a mirror before entering your interview.

Factors Which Frequently Lead to Rejection During a Job Search

- Lack of planning for career. No clear goals.
- Lack of interest or enthusiasm, passive.
- Inability to express oneself clearly
- Lack of confidence and poise, nervous.
- Overbearing or know-it-all attitude.
- Overemphasis on money or best salary offer.
- Unwillingness to learn, or start at bottom.
- Failure to establish eye contact.
- Make excuses, evasive.
- Poor personal appearance.
- Lack of tact
- Lack of maturity.
- Indecision.

- Sloppy application materials.
- Shopping around—fishing for just any job.
- Little sense of humor.
- Overemphasis on whom s/he knows.
- Lack of social/professional etiquette.
- Intolerant/prejudiced.

Follow These Steps for Your Dream Job

- Get your goal clearly in focus.
- Research potential employers that fit *you*.
- Network to tap into the hidden job market. Informational interviews are useful for this (see handout "Networking Guidelines.").
- Project your enthusiasm and desire to be employed by this organization, with 2-3 reasons why you want to work for them. Enthusiasm is refreshing and contagious. Employers respond.
- Organize your lists and follow up.
- DON'T GIVE UP!! Have fun while searching.

Career Services Resources on Interviewing

Books

- [Interview for Success](#)
- [Job Search Handbook for People with Disabilities](#)
- [The Insiders Guide to Finding the Perfect Job](#)
- [Knock 'Em Dead](#)

Videos

- [Quick Interview Video](#)
- [Tapping the Hidden Job Market](#) (on informational interviews)

Websites

General career advice and job listings on Seawolf Jobs on Career Services website: www.sonoma.edu/sas/crc

Researching Employers:
www.jobstar.oirg
www.socojoblink.org
www.hoovers.com
www.vault.com
www.wetfeet.com

