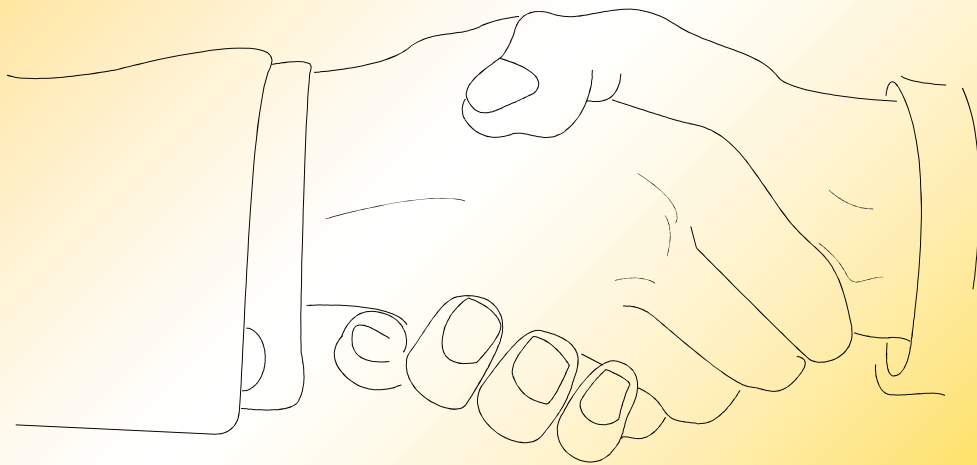


INTERVIEWING HANDBOOK

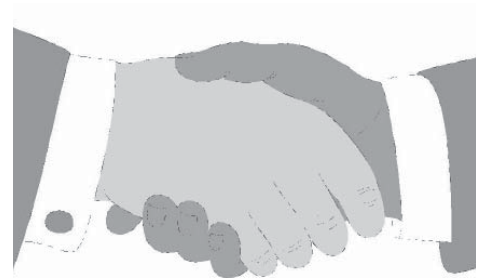


Master the Interviewing Process

The key ingredient to successful interviewing is confidence. You should feel good about yourself and your abilities going into an interview. After all, the company must be interested in you or you would not have been granted an interview.

Before the Interview:

One of the keys to a confident interview is doing your homework. It is difficult to make a strong case for yourself if you don't know much about the company and the position. You spend hours studying for one class exam; your job search requires equal attention! Know the company's line of business, how long they have been in existence, milestones in their history, their financial situation, and plans for future growth (or conversely, cutbacks).



Resources:

- ✓ ReferenceUSA, available in the Career Center's computer lab
- ✓ Company web site
- ✓ Business magazines and newspapers
- ✓ Chamber of Commerce publications
- ✓ People who work/have worked for the organization
- ✓ Company annual report
- ✓ Reference materials in the Career Center and Pickler Memorial Library

What to take to the interview:

- ✓ Extra résumés and reference pages
- ✓ A padfolio to hold your résumé, cover letter, reference pages, list of questions to ask the employer, and business cards which you collect during the interview (in most cases, a briefcase is more than you need)
- ✓ Directions (which exit, which building, which room, whom do I ask for, how long will it take to get there?)

Typical screening interview format:

- ✓ Introductions and breaking the ice (“small talk”)
 - + Use a firm handshake, speak your name clearly, and smile.
 - + Understand that the small talk is intended to relax and transition you into the interview.
- ✓ Content questioning, or questions put to you (See examples beginning on page 7.)
- ✓ Information about the organization provided by the interviewer
 - + The type of information you receive here will depend on who is interviewing you - it could be information about benefits or the specific position you’re applying for.
- ✓ Your chance to ask questions
 - + You **MUST** have well thought-out questions to ask, based on your research.
 - + You can write these questions in your portfolio and refer to them during this portion of the interview (see examples below).
- ✓ Closing the interview
 - + Thank the interviewer for his/her time.
 - + Re-state your interest in the position.
 - + Determine what the next step in the hiring process is, and offer to take positive action.
 - “Thank you again for this interview, Mr. Sullivan. It seems as though my internship with XYZ makes me an ideal candidate for this position. I’m wondering if you could tell me what the next step in the hiring process is?”
 - “Mr. Sullivan, would it be o.k. if I called you at the end of the week to see how the hiring process is coming along?”

Interviewing Tips:

Many of the questions in an interview, such as “tell me about a goal you’ve set for yourself,” don’t have a right answer. Rather, they allow the interviewer to determine whether or not you are goal oriented. Often, the interviewer simply wants to see how your mind works, and garner information about such things as your ability to communicate and whether or not you are a positive individual.

The “tell me about yourself ” question can be a tricky one. Because it will be the first question asked if it is asked at all, it is important that you carefully prepare your response. Using the format of past, present, and future, give a two-three minute “commercial” about yourself. Feel free to interject personal information, but be cautious in bringing up sensitive issues such as children or physical limitations. As a general rule, only include information that would be perceived as neutral or positive - when in doubt, don’t mention it.

Additional Tips:

- Approach the interview with a positive attitude and sincere interest in the company.
- Pay attention to your appearance. You want to appear professional, so dress conservatively.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early for the interview (allow enough time to go to the restroom and check your grooming).
- Greet the secretary/receptionist politely and let him/her know why you are there.
- Provide a firm handshake coupled with a smile and good eye contact.
- Wait to be seated until the interviewer offers.
- Let the interviewer initiate the conversation.
- Be friendly, relaxed; be yourself.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Communicate accomplishments.
- Do not monopolize the conversation, but be an active participant.
- Be an attentive listener when the interviewer is speaking.
- Respond to questions with more than a yes or no answer.
- Show interest through asking well-thought-out questions.
- Do not try to fill in the silent spots. You may tend to ramble.
- Display your personality and achievements, initiating as well as responding.
- Accentuate the positives. Be optimistic. Display self-confidence, ambition and a competitive attitude. Be sure your good points get across to the interviewer.
- Emphasize your special skills and interests.
- To close, thank the interviewer for his/her time, shake his/her hand, re-state your interest in the position, and inquire as to the next step in the hiring process.
- Send a thank you note to the people who interviewed you within 24 hours. It is preferable to do this via snail mail or in person, although e-mail is better than not sending one at all!

Behavioral Interviewing:

Many organizations use behavioral interviewing in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral-based interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It provides a more objective set of facts to make employment decisions than other interviewing methods.

Typical Questions:

- ✓ Tell me about a situation where you had to take on responsibility.
- ✓ Tell me about a situation where you utilized your initiative.
- ✓ Tell me about a time when you had to be especially flexible.
- ✓ Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you've had to complete.
- ✓ Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

To master behavioral interviewing, you must give specific examples to illustrate the quality you're being asked about. Using persuasive language, tell a "story" about specific situation, remembering to give the conclusion and what you learned from that experience.

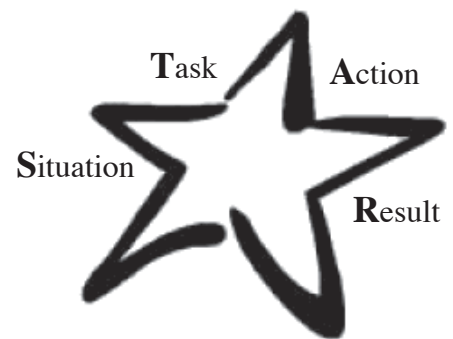
The STAR Method:

STAR approach: **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esults

If the interviewer asks you about your ability to work as part of a team, your answer may sound something like this:

Example:

"I have a great deal of experience working in teams, and I really excel in that environment. For example, (**S**ituation) during my senior year I took a marketing research class. (**T**ask) Our group worked on a project for the Career Center, trying to determine reasons why some students don't utilize the Career Center. To do this, (**A**ction) our team decided to survey students as they entered and left the campus library. We had to work closely to develop the survey and to coordinate the times that we stood outside the library. We also spent a lot of time analyzing the data together, and preparing our final report. As a result (**R**esult) our project provided the Career Center with helpful data, and our group received an "A."



The Career Center Can Help You Prepare:

The Career Center offers several options to help you gain experience and confidence in your interviewing skills.

- **The Perfect Interview:** A computer based program that allows you to select the types of questions you feel you need to work with most. Your interview is recorded so that you may go back and review your answers. You can also listen to sample responses to questions for ideas as to what type of information interviewers are seeking with specific questions.
- **Student Mock Interviews:** Sit for an interview with a trained mock interviewer who will select questions appropriate for a screening/initial interview for your field. You will be videotaped so you can review your answers as well as non-verbal and verbal mannerisms. You must sign up in advance; time slots are on a first-come basis and your resume must be turned in 24 hours in advance of the interview. Professional business attire is required for the interview.
- **Phone Mock Interviews:** Many companies are utilizing phone interviews for their initial screening interviews to narrow the field of potential job candidates. Sit for a phone interview with a trained mock interviewer in your field of interest. You must sign up in advance; time slots are on a first-come basis and your résumé must be turned in 24 hours in advance of the interview.
- **SCORE/ Employer Mock Interviews:** At advertised times, the Career Center hosts professionals who will do mock interviews to help you gain experience. These will be advertised and are on a sign-up, first-come basis. Your résumé must be turned in 24 hours in advance and professional business attire is required.

A guide to selecting the appropriate mock interview

	The Perfect Interview	Student Mock Interview	Phone Mock Interview	SCORE/ Employer Mock Interviews
Class Requirement	✓	✓		
Organization Requirement	✓			
No/Little Interviewing Experience	✓	✓		
Limited time availability	✓			
Personal Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
Actively interviewing for Internships	✓	✓	✓	✓
Actively interviewing for jobs	✓	✓	✓	✓

Telephone Interviewing Tips:

Be Prepared:

- Have a copy of your resume, transcript, and the job description in front of you during the interview.
- Keep a log of the companies and titles of jobs you applied for, which will help you be better prepared if you are called unexpectedly. Have at least one substantive question ready for each company to which you have applied.
- Prepare a “30 second commercial” to sell yourself to the company and practice, practice, practice. This could be the answer to “Tell me why we should hire you,” “Tell me about yourself,” or “How have you been preparing yourself for this job?” Record your commercial and listen to what an interviewer will hear. Do this several times to get comfortable with what you are saying.

Be Professional:

- Record a professional message for your answering machine or voice mail.
- Have a “canned” response ready for a recruiter if you’re caught off guard. That could be something like, “I was actually on my way out the door for class. I’m very interested in talking with you about this position. Can I arrange a time to call you back this afternoon?” This gives you the opportunity to review the job description and other reference materials, and be prepared with some questions.
- Turn off music or the TV during the interview.
- Don’t eat, drink or chew gum during the interview.
- Don’t type on your computer during the interview.
- Don’t put an interviewer on hold to take call waiting.
- Treat the phone interview just as you would an in-person interview. Dress professionally.
 - + This makes a noticeable difference in both your mindset and your presentation.

Be Personable:

- Be enthusiastic- show interest in the position and the organization.
- Ask pertinent questions about the job and company. This is not the time to discuss salary, benefits, and/or hours.
- Talk slowly and show self-confidence.
- Think before you speak.
- Remember the interviewer can not see your body language or gestures. Your voice inflection and the words you say are all he or she has to go on. A smile on your face comes through in your voice and will reflect enthusiasm.
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time.



Sample Interview Questions:

10 Commonly Asked Questions:

- Tell me about yourself...
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What is your work/management style?
- What are your future career plans?
- Why are you interested in our company?
- How did you get along with your last manager?
- How would your peers/subordinates/manager describe you?
- What are your salary requirements?



Communication:

- How do you rate yourself as a presenter?
- Cite examples of accomplishments where you have been an excellent communicator.
- How do you keep subordinates, colleagues, bosses, and clients informed?
- Give me an example of putting your foot in your mouth professionally.
- Do you communicate most by phone, voice mail, memo, or face-to-face?

Culture/Work Environment:

- What did you like least in your last position?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What type of work interests you?
- Are you presently geographically mobile? In the future?
- Do you have a geographical preference?
- What was morale like at your last company?
- What is the worst thing you have heard about our company?
- What is least appealing about this position?
- What are your expectations of a new company?
- What is most appealing in this position?

Behavior/Accomplishments:

- Describe the project that best exemplifies your analytical skills.
- We are looking at several candidates. What makes you unique?
- Tell me about the planning processes that you have found most useful.
- Looking back at college, what were your greatest challenges?
- What have been some of the more important aspects of your education?
- Why did you select the school/college/university you attended?
- How did you choose this particular field of study?
- What courses did you like best? Least? Why?
- Tell me about a time when your course load was heavy. How did you complete all your work?
- Do you feel you have done the best scholastic work of which you are capable?
- How have your extracurricular activities prepared you for the kind of work you've done or influenced?
- Do you think that your extracurricular activities were worth the time you devoted to them? Why?
- What is the most important lesson you have learned in your life?
- What causes pressure or stress for you?
- Describe situations where:
 - a.) your work was criticized;
 - b.) your ideas were criticized;
 - c.) your style or personality was criticized.
- What work satisfaction or achievements have not been realized or at least have not been at the level which you had hoped?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you sought the advice of others?
- How does your experience to date qualify you for this position?
- What has been your greatest life achievement?
- Describe your three greatest strengths.
- Describe your three most significant accomplishments.
- How have you successfully worked with difficult people?
- Tell me about a time you failed and the impact it had on you.

Salary:

- What were you making at your last job?
- What has been your salary history?
- What would be an adequate reward for your efforts?
- Have you ever been refused a salary increase?
- What is the minimum salary you would accept?
- Assuming we make you an offer, what do you see as your future?
- How do you feel about leaving the benefits at your old company?
- What is more important- money or the job itself? Why?

General (or ambiguous):

- Why should I consider a candidate from outside the company?
- What else should I know about you?
- If your credibility were questioned, how would you react?
- Why should we hire you?
- What can you do for us?
- What is the least relevant position (to the current opportunity) you have ever held?
- Describe your perception of the responsibilities of a _____.
- What aspects of your last job did you consider most crucial?
- Describe yourself.
- If you were in our shoes, what kind of person would you select for the job?
- What is your greatest weakness with respect to this position?
- What will this position offer you that others have not?
- What do people criticize about you? Are their concerns valid?
- What have you learned about life so far?
- What is your understanding of our company's products, services, revenues, problems, people, image and history?
- How do you see yourself today?
- What special recognition have you received over your career?
- What stirs your emotions?
- If you had an open choice of career and companies, where would you go?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would that be?
- Who had the most influence on your career? On your life? Why?

Problem Solving:

- How do you resolve conflict?
- Give some instances where you anticipated problems or influenced new directions.
- What decisions have you made that you would do differently today?
- What kinds of decisions or recommendations have you been called on to make?
- Tell me about your most difficult decision.
- How have you improved your decision-making ability over the years?
- Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a problem with no rules or guidelines in place.
- What are some of the things you and your boss disagreed on?
- Tell me how you handled an ethical dilemma.
- How would you structure this job?
- How do you go about making very tough decisions?
- How do you handle conflict with others?

Interpersonal:

- What difficulties do you experience in getting along with others?
- What kinds of people do you like to work with?
- How have you changed since high school?
- Tell me why you would be a good team player.
- How would your friends describe you?
- Describe the kind of individuals who are difficult for you to work with.
- How have you changed since college?
- How would you rate your effectiveness in relating to others? Do you feel it is a natural talent for you?
- What causes you to be short fused or impatient with others?
- What challenges do you face getting along with others?
- Tell me about your character.
- How would your family and friends describe you?
- How would your last boss describe you?
- Describe your personality.
- Describe your overall relationship with most bosses you have worked with.
- Describe your personal style, work style, management style.
- Who was the best colleague you have worked with and why? Who was the worst?
- What makes you effective in small groups?
- We are not sure about how you will fit into our organization. Tell us about your personality, style, and interests.

Work Style:

- Can you take instructions without feeling defensive, hurt or upset?
- How do you accept direction and, at the same time, maintain a critical stance regarding your ideas and values?
- Tell me about your energy level- describe a typical day.
- How do you respond to pressure in the workplace?
- How do you feel you could contribute to the company?
- Do you prefer working alone or with others?
- What have you done that shows your initiative?
- In your last job, what percentage of time did you work alone? Work with others? Work as a team? Where did you find your greatest satisfaction?
- How do you schedule your time? Set priorities?
- How do you feel about evening or weekend work?
- How do you feel about a job that requires a great deal of paperwork and report writing?
- What hours are you accustomed to working?
- Do you prefer working under pressure or with adequate time to plan, organize, and execute?
- What makes you effective in large groups?

Values:

- What values drive you in your professional career?
- What personal factors do you consider most important in evaluating yourself or your success?
- How do you weigh career priorities such as job security, satisfaction, work hours, salary and working conditions in evaluating your needs in a job?
- How will you know when you have found the right job, the right company and the right boss for you?
- What values drive you in your personal life?
- Have you done the best work you are capable of? If not, why?
- What do you want out of life?
- How do you measure success?
- Under what circumstances do you deem it appropriate to lie?
- How would this job meet your long and short-range goals?
- What has been the most significant disappointment in your life?
- How do you personally define success?
- Have you ever left a position because standards of quality were below yours?

Motivational:

- What are the three most important things to you in a new position?
- How did you get your last job?
- What are the pluses and minuses of your last job?
- Why have you changed jobs so frequently?
- Why do you want to get into the _____ field?
- What has been your toughest professional challenge?
- What professional experience has been most valuable to you?
- What consideration have you given to further enhance your performance and personal growth?
- What event has had the greatest influence on your career?
- How long a period of time would you commit to the company?
- What has brought you here today?
- What are some examples of activities and surroundings that motivate you?
- What have you learned from the jobs you have held?
- Do you feel the progress you've made in your career is indicative of your ability?
- What special recognition have you received over your career?
- What other positions are you looking at and what about each is appealing?
- How did your boss get the best out of you?
- Are you willing to go wherever a company might send you?
- What makes you tick?

Management/Leadership:

- Describe your biggest leadership challenge.
- How would your subordinates describe your performance standards?
- What have your experiences been with terminating or removing subordinates?
- How do you get the best performance from an employee?
- What interferes with your management effectiveness?
- Describe your standards of performance.
- How would your subordinates describe your experience in delegation?
- Explain your role as a team leader, team member, and team player.
- What aspects of your last job did you consider most crucial?
- What extracurricular activities were you involved in during college?
- What are some things your boss or supervisor did that you disliked or did not agree with?
- What kinds of leadership roles have you held?
- Describe the ideal boss.
- How did your boss rate your performance?
- How could your boss have done a better job?
- How would you handle two direct reports that were arguing?
- How would you handle an employee cheating on an expense account?
- How would you handle laying off a top performer in the company?
- What style of leadership did your last company support?
- Describe the role of a manager.
- How do you elevate the performance of a subordinate?
- When your boss puts extreme pressure on you how do you generally respond?
- How has your management style changed over your career?
- How do you distinguish management skills from leadership skills?
- How have you handled subordinates' poor decisions?

Change Management:

- Why do you feel you can help/change our organization?
- Do you take calculated risks?
- How do you cope with change?



Topics for Questioning the Employer:

It is a good idea to write your questions down in a padfolio that you bring with you to the interview. When it is your turn to ask questions, simply open your padfolio and feel free to take notes on what you learn. The employer will be impressed that you took the time to write down intelligent, thoughtful questions.

Human Resources:

- How would you describe the position?
- To whom does the position report?
- What can you tell me about the person who would supervise me?
- How might you describe my supervisor's management style?
- Describe the organization's structure.
- How would you describe the culture?
- How did this opening occur?
- Have you offered this position to any internal candidates and what is their status?
- How long has the position been vacant?
- How does this position interact with other departments?
- What is the organization's mission?
- What can I expect the next step in this process to be?

Colleagues/Peers:

- What is it like to work here?
- Describe your job/role here.
- Describe how work gets done here. As a team? As independent contributors?
- How are decisions made?
- How will this position impact you? Your group/department?
- How would you describe the organization culture?
- What types of issues does the supervisor consider critical?
- What do you enjoy most about your job? Least?
- How long have you been with the company?

Manager's Manager:

- In what direction is the business moving?
- What is your vision for the department/division?
- How can I be most successful in this role?
- How does this position fit into your plans for this department/division?
- If I join the company and decide to change fields, can it be done within the company?

Hiring Manager:

- How would you describe your management style?
- Why is the position vacant?
- How long has the position been vacant?
- What do you see as the biggest challenge for this position?
- What are your 60-/90-/120-day goals for this position?
- What are the specific responsibilities/goals of this position?
- How is performance evaluated?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- Does the company have a practice of promoting on merit and of promoting from within?
- What specific skills/experience are you looking for?
- Does the company encourage and support “continuing education” for its employees?
- What opportunities will I have for professional development?
- What would you expect the first assignment to be?
- How would you describe a “typical day” in this position?
- How does this position interact with other departments?
- How long have you been with the organization?
- What other roles have you had with the organization?
- What is your vision for this department/division?
- How can I be most successful in this role?
- What can I expect the next step in this process to be?

Note that these questions center around work content and workplace environment. It is not appropriate to ask questions about salary in the initial interview. Ideally, the employer will initiate the salary discussion in a subsequent interview.



Illegal Questions:

Questions of a personal nature that have no bearing on your ability to do the job are considered to be illegal. Nonetheless, some employers will ask these questions, either out of ignorance or deliberate disregard for the law.

- Marital status
- Dependents/children (number of/age)
- Child care plans
- Pregnancy/ plans regarding parenthood
- Name of spouse
- Head of household/principle wage earner
- Living arrangements
- Request for recent photo with resume application
- National origin
- Native language
- Age or birth date
- Height/weight
- Sexual preferences
- Religion
- Race
- Home or car ownership
- Type of military discharge
- Non-job related handicaps
- Worker's compensation claims on previous jobs

As this is not a complete list, various other personal questions are off limits for the interviewer.

Strategies for Responding to Illegal Questions:

- You may answer the question directly if you choose to and if doing so will not hurt your candidacy.
- Answer the question indirectly. For example, a question about children could be answered by, "Childcare is not an issue for me." This way, you are answering the question they probably wanted to ask.
- You can flatly refuse to answer an illegal question, but you may ruin your chances for employment with that organization.

Dressing for the Interview:

Everyone:

- ✓ Leave off the fragrance! Be aware of fragranced body lotions and deodorants as well. Interview rooms are often quite small, and many individuals are allergic to fragrances.
- ✓ A less than perfect appearance translates to how you would perform the job. Shoes shined, hands well groomed, no obviously worn clothing or accessories - attention to detail!
- ✓ Dress above what the job requires.
- ✓ No obvious piercings other than one earring in each ear for women; cover tatoos.

Men:

- ✓ First choice in most instances is a matched suit, in solid or pinstriped grey or navy blue.
- ✓ Second choice - slacks and a coordinating blazer (not Dockers or khakis).
- ✓ Belts should be leather with no obvious signs of wear, and should coordinate with pants.
- ✓ Socks should be dark and in the same color family as your slacks and shoes, show no obvious signs of wear and cover your legs at all times.
- ✓ No necklaces or jewelry other than a wedding ring, class ring, and a dress watch.
- ✓ Resist conversational ties; stick with silk ties in a stripe, paisley, or small pattern.
- ✓ Wear lace-up (rather than slip on) dress shoes in the same color family as your suit; they should be freshly polished.

Women:

- ✓ First choice - classic suit, in navy blue, grey, brown or black (colors you would see men in).
- ✓ Second choice - skirt or pants and coordinating blazer.
- ✓ Generally, dresses are not a good interview choice.
- ✓ Wear hair up if it is long or wild.
- ✓ Minimal jewelry; pearls and classic gold/silver pieces (nothing that dangles).
- ✓ If you choose to wear nail polish, make sure it is not chipped and in an appropriate color; nails not excessively long.
- ✓ Pantyhose with skirts, even in the summer; coordinate with clothing or use skin tone.
- ✓ Shoes should be a closed heel, closed toe pump in a conservative color.
- ✓ Makeup that makes you look "natural" - no bright lips or sparkles.



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