

TRUMAN • STATE • UNIVERSIT

Master the Interview Process

The key ingredient to a successful interview 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 do not 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).

Additionally, you should be able to provide success stories which showcase your experiences related to this position. These stories should emphasize your ability to effectively utilize relevant skills such as: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, organization, and initiative.

Resources

- truman.experience.com
- LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network
- Company website
- 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

One of the keys to a confident interview is doing your homework.



What to Take to the Interview

- Extra résumés and list of references
- A padfolio to hold your résumé, cover letter, references, 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), and be sure to bring a pen as well.
- Directions (which exit, which building, which room, whom do I ask for, how long will it take to get there?) and a phone number in case of unexpected delays.

Typical Screening Interview

- 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 asked of 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, the company as a whole, or the specific position for which you are applying.
- 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 padfolio and refer to them during this portion of the interview (see examples on pages 13-14).

- Closing the interview
 - \bigcirc Thank the interviewer for his/her time.
 - \bigcirc Re-state your interest in the position.
 - Determine the next step in the hiring process 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 which is exciting. What is the next step in the hiring process?"
 - "Mr. Sullivan, I will call you at the end of the week to inquire where you are in the selection process and if I can provide any additional information."

... bring a pen as well.



Tips for a Successful Interview

Many of the questions in an interview do not have a right answer. Often the interviewer simply wants to see how your mind works, how your past successes/experiences provided you with skills relevant to this position, and determine fit and match for both you and the employer.

Use a firm

handshake,

speak your

name clearly,

and smile.

- 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 appearance).
- Greet the secretary/receptionist politely and let him/her know why you are there.
- Make sure to wait to be seated until the interviewer offers.
- Let the interviewer initiate the conversation and maintain good eye contact.
- Communicate accomplishments, skills, and interests related to the position.
- Do not monopolize the conversation, but be an active participant. Likewise, be an attentive listener when the interviewer is speaking.

- Respond to questions with more than a yes or no answer. Do not try to fill in the silent spaces, 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.
 - Approach the interview with a positive attitude and sincere interest in the company.
 - Send a thank you note to the people who interviewed you within 48 hours. It is preferable to do this via snail mail, in person or e-mail.



Behavioral Interview

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 demonstrated initiative.
- Tell me about a time when you had to be especially flexible.

- Describe the most significant or creative presentation you have had to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.

To master behavioral interviewing, you must give specific examples to illustrate the characteristic you are being asked about. Using persuasive language, tell a story about a specific situation, remembering to give the conclusion and what you learned from that experience (see STAR Method below).

The STAR Method

STAR approach: Situation, Task, Action, Results

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, (Situation) during my senior year I took a marketing research class. (Task) Our group worked on a project for the Career Center, trying to determine reasons some students do not utilize their services. To do this, (Action) 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 together analyzing the data, and preparing our final report. As a result (Result) 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 opportunities to help you gain experience and confidence in your interviewing skills. Time slots are on a first-come basis and your résumé must be turned in 24 hours in advance of the interview.

- Student-Led Mock Interviews: Participate in an interview with a trained mock interviewer who will select questions appropriate for a screening/initial interview for your field. You will be recorded so you can review your answers as well as non-verbal and verbal mannerisms. Professional business attire is required for the interview.
- SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives)/Alumni Mock Interviews: At advertised times, the Career Center hosts professionals who will conduct mock interviews to help you gain experience. These interviews will be advertised in advance in order for you to register. Professional business attire is required.
- Phone Mock Interviews: Many companies utilize phone interviews for their initial screening interviews to narrow the field of potential job candidates.

"" You can review your answers as well as non-verbal and verbal mannes mannerisms.



Telephone Interview Tips

Be Prepared

- Have a copy of your résumé, transcripts, and the job description in front of you during the interview.
- Keep a log of the companies and titles of jobs for which you have applied. This 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 voicemail.
- Have a "canned" response ready for a recruiter if you are caught off guard. That could be something like, "I was actually on my way out the door for class, but I'm very interested in talking with you about this position. May 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 all electronic devices during the interview.
- Do not eat, drink, chew gum or type on your computer during the interview.
- 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 and 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.
- Remember the interviewer cannot see your body language or gestures. Your voice inflection and your words 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

Self-Knowledge; Skills & Abilities

Tell me about yourself. (Or, describe yourself.)

Strategy: Prepare a 30-60 second commercial about yourself. Use a past-present-future format. Go beyond what your résumé has already told them. Although the focus should be on your qualifications, personal anecdotes/stories are okay as long as it is neutral or positive information. Good example: "I'm from the smallest town in Missouri." Bad example: "I'm an active member of Gamblers Anonymous."

- What do people criticize about you? Are their concerns valid?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would that be?
- What will your references say about you?

Strategy: First of all, be sure to ask your references if they would be willing to provide a strongly positive recommendation for you. Secondly, ask those references what they will say about you.

- Describe the project that best exemplifies your analytical skills.
- We are looking at several candidates. What makes you unique?

Strategy: This is your chance to emphasize your "selling features," your strengths. When discussing your strengths, be certain to use specific examples to bolster your statement. Example: "I'm skilled at electronic information handling. For instance, I tracked my sorority's finances in Excel using spreadsheets and graphs."

- How have your extracurricular activities prepared you for this type of position?
- What causes pressure or stress for you?
- Describe your three greatest strengths.

Strategy: Several of these questions involve talking about your "selling features." Have at least three strengths prepared so you will seem well-rounded and self-reflective. Ideally, you will be reinforcing these strengths throughout the interview.

• What is your greatest weakness?

Strategy: State your weakness and what you are doing to improve it. Make sure that the weakness you describe is not one that would be considered a "fatal flaw," such as an applicant for an accounting position who states that his greatest weakness is that he frequently transposes numbers.

- Describe your three most significant accomplishments.
- Tell me about a time you failed and the impact it had on you.

Strategy: This is a behavioral question. You should give a specific example, using the STAR Method outlined in this book.

- Give an example that illustrates your presentation skills.
- Cite examples of situations where you have been an excellent communicator.
- Give me an example of putting your foot in your mouth professionally.
- Tell me how you handled an ethical dilemma.



How do you go about making very tough decisions?

Strategy: Even though this question is not worded as a behavioral question, you should respond as if it were by giving a specific example of a time when you had to make a tough decision and how you went about it.

- How do you handle conflict?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What causes you to be short fused or impatient with others?
- What challenges do you face getting along with others?
- How would your last boss describe you?
- Describe your personality.
- Describe your overall relationship with most supervisors with whom you have worked.
- What makes you effective in small groups?
- What have you done that shows your initiative?
- What values drive you in your professional career?
- What personal factors do you consider most important in evaluating yourself or your success?
- What values drive you in your personal life?
- What do you want out of life?
- How do you measure success?
- How do you personally define success?
- Under what circumstances do you deem it appropriate to lie?
- What has been the most significant disappointment in your life?
- What has been your toughest professional challenge?
- What professional experience has been most valuable to you?
- What event has had the greatest influence on your career?

- What have you learned from the jobs you have held?
- Do you feel the progress you have made in your career is indicative of your ability?
- What special recognition have you received throughout your career?
- Describe your biggest leadership challenge.

Strategy: When asked about a challenge, be sure to specifically explain how you successfully navigated the situation and exactly what you learned from the experience.

- What extracurricular activities were you involved with during college, and how have they prepared you for this position?
- What kinds of leadership roles have you held, and how have they prepared you for your career?
- Do you take calculated risks?
- Give an example of how you have coped with change.
- Are you a leader or a follower?
- What decisions have you made that you would make differently today?
- Tell me about your most difficult decision.
- How have you improved your decisionmaking ability over the years?
- Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a problem with no rules or guidelines in place.
- What else should I know about you?

Strategy: This is your opportunity to re-state your qualifications for the position, as well as your interest in the position. Think of this as a summary of the strengths you presented throughout the interview. Do not feel as though you can only give new information here.



Fit with Company/Position and Company Knowledge

Strategy: You have to do your homework to be able to answer the questions in this category. Employers want to know that you want to work for them, not that you are just looking for any job. Study their website, talk to people who work there, read industry journals. Be as prepared for an interview as you would for a final exam.

- How do you feel you can help our organization?
- What can you do for us?
- What other positions are you considering and what about each is appealing?
- Describe your perception of the responsibilities of a ____
- 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?
- How does your experience qualify you for this position?

Strategy: Now is the time to engage the employer with your résumé. Reference a specific job, and expand upon your descriptive bullet points.

Tell me how You handled an ethical

dilemma.

- Why do you want to work here?
- What is your understanding of our company's products/services/ revenues/problems/ people/image/history?
- What is most appealing about this position? Why?

- What is least appealing about this position? Why?
- What are your expectations of a new company?
- How do you feel you could contribute to the company?
- How will you know when you have found the right job, the right company and the right boss for you?
- How would this job meet your long and shortterm goals?
- How did you prepare for this interview?

Strategy: They are asking this guestion because they want to know if you did your homework! Lay out the steps for them.

- Why do you want to get into the field?
- How long a period of time would you commit to the company?
- What do you want to be doing professionally in five years?
- What are the three most important things to you in a new position?
 - Why should we hire you?
 - Are you willing to go wherever a company might send you?
 - Are you presently geographically mobile? In the future?
 - Do you have a geographical preference?



Work Environment Preferences/ Work Style

 What are some things your boss or supervisor did that you disliked or did not agree with?

Strategy: Be careful here! One cardinal rule of interviewing is to never say anything negative about anyone, especially a former employer or supervisor. Even if your supervisor was terrible, find a way to frame your answer so that no one is criticized.

- How did your boss rate your performance?
- How could your boss have done a better job?
- How would you handle two direct reports who were arguing?

Strategy: If you have not held a full time job before, do not despair if these types of questions are asked. Pull from your experiences with part-time jobs, internships, or student organization involvement.

- 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 do you distinguish management skills from leadership skills?
- How do you get the best performance from an employee?
- 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 are some examples of surroundings that motivate you?
- Describe a time when you had to work with difficult people.
- What did you like least in your last position?
- Do you communicate most by phone, voicemail, memo, or face-to-face?
- How do you resolve conflict?
- What are some of the things you and your boss disagreed on?
- What difficulties do you experience in getting along with others?
- What kinds of people do you like to work with?
- Describe the type of individuals who are difficult for you to work with.
- Describe your work style.
- Tell me about a time when your supervisor had to give you tough feedback.
 O How did you respond?
- Describe situations where:

··· they want to know if you did your homework!

- Your work was criticized;
 - Your ideas were criticized;
 - Your style or personality was criticized.

Strategy: They are asking this question to see how you

respond to criticism. If you are applying in a field where thick skin is a requirement, then you will need to demonstrate your ability to not take things personally. In other fields, it may be acceptable to indicate that these situations are difficult for you, as long as you can show you have improved in this area.



- How do you respond to pressure in the workplace?
- Do you prefer working alone or with others?
- How do you schedule your time? Set priorities?
- How do you feel about evening or weekend work?

Strategy: It is best to be honest with these types of questions; otherwise, you may find yourself in a job that is not a good fit for you.

- What hours are you accustomed to working?
- How do you feel about a job that requires a great deal of paperwork and report writing?
- Do you prefer working under pressure or with adequate time to plan, organize, and execute?
- How do you weigh career priorities such as job security, satisfaction, work hours, salary and working conditions in evaluating your needs in a job?
- Describe the ideal boss.
- Tell me about an experience working on a team.

General (or ambiguous)

• Where do you see yourself in five years?

Strategy: Your answer should be congruous with the position for which you are interviewing. It is acceptable to discuss additional education and learning another language. It is not acceptable to talk about having children or moving.

 Tell me about a time when your course load was heavy. How did you complete all your work?

- What is the most important lesson you have learned in your life?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you sought the advice of others?
- What has been your greatest life achievement?
- How have you changed since high school?

How do You respond to pressure in the workplace?



Sample Questions for the Employer

It is a good idea to write down your questions. 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

- What can you tell me about the person who would supervise me?
- How would you describe the culture of the office in which I would be working?
- How might you describe my supervisor's management style?
- Describe the organization's structure.
- How did this opening occur?
- How long has the position been vacant?
- How does this position interact with other departments?
- What can I expect the next step in the hiring process to be?

What is the most important lesson you have learned in your life?

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?
- 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 do

you see as

the biggest

challenge

position?

for this

- What specific skills/experience are you looking for?
- Does the company encourage and support continuing education for its employees? In what ways?
- 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 the hiring process to be?

Note that these questions center on 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 listed 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 (no. of/age)
- Childcare plans
- Pregnancy/plans regarding parenthood
- Name of spouse
- Head of household/principle wage earner
- Living arrangements
- Request for recent photo with résumé application
- National origin
- Native language
- Age or birthdate
- 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, "Child care is not an issue for me." This way, you are answering the question they probably wanted to ask.

- Height/weight
- Sexual preferences
- Religion
- Race
- Worker's compensation claims on previous jobs
- Home or car ownership
- Type of military discharge
- Non-job related handicaps



to do the job

 You can flatly refuse to answer an illegal question, but you may lower your chances for employment with that organization.

Appropriate Interview Attire

Dress

above

what

the job

requires.

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 tattoos.

Men

- First choice in most instances is a matched suit in black, navy, or charcoal gray.
- Second choice is 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

Women

- First choice in most instances is a classic suit, in gray, brown or black.
- Second choice is a 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).

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 dress watch.
- Resist conversational ties; stick with silk ties in a stripe, paisley, or small pattern.
- Wear freshly polished dress shoes in the same color family as your suit. Lace up shoes are more formal than slip on shoes.

- If you choose to wear nail polish, make sure it is not chipped and in a conservative 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.



Notes





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