INTERVIEWING GUIDE
THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview is one of several sales tools you will use in the job search process. Some consider it to be the most important part, for in many instances, it is your only chance to make a favorable impression upon an employer and it could very well be the deciding factor as to whether or not you are offered employment.

Purpose

The interview serves four main purposes. For one, it gives the employer an opportunity to learn about you, your qualifications and experience, and to decide if you are the best person for the job. Second, it gives you, the job seeker, a chance to learn about the company, the position, its duties and expectations, and to convince the employer that you are the right person for their organization. Third, it’s a screening tool for future interviews and last, it’s the point where hiring decisions are made.

Phases

The interviewing process can be intimidating if you don’t know what to expect. While each interview will differ, all interviews include three phases: before, during and after.

Phase #1: Before

Just like other important tasks, preparing for an interview is very essential to getting hired, yet it is often neglected. Here are some suggestions to help you get ready for your interview.

1. **Know yourself** - Think about how your interests, skills, education, experience, and values fit in with the type of organization and position for which you are being interviewed.

2. **Know the employer** - Researching the company, the interviewer, and the position enables you to ask well informed questions. It is important for you to know what type of business the company engages in, the working conditions, duties and salary range of the desired position, the mission, goals and vision of the company, and the full name and title of your interviewer.

   There are many resources you can use to aid you in your research. Most employers have literature and/or a website describing their organization and opportunities. Major employers provide annual reports and company literature while smaller organizations publish brochures, fact sheets and annual reports.

   Either way, it’s important for you to secure information on an employer before you interview. Doing so will help you to target your skills and compatibility, as well as, decrease your level of anxiety.

3. **Appearance** - Be sure to get a good nights rest before the interview. When getting dressed, your appearance should be clean and neat. Experts recommend that you dress like you think your interviewer would dress, but cleaner. Make sure your hair is neat, teeth and nails are clean, breath is fresh, clothes are wrinkle free, and shoes are polished. Refrain from wearing loud colors, low cut blouses, short skirts, clanging jewelry, excessive make-up and colognes.

4. **Timing** - Time is always a major factor in getting prepared for an interview; therefore, it is important to know the exact time and location of your interview, the route you plan to take, and how long it will take for you to arrive. If you are unsure about these things, you may want to make a trial run a few days prior to your scheduled interview. The day of the interview, you should arrive 15 minutes early. This allows you time to slip into the restroom to freshen up, look yourself over, and correct any grooming problems that your travel may have caused.

5. **Other Reminders** - Always go to interviews alone. You should leave children, buddies, significant others and spouses at home. Carry with you at least two ink pens and a notepad. Take money for parking and lunch. Take copies of your resume, military records, reference letters, and any source of identification.

### INTERVIEWING PHASE # 1

- Know yourself
- Know the employer
- Appearance
- Timing
- Go alone
- Carry ink pens and a notepad
- Take money for lunch and parking
Phase #2: During

The typical interview will last 45 minutes, although some may be longer. A typical structure includes the greeting or opening, small talk, questions and answers, and the closing.

The Opening

The typical interview starts before you even get into the inner sanctum. It begins in the outer office, so it is important that you are pleasant and courteous to everyone you meet. While waiting for your interviewer to arrive, remember to remain relaxed. Occupy your mind by looking over your resume, notes and any company literature. Refrain from smoking, chewing gum, slouching in your seat, fidgeting with your nails, hair, lipstick, tie or clothes.

Small Talk

The minute you are identified by the interviewer, you are being evaluated. You are expected to shake the interviewer’s hand upon being introduced, so don’t be afraid to extend your hand first… this shows assertiveness. Always refer to the interviewer by their name, smile and look them straight in the eyes. For example, “Hello Dr. Charles, I am Patrice Jones.” You are now face to face with your interviewer who is in the position to notice your posture, your dress, any annoying mannerisms, and your nervousness.

Questions and Answers

The main part of the interview starts when the interviewer begins discussing the organization. As the interviewer turns to talk about your qualifications, be prepared to engage in a back and forth conversation for about 15 to 30 minutes. Your interviewer will lead the conversation, so listen carefully and answer all questions in a brief, concise manner. Relate all of your answers directly to the job and your skills and remember to mention examples and results of your past works. Be sure to use Standard English and avoid using slang and expressions such as, “uh,” “you know,” “like,” and etc. Speak in a clear, strong tone. Not too fast and not too slow.

Remain standing until you are directed where to sit and where you may be able to hang your coat. While sitting, keep a good posture, place your feet firmly on the floor and put your notepad in your lap and your belongings on the floor next to your chair.

Many interviewers will begin the interview with some small talk. Topics range from the weather to sports and will rarely focus on anything that brings out your skills. Nonetheless, you are still being evaluated. Interviewers are trained to evaluate candidates on many different points. They may be judging how well you communicate on an informal basis. This means you must do more than just smile and nod.

The Closing

The conclusion of the interview usually lasts five minutes and is very important. During this time the interviewer is assessing your overall performance. It is important to remain enthusiastic and courteous. Often the conclusion of the interview is indicated when the interviewer begins to rustle papers, look at their watch, close or pack up their belongings, stand up or simply states that he/she has all the information needed. When any of these things occur, you should briefly reiterate your interest in the position, stand, shake the interviewer’s hand and thank them by name for their time and for the opportunity to interview for the job. Smile and say goodbye.

Phase #3: After

You’ve walked out of the door and the interview is now over. WRONG!!! You now need to jot down any important notes about the job and you also need to follow-up on your interview by sending a thank you card, note or e-mail to the person or persons who interviewed you. A phone call is also a good way to follow up on your interview for it shows that you are truly interested in the position. After the interview you may also want to evaluate your interview experience. Ask yourself, what would you do differently? Where can you improve? What were your impressions of the company? What can you expect next? And are you still interested in the position?
TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

The interview is the last segment in the job search process. Employers use interview styles that assist in revealing those attributes of the candidate that are most essential for the job and most beneficial to the organization. Becoming familiar with different types of interviews will give you a chance to be a better prepared candidate. Below are descriptions of the most common types of interviews:

- **Exploratory/Information**: Direct meetings set up with selected people to obtain “insider” information about an industry, occupation, organization, or training program. They are a method of career exploration and a way of discovering jobs that are not publicized. They are considered one of the best avenues for building and maintaining a professional network of contacts.

- **Panel**: Two or more people interview you simultaneously, usually taking turns asking questions.

- **Group**: Used by employers when numerous applicants must be seen to determine a candidate’s potential. It can last from two hours to a day or longer and may include a group problem-solving exercise.

- **Stress**: This interview intentionally creates and promotes discomfort. The purpose is to test the candidate to see how she/he reacts under pressure and in difficult situations.

- **Behavioral**: Behavior-based interviews consist of questions that enable the interviewer to know how you previously reacted or behaved in certain types of situations. Candidates are asked to respond to questions that require examples of previous activities. This format helps an employer to predict future performance based upon past experiences.

- **Telephone**: Used as an initial screening method to determine if a full interview is warranted. Days and times are pre-arranged.

- **Second**: Usually referred to as a “site visit” and is most often conducted by the first interviewer’s boss or someone else in management. The purpose of this interview is to see whether you fit in with the organization’s culture and if you really want to work for this employer.

- **Meal**: This type of interview is more relaxed and it allows for more lengthy answers; however, be mindful that you are still being judged so follow good restaurant etiquette, select foods that are easy to eat, never drink alcohol, and always keep focused on the conversation.

- **Testing/Performance**: In this interview, the employer’s purpose is to see how you handle yourself, so you will be asked to perform tasks associated with a job in a limited amount of time. Remember to ask for clear directions, follow them exactly, proofread your answers and do your best.

- **Cyber**: This type of interview takes about 30 minutes to complete. One variation is for the computer to ask you a series of questions about your background, work history, and career goals. A second variation is a toll-free call requiring you to answer up to 25 questions on a push-button phone.
INTERVIEWING HINTS

Before stepping into an interview, be sure to practice, practice, practice. To help with the interview process, keep the following rules in mind:

**Keep your answers brief and concise.** Unless asked to give more detail, limit your answers to two to three minutes per question.

**Review the list of common interview questions provided in this handout.** Know your answers to those questions but do not memorize them.

**Include concrete, quantifiable data.** Refrain from talking in generalities. Include measurable information and provide details about specific accomplishments when discussing your strengths.

**Repeat your key strengths three times.** It’s essential that you comfortably and confidently articulate your strengths. Explain how the strengths relate to the company’s or department’s goals and how they might benefit the potential employer.

**Prepare five or more success stories.** Make a list of your skills and key assets. Then reflect on past jobs and pick out one or two instances when you used those skills successfully.

**Put yourself on their team.** Ally yourself with the prospective employer by using the employer’s name and products or services. For example, “As a member of ______, I would carefully analyze the _____ and _____.” Show that you are thinking like a member of the team and will fit in with the existing environment. Your research will help you in this area.

**Image is often as important as content.** What you look like and how you say something are just as important as what you say.

**Ask questions.** The types of questions you ask and the way you ask them can make a tremendous impression on the interviewer. For this part of the interview, you should have a list of questions already prepared. If you don’t have any questions prepared and you try to cover your mistake by asking a spur-of-the-moment question, chances are you have damaged your chances for a successful interview. Every question you ask should demonstrate your interest and confirm your knowledge of the organization. Don’t ask questions just for the sake of asking questions – make sure it is information that you need.

**Maintain a conversational flow.** Use feedback questions at the end of your answers and use body language and voice intonation to create a conversational interchange between you and the interviewer.

**Research the company, product lines and competitors.** Simply being informed about an employer does not guarantee a successful interview unless you thoroughly research the company. Researching the company helps you to answer questions intelligently and to determine whether your goals will fit the promotional structures defined by that employer.

---

**Behavioral Questions**

Be prepared to answer Behavioral Questions with the T.B.A.R. formula:

- **Topic / Background / Actions / Results**

  - State the **topic** expressed in the **question** (Ex: “Tell me about your problem-solving skills?” Answer: “I performed in-depth problem-solving.”)
  - Second, give your **background** experience in dealing with this topic, in a particular job or setting (Ex: “When I worked from ____ to ____ (dates) at ____ (name of company)...”)
  - Third state the **actions** you performed in addressing, completing the service or task (Ex: “...and created, implemented a new system for addressing customer service needs...”)
  - Fourth, mention the **results** of your actions (Ex: “This resulted in a customer service system that was 35% more efficient.”)
  - Finally, **link/reference** this company’s needs/services, and state that you can perform in a way that would make a difference. (Ex: “Your company has a fine reputation for customer service, and I am certain I could support your standards in ____., and that I could improve upon your current record.”)

---

Keep and interview journal. As soon as possible, write a brief summary of what happened. Note any follow-up action you should take and put it in your calendar.
QUESTIONS ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for our organization?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What can you offer us?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
- What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?
- Define success. Define failure.
- Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
- Name three accomplishments you are most proud of?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- How does your college education or work experience relate to this position?
- What motivates you most in a job?
- Have you ever had difficulty getting along with a former professor / supervisor / co-worker and how did you handle it?
- Why should we hire you?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Why did you choose to attend your college or university?
- In which campus activities did you participate? Why?
- What did you enjoy most about your last employment? Least?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
- Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
- How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?
- How did you learn about us?
- How many employers have you worked for during the last five years?
- You seem to switch jobs a lot. Why?
- Why are you looking to leave your current employer?
- Do you plan to continue your education?
- Give an example of any major problem you faced and how you solved it.
- In your lifetime, what has been your greatest accomplishment? What did you learn from it?
- What was your greatest failure? What did you learn from it?
- Are you at your best when working alone or in a group?
- Would you rather be in charge of a project or work as part of the team?
### QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK EMPLOYERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you looking for in the person you will hire for the position?</td>
<td>If hired, would I report directly to you, or to someone else?</td>
<td>What do you like best about your job / company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you describe a typical work day and the things I'd be doing?</td>
<td>Does your company encourage further education?</td>
<td>What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will I be trained or introduced to the job?</td>
<td>How often are performance reviews given?</td>
<td>What skills are especially important for someone in this position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this job important to the company - how does it contribute?</td>
<td>Are salary adjustments geared to the cost of living or job performance?</td>
<td>Is there a lot of team / project work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the department’s goals for the year?</td>
<td>What are your growth projections for next year?</td>
<td>Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many people work in your department? In the company?</td>
<td>Do you offer flextime?</td>
<td>How much travel, if any, is involved in this position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the people I’d be working with and what do they do?</td>
<td>Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?</td>
<td>What is the average age of top management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would I get feedback on my performance?</td>
<td>What is the largest single problem facing your staff (department) now?</td>
<td>What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### QUESTIONS NOT TO ASK EMPLOYERS

Not only should you know what questions to ask during the interview, but it is important to know what questions not to ask. You don’t want to alienate the interviewer by putting him or her on the defensive.

Avoid the following areas:

1. **Avoid asking questions that are answered in the company’s annual report, employment brochure or on their website.** Interviewers are familiar enough with their own information to recognize when you haven’t done your homework. If some information in the literature is not clear to you, by all means ask for clarification.

2. **Don’t bring up salary or benefits in the initial interview.** The majority of companies are very competitive and will offer similar salaries and benefits. The interviewer may choose to bring up the information, but you should not initiate the topic.

3. **Avoid asking any personal questions or questions that will put the interviewer on the defensive.** This includes questions such as the interviewer’s educational background, marital status, past work experience and so on.

4. **Don’t ask questions that have already been answered during the interview.** If you have prepared a list of questions and some of them have been addressed during the interview, do not repeat them unless you need clarification.
What is an Illegal Interview Question?

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes discrimination on the basis of national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest record, military discharges, or personal information (such as height and weight) illegal. Any question that asks a candidate to reveal information about his or her national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest record, military discharges, or personal information is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Which Questions ARE Still Legal?

If employers can phrase questions so that they directly relate to specific occupational qualifications, then the questions may be legitimate ones. Employers may also still ask general questions. For example, an interviewer may NOT ask your age in an interview, but the interviewer may ask if you are over the age of 18 (if being over the age of 18 is a requirement of the job). The reverse side of this sheet contains additional examples of illegal versus legal questions.

What Should I do if I am Asked an Illegal Question?

If you are asked an illegal question during an interview, you have three basic alternatives.

1. You Can Answer the Question

By answering the question, you may actually help your chances of getting the job, particularly if you give the “right” answer. Doing so, however, may convey to the interviewer that you are not familiar

2. You Can Refuse to Answer the Question

You do have the right to not answer the illegal question. However, a flat refusal to answer may harm your chances of being hired for a position if the interviewer sees you as an uncooperative or stubborn person.

3. You Can Examine the Intent Behind the Question

When an interviewer asks an illegal question, they are often trying to find out information about you that is not directly related to the job. It is often easy to infer what the interviewer is really trying to find out from an illegal question. A simple compromise to the problem is to respond to the question as it may apply to the job. For example, if the interviewer asks “are you a US citizen?” you may respond “that question is in violation of the law, but yes, I am authorized to work in the United States.” This third choice shows the interviewer that you are both knowledgeable of the law and able to quickly compromise and solve problems.

4. Other Alternatives

You may feel more comfortable with one of these choices (which are just as valid as the first three) for responding to an illegal interview question:

- Ignore the question and move on
- Ask how the question relates to your qualifications or the requirements of the job
- Walk out

Find information on the Internet About Illegal Interviewing Questions at:

- [http://hr.albany.edu/content/legalqtn.asp](http://hr.albany.edu/content/legalqtn.asp)
- [http://www.hrproonline.com/40204000.htm](http://www.hrproonline.com/40204000.htm)

Whatever alternative you chose depends on your personal preference. If you are asked an Illegal Question and you would prefer not to work for a company that asks such questions, then do not be afraid to refuse to answer the question and tell the interviewer why. Pointing out illegal questions may persuade the interviewer not to ask them of other candidates in the future.
Types of Illegal Interview Questions

National Origin / Citizenship

**Illegal**
- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Where were you / your parents born?
- What is your native tongue?
- Date when you, your parents or spouse acquired U.S. citizenship.

**Legal**
- Are you authorized to work in the United States?
- What language do you read/speak/write fluently? (This question is okay only if this ability is relevant to the performance of the job).
- Statement by employer that if hired, you may be required to submit proof of authorization to work in the U.S.

Age

**Illegal**
- How old are you?
- When did you graduate?
- What’s your birth date?
- Where were you born?
- Birthplace of your parents, spouse or other relatives born.
- Require you to submit a birth certificate, naturalization or baptism record.
- Other questions that tend to identify applicants 40-64 years of age.

**Legal**
- Are you over 18 years of age?
- Can you, after employment, submit a work permit if under age 18?

Education

**Illegal**
- Date last attended high school.

**Legal**
- Your academic, vocational or professional education; schools attended.

Marital Status / Family

**Illegal**
- What’s your marital status?
- With whom do you live?
- Do you plan to have a family? When?
- How many kids do you have?
- What are your child-care arrangements?
- With whom do you reside?
- Do you live with your parents?
- Name and address of a relative to be notified in case of accident or emergency.

**Legal**
- Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?
- Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? (This question is okay if it is asked of all applicants for the job).
- Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? (This question is okay assuming it is asked of all applicants for the job).
- Names of your relatives already employed by this company.
- Name and address of parent or guardian if you are a minor.
- Name and address of a person to be notified in case of an accident or emergency.

Affiliations

**Illegal**
- What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?
- Do you attend religious services / or/ a house of worship?
- Applicant may not be told “This is a Catholic / Protestant / Jewish / atheist organization.

**Legal**
- List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.

Arrest Record

**Illegal**
- Have you ever been arrested?

**Legal**
- Have you ever been convicted of any crime? If so, when, where, and disposition of case? (The crime named should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)
- Have you ever been convicted of a crime under another name?
Disabilities

**Illegal**
- Do you have any disabilities?
- Please complete the following medical history...
- Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?
- If yes, list them and give dates when these occurred.
- What was the date of your last physical exam?
- How’s your family’s health?
- When did you lose your eyesight? How?
- Do you need an accommodation to perform the job? (This question can be asked only after a job offer has been made).
- Questions as to receipt of workmen’s compensation.

**Legal**
- Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job? (This question is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job).
- Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?
- Statement by employer that all job offers are contingent on passing a physical examination.
- As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical / safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on exam results).

Personal

**Illegal**
- How tall are you?
- How much do you weigh? (Questions about height & weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential for the safe performance of the job).
- Requirement that you affix a photograph to the application form, or provide a photograph after the interview but before hiring.

**Legal**
- Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
- Have you worked for this company under a different name?
- Statement that photograph may be required after employment.

Military

**Illegal**
- If you’ve been in the military, were you honorably discharged?

**Legal**
- In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve?
- What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

Resource

US Equal Opportunity Commission
http://www.eeoc.gov/
Researching Your Potential Employer

There are many important areas of preparation to deal with prior to the interview. One of the most important steps involves researching the company.

It’s wise to begin researching weeks before your interview. You may find an overwhelming amount of information and you must be able to sort out the pertinent information and retain key facts. Additionally, it may be difficult to find some information and some digging will be required.

If you are interviewing with a number of different employers, it’s smart to keep a file on each one. As you do more research, the file will help you keep facts organized, making the preparation easier.

**Facts to Know About the Organization**

- Size of organization in industry
- Potential growth
- Annual sales growth for past five years
- Details and functional descriptions of positions
- Training program outline
- Hiring Process (timing, evaluation criteria)
- Benefits
- Requisite qualifications for entry-level positions
- Typical career / promotional paths
- Products / services
- Potential new products / services
- Age of top management and their backgrounds
- Starting salaries / compensation forms
- Travel / relocation expectations and policies
- Regional lifestyle / cost of living
- Geographical locations
- Location of corporate headquarters
- Organizational chart / structure
- Name and correct spelling of the interviewer
- History of the organization

**Information Sources Available**

- Annual report
- Employment brochure
- Company website
- Chamber of Commerce
- Library
- Career Center
- Trade publications
- Friends
- Faculty
- Finance and business section of local newspaper
- Business / industry directories

**IN SUMMARY**

Because of its importance, interviewing requires advance preparation. Only you will be able to positively affect the outcome. You must be able to compete successfully with the competition for the job you want. In order to do that, be certain you have considered the kind of job you want, why you want it, and how you qualify for it. You also must face reality: Is the job attainable?
# How to Ace Your Job Interview Checklist

## Before the Interview

### Know Yourself
- What do you have to offer: knowledge, skills and abilities
- Assess your goals

### Research the Company
- What questions will you ask an interviewer? (see Questions You Should Ask Employers on pg. 7)
- Learn as much as you can about the company beforehand (organization size, products/services, names of interviewers, annual sales growth, benefits, starting salaries, geographical locations, training programs, company history, etc.)*

### Practice Your Interviewing Skills
- Practice alone and with family and friends
- Practice using Virtual Job Interview (http://www.umuc.edu/students/support/careerservices/interviewing_skills.cfm)
- Schedule a mock interview with a career counselor in Career Services

*Find company information in a variety of places including: company websites, local newspapers, Chamber of Commerce. The following websites can also be helpful: www.vault.com; www.hoovers.com and www.irin.com

## During the Interview

### Be Prompt and Prepared
- Arrive 10—15 minutes before the interview
- What to bring (academic transcript, extra copies of your resume, list of references, your questions for the interviewer, folio with pen and paper)
- Do not be a No Show!

### First Impressions Count
- Dress appropriately**
- Give a firm handshake
- Avoid nervous laughter

### Q&A
- Answer the interviewers questions thoroughly, yet concisely
- Ask questions yourself
- Be enthusiastic
- Show you are go-getter and excited about the company

### Closing
- Be prepared with your closing statement expressing interest
- Ask the interviewer for a business card
- Thank the interviewer

**Appropriate dress includes making sure your clothing is pressed, shoes polished and giving attention to personal grooming.

## After the Interview

### Follow-up
- Send a thank you note a.s.a.p. (email or handwritten)
- Jot down information about the interview

### Evaluate
- Is this job for you?
- Is the position a good fit for a successful career?
- Critique yourself (were you prepared, what would you do differently)