

What is an Interview?

The interview is the last step of the hiring process and the most important. It offers you and the employer the opportunity to meet one another, exchange information and come to tentative conclusions about “hiring” one another.

The interview is the opportunity where you can describe your experiences and skills and can get an idea of what is happening with the company. During an interview, an employer’s goal is to gather additional information about you that is not provided in your resume and cover letter. They will attempt to find out what motivates you, how well you communicate and if you are a leader or a follower. The interview is a two-way process. You evaluate the employer while he/she evaluates you.

Interview Preparation

Preparation is the best way to combat the “interview nerves” and the key to a successful interview!

Through good preparation, you will feel more confident and ready to do your best. See the following pages for hints and tips on preparing for your interview.

The majority of the interview centers on you, so before you talk to a prospective employer, take time to think about what you have to offer.

The best way to figure out what you have to offer is to do a self assessment.

Strengths –

Know your strengths and have a short story to tell which demonstrates that strength.

Academic Performance -

Be prepared to discuss your grades, mention particular courses that related to your targeted career, and describe “hands-on” knowledge you learned through labs, internships, service learning, etc.

Work Experience -

Be prepared to describe what you learned from your previous work experience and how it related to the position.

Professional Goals -

State how your major matches your career interests and professional goals. Describe how your goals would motivate you to do your best work for them.

Before the Interview

Research the Employer -

Visit the company website, learn about the products, services, and mission.

Research the position -

Analyze the job description, match your experiences to the position.

Know Yourself -

Know your resume inside & out and prepare examples of your accomplishments.

Know the Interview Format -

Know who you are meeting with and the format the interview will follow.

Practice -

Prepare your answers to frequently asked interview questions. Do a mock interview.

Make a List of Questions to Ask -

Prepare questions that demonstrate your interest.

Map it Out -

Know the exact location of the interview and the parking situation.

The Day of the Interview

Dress to Impress –

Look professional, well dressed and groomed.

Be Prepared –

Bring extra resumes, references, transcripts, certifications, work samples, etc.

Arrive Early –

Arrive 10 minutes early so you have time to relax before the interview begins.

Have a great Attitude –

Be enthusiastic and have a positive attitude.

During the Interview

Make a Great First Impression –

Offer a firm handshake, have good eye contact, smile & be polite

Demonstrate Your Knowledge & Interest -

Listen, have clear & concise answers, ask questions.

After the Interview

Learn from your mistakes –

Note what you think you handled right & and what you handled wrong

Say thank you –

Send a thank you letter that reiterates your interest in the position and organization.

Follow-up –

Make one follow-up call to check on the status of the position.

Dress for Success

Your appearance and the impression you make can be as important as the content of the interview.

Your personal grooming and dress will not get you the job, but may keep you from getting it!

- Choose clothing, jewelry, fragrances and accessories that are not distracting.
- Choose professional clothing that you feel comfortable in/good about.

- Wear conservative suit colors including navy blue, charcoal gray, or black with a traditional shirt or blouse.
- Shoes should be comfortable, conservative, clean and polished; dark colors are your best bet,
- Dark socks for men and neutral hosiery for women are suggested.
- Clothing should be clean, neatly pressed, and fit well.
- Make sure your hair is clean, neat and styled. Nails need to be clean and well groomed
- Limit jewelry and accessories, remember to wear a watch.
- Perfume or cologne should be light fragrances and never strong.
- Avoid chewing gum during an interview or smoking before an interview.

Answering Interview Questions

Non Verbal Communication

Actions Speak Louder Than Words. Don't send the wrong message. Pay attention to these non-verbal cues:

- Fidgeting with your hands makes you look nervous and unsure of yourself.
- Drumming your fingers, clicking a pen, tapping your shoe makes you look impatient, or uninterested in the discussion.
- Slouching makes you look lazy, tired, inattentive or unrefined.
- Crossing your arms makes you look defensive or inflexible.
- Chewing gum during an interview makes you look unrefined and rude.
- Keeping a blank expression makes the interviewer wonder if you understand what he/she has been talking about.
- Looking at the ceiling or floor to compose your thoughts makes you look insincere or unprepared.
- Flipping your hair off your face makes you look slightly out of control or nervous.

Stay Positive

Maintain a positive, confident attitude throughout the interview, and avoid making excuses or blaming others. Be honest when you are asked about weaknesses or past failures, but focus on positive elements such as what you learned from a past failure, or what steps you are taking to improve yourself.

Stay Focused

Give clear, focused, well-organized answers to the interviewer's questions. Don't ramble or give irrelevant information. Remember why you are there – to make a presentation of your skills and abilities as a candidate for a particular job – and keep your answers on track with that purpose.

Illustrate Your Answers

Keep your answers brief and on point, but don't just give "yes" and "no" responses. Create a "word picture" for the interviewer by illustrating your personal qualities and strongest abilities with examples from your past. Try to address any underlying questions you think the employer might have about your suitability for the job.

Ask Questions When Indicated

Ask relevant, meaningful questions at appropriate times during the interview. Find out more about specific job responsibilities, what kind of training is provided, what advancement opportunities are

available within the company, how much travel is required, etc. Be sure to ask about the next step at the close of the interview.

Be Yourself

It is important to relax and be yourself. Don't try to present an image of someone you think they want, because it won't be genuine.

General Interview Stages

Introduction -

The common exchange of names, small talk, and casual questions while you are being escorted to the place of the interview. This is your first chance to make an impression. Topics may include weather, traffic, hobbies, etc. (designed to make you more at ease/relaxed).

Broad Questions and Answers -

The interviewer will begin to ask you questions about yourself, your education, your past work experience, other items on your resume, your interests and goals. You may be asked questions about the organization and the job position.

Questions may include:

"Tell me about yourself"

"Why did you choose your major?"

"What are some of your extra curricular interests?"

Position Related Questions -

The interviewer concentrates more on the details of the job and the company and how you might fit in. You will be able to discuss how your experiences and qualifications fit the requirements of the job.

Questions may include:

"Why are you interested in working for this company?"

"Why are you interested in this position?"

"What types of contributions do you see yourself making to this company?"

"How has your experience and education prepared you for this position?"

You should ask pointed questions about the job and company based on your previous research. In addition to skills and qualifications, the interviewer will be looking for signs of your work ethic and your values.

Conclusion -

The interviewer will summarize what has been said and clarify any questions you may have. This is when you need to reiterate your interest in this company and position and stress again how you are uniquely qualified for the job.

The interviewer should explain the next steps in the recruiting process and how and when the next contact with you will be made. If the interviewer doesn't do this, ask them for the information before you leave. Ask for a business card so you can send a thank you note with the correct information.

Refrain from discussing salary or benefits unless the interviewer initiates it. This will be discussed when you are definitely being considered for the job, or when a job offer is made to you.

Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral interviewing is an interviewing technique that helps employers predict how a candidate will perform on the job and fit into the organization. By finding out what actions you took and/or how you reacted in past situations, the employer gets a sense for how you will probably respond to circumstances in the position they are considering you for.

This technique provides employers with objective information that they don't get from a traditional interview question.

For example, if an employer asks, "Do you work well with people from diverse cultures?" your response will most likely be "yes." If the employer says, "Tell me about a time when you had to work with people from diverse cultures," you will respond with a story about a situation where this was the case.

The employer will then be able to judge for him/herself whether you actually do perform well, according to his/her standards. This also gives you the opportunity to prove by example that you can handle the task at hand.

How to Answer Behavioral Questions

- Your answers to behavioral interview questions need to be specific and detailed.
- Listen carefully to what the interviewer asks so that you can give an answer that's relevant to the question. If you are unsure, ask for clarification.
- You can use examples from either school or work.
- Tell a story about something you've done, or talk about an event you were involved in.
- Structure your answers in three parts:
 - 1) Begin by briefly describing the situation
 - 2) Detail what action you took
 - 3) State the result (this should be a positive one, if it is not, state what you learned from the situation)

How to Prepare for Behavioral Questions

- Refresh your memory about your achievements in school and at work.
- Think about challenging problems or obstacles you have faced. Consider how you handled them and be able to summarize the outcomes.
- Demonstrate past behaviors by drawing on many experiences; think about internships, classes and projects, activities, team and sports participation, community service, and full or part-time jobs.
- Decision making, leadership, organizational skills, problem solving, and team building are among the many topics that behavioral questions probe into, so any experiences which involve these areas would be good to use as behavioral examples.

Illegal Questions

Questions regarding your age, sex, sexual preference, marital or family status, religion, race, national origin, handicap (or any question which does not address a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to perform the job) are not allowed in the interview or on employment application.

Because the employer's knowledge of such information may lead to illegal discriminatory hiring

practices, you are not required to divulge this type of information.

Although most employers refrain from asking impermissible questions, you may at times be confronted with this type of questioning.

Three possible ways of responding to such inquiries:

- 1) The most recommended response is to address the employer's underlying concern without directly answering the question.

For example: if you are asked about plans for marriage or children, the employer is usually concerned about your anticipated length of stay in the area or your ability to be at work on a regular basis. Although you do not need to answer the question directly, you should affirm your understanding of the employer's concern, and assure him or her that your personal life is arranged in such a way that it will not interfere with your job.

- 2) A more direct, but less comfortable, approach is to state to the employer your concern that the issue in question has no apparent bearing on your qualifications for the job. You may ask for clarification of the reason he or she has for requesting the information.

- 3) Based on your personal preferences, you may choose to answer impermissible questions, but you must realize the possible negative consequences of your actions. Think carefully!

NYS law expressly prohibits employers from asking certain questions either in an application form or in a personal interview before selecting an employee.

Thank You Letters

It is a good idea to follow an interview with a Thank You Letter.

The Thank You Letter:

- Gives you the opportunity to remind the employer about your interest.
- Allows you to tell the employer something that you may have forgotten or something you thought of after the interview.
- May give you that extra edge over another candidate.

Thank You Letter Tips:

- Keep your letter concise and to the point.
- Thank the employer for the time spent with you.
- Reiterate your interest in the position.
- Emphasize some of your qualifications that fit the position.
- Repeat what you agreed would be the next step in the process ("I look forward to hearing from you" or "I will call you next Thursday as we discussed.")
- Keep it short and sweet!

Thank You Letter Format

Date

Employer's Contact Information

Dear Mr./Ms.,

Thank you for the chance to interview with ABC Company this afternoon. I came away feeling very enthusiastic about the position.

The opportunity to combine independent research with team report production is just what I am looking for. I am also very excited about the possibility that my strong interest in evaluation of early-education programs matches the need you have for someone who can quickly grow to contribute in that area.

If you have any more questions for me, please be in touch. Again, thank you for your time in our interview, and for considering me as a candidate for the position of researcher on your team.

Sincerely,

Sign your name

Type your name

30 Typical Interview Questions

1. How are you today?
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
3. What do you know about this organization?
4. Why are you interested working for this company?
5. How did you decide on a program of study?
6. Why did you select Onondaga Community College?
7. What subjects did you like best/least? Why?
8. What are your strengths?
9. What is your biggest weakness?
10. How has your college experience prepared you for this position?
11. Why do you think you would do well at this job?
12. Describe your work ethic.
13. Describe the biggest challenge you have had in your last job or internship and how you handled it.
14. Talk about a time when you made a mistake. How did you fix it?
15. Talk about a situation where you had to deal with someone who was being difficult. How did you handle the situation?
16. Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short period of time. How did you do it?
17. Tell me about a time when you had to work in a team environment. Were you the leader or a follower in the group?
18. Tell me about a time you received criticism and how you dealt with it?
19. Give me an example of an important goal you set and how you reached it.
20. Describe a situation that required you to do a number of things at the same time. How did you handle it?
21. Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
22. Tell me about your ability to work under pressure.
23. Tell me about a suggestion you have made and what came of it.
24. What two work accomplishments are you most proud of?
25. What duties have you performed in the past that you liked most/least and why?
26. What would your previous supervisor say your strongest point is?
27. What kind of management style do you work best under and why?
28. Why are you leaving your current position?
29. What motivates you to do your best on the job?
30. Do you have any questions for me?