

Interviewing For Employment



Some key points:

- Your resume got you the interview; your interview gets you the job or internship offer.
- Employers use interviews to assess your fit based on their organization's needs. You need to use the interview to promote your skills and personal attributes in a compelling fashion.
- The typical 5 step interviewing process is as follows:
 - Resumes are collected
 - Resumes are reviewed
 - Candidates are selected
 - Candidates are contacted
 - Interviews occur.

Interview formats:

Onsite Interviews—these are interviews where the employer comes to you.

Panel Interview—these interviews are often rapidly paced with questions coming from a variety of individuals. To achieve rapport during this form of interview, remember to maintain eye contact with, and involve, each person on the panel. Get a list of all those in attendance for thank-you notes.

Telephone Interviews—these interviews are used for screening and are generally under ½ hour in length. The screening is to weed-out weaker candidates before the more intensive on-site interviews. To be successful in phone interviews, you should keep your resume and notes nearby. Answer with concise, well worded responses and speak clearly and slowly as the interviewer is often taking notes. Remember to create a phone interviewing environment with minimal distractions and background noise. Use a landline to avoid dropped calls during your interview.

Interview types:

Just as interviews may occur in different formats, there are various types of interviews you may find yourself conducting.

1. Resume-based interviews

- Uses your resume as the source for most questions.
- Focuses on resume-listed past performance in academics, employment, and activities.
 - Ex. "Tell me about your experience as a facility manager at the AFC."
- Be able to expand on each item on your resume. Be prepared to go into great depth if asked for specific

details.

2. Behavioral interviews

- Based on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior on the job.
- Evaluates a candidate's skills, abilities, and interests, and reveals willingness to gain from experience (both success and failure).
- Situation-based questions are used.
 - o Ex. "Tell me about a time when you had to work with a team to accomplish something."
- Use the **S.T.A.R.** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) technique for structuring your answers.
 - Briefly explain the **Situation** and the **Task** that was at hand. Go into detail about your **Actions** (not your group's or your team's), and briefly describe the end **Result**.
 - o Ex. "Tell me about a situation in which you demonstrated leadership skills."

SITUATION - Define the situation or 'set the stage'.

'Every year my fraternity sponsors a fundraising event to benefit a local food bank.'

TASK - Identify the task/project performed.

'Since I held the position of philanthropy chair, I was in charge of the event last year.'

ACTION - Describe the action that you took/initiated. This response should illustrate the specific skills you used in completing the task.

'I organized and led a committee of eight brothers to handle of the logistics involved in planning the fundraiser. I managed the budget, created the timeline, and delegated responsibilities to each committee member, using weekly meetings to check on their progress. The planning for this event took the entire fall semester.'

RESULT - Summarize the outcome.

'I was really proud of the outcome. Two-hundred fifty people attended the event and we raised \$3,000 for the food bank.'

3. Case interviews

- Presents interviewee with a problem, or case, to solve. Your answer is not as important as your analysis of the problem.
 - o Ex. "How many golf balls would fit in a swimming pool?"
- Usually used during in-person interviews and commonly used by consulting firms.
- When answering, think out loud so the interviewer can get a sense of how you solve problems.

Interview preparation:

Remember, the interview starts long before you arrive at the interviewer's office.

1. Research the employer

Not researching the employer is the No. 1 way to be denied a job offer. It's easier than you think. Use Google, printed literature, and the LMU Library databases to thoroughly research the organization to impress the interviewer and allow more time to discuss specifics of the position. Demonstrating knowledge about the employer is one of several ways to communicate your interest, which is almost as important as your ability to do the job.

2. Know Yourself

When answering questions, identify several key strengths with examples from your past experience to help the employer visualize you as a strong candidate. If necessary, evaluate problem areas in your record and be prepared to offer a strong explanation during the interview.

3. Prepare Yourself

- For on-site interviews, secure directions and be prepared to arrive 20 minutes early.
- Dress to project the image of confidence and success; your total appearance should be appropriate to the job. Your outfit should be clean, ironed, and fit comfortably. Only wear business casual if you are absolutely sure it is appropriate.
- Prior to your first interview, meet with the Director of Career Planning and conduct a mock interview.
- Prepare to bring additional materials to the interview such as copies of your resume, a list of references, samples of your work, and unofficial transcripts.
- If provided, familiarize yourself with the key information (name and job title) on your interviewers.
- Plan ahead by thinking about what you want the employer to know about you. Prepare key points you want to communicate about yourself and how you plan to make them when asked:
 - o “Tell me about yourself?”
 - o “What do you think makes you a strong candidate for our position?”
- Prepare your questions for the employer in advance to fall back on in case you do not think of any during the interview.

During the interview:

First, build rapport with the front desk staff or receptionist who greets you at the organization. Building rapport involves your (1) attitude, (2) non-verbal behaviors and (3) verbal behaviors.

Attitude: Think positively! If you don't think you are the best candidate for the job, you will not get hired.

Non-Verbal: 93% of communication is non-verbal. Your general appearance, facial expressions, and tone of voice sell your attributes. Build a strong connection in the following manners:

- Your eye contact should be open and direct when listening, asking, and responding to questions.
- Your posture should be well-balanced, upright, relaxed, forward-facing, and open. Know your nervous habits and practice controlling them. Be sure to lean forward slightly to communicate interest.
- Your hands should be used in a relaxed way for communicating excitement and interest.
- A smile conveys your sincerity and can add a positive spin to your words.
- The tone of your voice should be firm, warm, well-modulated and relaxed.
- Practice your timing as you should pause slightly before answering a question.

Verbal: How you communicate verbally involves your ability to:

- Use active verbs and give concise, concrete, and complete examples.
- Be positive and confident and “own” what you have done and what you know.
- Always create a dialogue with the employer by asking questions related to the current topic and requesting more information when asked vague questions.
- Tell your S.T.O.R.Y. when answering questions:
 - State your qualities
 - Toot your horn (without blowing it!)
 - Outline your progress to date
 - Relate your background/experiences to the job or internship
 - “Y” should they hire you? (Talk about what makes you unique.)

Twenty questions employers might ask you

1. “Tell me about yourself.”

Employer Motivation: To see how well you can communicate and structure your thoughts. Strategy: Prepare for this question in advance. Pretend that the employer said “Tell me about yourself and why you are interested in this job?” You might answer this question by quickly mentioning your relevant background, experience and skills and then explaining why you believe the job would be the next logical step for you.

2. “What are your greatest work and non-work accomplishments?”

Employer Motivation: To know what you care about and what motivates you. Strategy: Choose something about which you are passionate. Do not say “Getting into college” as this is an accomplishment common to most folks interviewing for the job, so you may want to think of other undertakings.

3. “Describe three things that have been most important to you in a job.”

Employer Motivation: To find out about your work-related values. Strategy: Be truthful about what matters to you professionally rather than personally.

4. “How did you prepare for this interview?”

Employer Motivation: To see if you have made an effort to research the company, which shows your interest and initiative. Strategy: Talk about any research you have done through the company website, news articles, employees of the company, students who have interned with them already.

5. “What do you know about this organization?”

Employer Motivation: Similar to the previous question, the employer is checking your knowledge base and interest. Strategy: Provide an answer that indicates that you have researched the company before the interview. Example: “I’ve talked with some of your employees and they feel that this a good company to work for

because..." "I have been reading that your company is really growing fast, planning two new branches this year. I want to work for your company because the future looks promising."

6. "What is your biggest strength and your biggest weakness?"

Employer Motivation: To find out if your strengths would be used in the position and to find out if you are aware of the areas where you need improvement.

Strategy: You can give examples of your strengths if you wish (e.g. "I'm an excellent writer. Most of my teachers have commented on my ability to organize my thoughts and communicate with a variety of audiences.") With your weaknesses, explain how you work around them or try to strengthen them.

Avoid sharing a weakness that directly relates to the job's requirements.

7. "Describe your ideal supervisor."

Employer Motivation: To see if you would be effective working for the supervisor.

Strategy: It is much easier to answer this question if you already know the supervisor and his/her style. If not, you may want to state broad preferences, or consider mentioning how you would be a good supervisee.

8. "Why did you choose your major?"

Employer Motivation: To find out your interests and preferences and then see if they fit with the job and the company culture.

Strategy: If your major is unrelated to the industry, consider what aspects of your interests are most relevant to the job and focus on that side (e.g. your love of independent quantitative analysis vs. your love of team projects.)

9. "Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team."

Employer Motivation: To assess your teamwork, interpersonal and leadership skills.

Strategy: Pick a specific example that has a "happy ending" and about which you are proud.

10. "What does diversity mean to you and how can it impact teams and results?"

Employer Motivation: To assess your knowledge and commitment to diversity and to examine your understanding of effective interpersonal and team dynamics.

Strategy: Describe your definition of diversity and how it might be a fit for the organizational structure, keeping in mind any organizational research or literature you may have seen on this issue.

11. "What have you learned from your past job or internship?"

Employer Motivation: To see if you can learn from your experiences.

Strategy: Highlight some skills that you have gleaned from each of your major job/internship experiences and perhaps how you have refined those skills in subsequent positions.

12. "What specific skills have you acquired or used in previous jobs that relate to this position?"

Employer Motivation: To see if you have a clear idea of the skills needed for the position that is advertised.

Strategy: Be sure to have thought about your skills before the interview. A good way to do this is to highlight the skills mentioned in the job description and then think about how you might be able to prove each of those skills.

13. "What did you like least about your previous job or internship?"

Employer Motivation: To gauge how you deal with obstacles and/or conflict and to assess your performance in a work setting.

Strategy: Definitely give this question some thought prior to any interview. Try to balance anything negative with something positive.

14. “Tell me about a time when you disappointed a supervisor?”

Employer Motivation: To see how honest you are about your mistakes.

Strategy: Pick something small to discuss (e.g. one day being late or making an error early in your training). Be sure to explain how you learned from the experience.

15. “How would you motivate a co-worker who was performing poorly on a team project?”

Employer Motivation: To see how you relate to others and perhaps how you can think outside the box.

Strategy: Draw upon your teamwork experiences, both school- and work-related, to present a thoughtful and logical approach.

16. “Tell me about an unpopular decision you made. How did you make the decision? In retrospect, how do you think you handled it?”

Employer Motivation: To see how you make decisions and how you handle differences of opinion.

Strategy: Include all aspects of the decision-making process as well as your analysis of the decision after the fact.

17. “How would your best friend describe you?”

Employer Motivation: To see if you can confidently state your strengths.

Strategy: A popular variation of this question is to state three adjectives that describe you -- short but informative.

18. “How will employment with us contribute to your career plans?”

Employer Motivation: To gauge what your long-term career goals are and how they fit with his/her particular organization.

Strategy: Provide an outline of what your career goals are at that time, but you don’t necessarily have to have a concrete timeline for the next twenty years in mind.

19. “Why should we hire you?”

Employer Motivation: To see if you can concisely sell your strengths.

Strategy: You may want to say something like “I think there are three main reasons you should hire me. First...” Three main selling points will stick in the interviewer’s mind. Structuring your answer with numbers will keep you focused. This is not the time for many details. This question is best answered with a summary of your major assertions.

20. “What salary do you expect?”

Employer Motivation: To see if your expectations are in line with his/hers.

Strategy: Never state a flat dollar amount unless you know what the job pays. Try a neutral statement: “I would expect to be paid what other persons in this position/area are paid”. You can also answer with a question: “How much does the job pay?” or “How much is a new employee usually paid?”

What are they writing down?

You will find that employers are writing down key points and ideas that you discuss while answering questions. Below is an example of a worksheet that employers fill-out to rate candidates during interviews:

Tip: Try not to peek while your interviewer is taking notes!

Illegal Questions

Questions that relate to gender, race, color, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disabilities are illegal, unless the employer can demonstrate that they relate to bona fide requirements of the job. Questions about family planning are also illegal. However, illegal questions do get asked in interviews. If you do want the offer, then three possible strategies are to:

Answer honestly, explaining how your circumstances may be an asset, if possible.

Q. I notice you have an engagement ring; when will you be getting married?

A. I will be getting married in August and my fiancée and I have agreed to focus our job searches on Atlanta. We are both very committed to our career goals and to working hard to support each other.

State what you assume the employer hopes to learn by asking the question, and then answer in response to that assumption. Sometimes this gives the interviewer time to recognize that an illegal question has been asked.

Q. I notice you have an engagement ring; when will you be getting married?

A. I guess that, in asking about my wedding plans, you may be wondering if I am truly committed to a career, and more specifically, whether I would be likely to be able to move at the end of your training program.

Sometimes it is possible to answer with humor or to simply deflect the question, if you are good at thinking on your feet.

Q. Do you have any health problems?

A. Yes – I'm a workaholic.

Questions you can ask employers

Your research of an organization or position may not provide all of the information that you will need before you take a job. Listed below are sample questions that you may want to ask during the interview to supplement your research. Avoid asking questions that begin with is, are, and do. These questions lead to yes/no answers. Instead begin your questions with who, what, when, where, why, or how:

How would you describe the duties of the position?

How would you describe a typical day and/or a typical week in this position?

How much travel is normally expected?

How frequently do you relocate professional employees?

Why are you looking to fill this position? (Is it a newly created job? Did the previous employee leave? Why?)

What are the things you like least/most about working here?

What is the average stay in this position?

Outside my department, with whom will I work?

Who would my supervisor be and what is his/her management style?

How does one advance in the organization?

How often are performance reviews given?

About how many individuals go through your training program each year?

Will you describe [my supervisor] to me? (The personality of a ranking officer often reveals a lot about the company philosophy).

How many people are you interviewing for this position?

If I were extended an offer of employment, how soon after this would you like me to start?

When can I expect to hear from you?

After the interview

Typically, there are 4 steps that occur after an interview:

1. Top candidates are chosen.
2. Background checks occur – especially important in banking, consulting, and government positions.
3. Top candidate is approved by HR and the supervisor.
4. An offer is made.

Finally:

Make sure to:

Get the business cards of everyone you have spoken with.

Send a thank you email within twenty-four hours to thank the interviewer and stress points in your background that qualify you for the position.

It is usually best not to accept a job offer on the spot; state your interest and appreciation for the offer and request a reasonable amount of time to consider it, e.g. several days through 2 weeks.

If you do not hear from the employer for several weeks, it is appropriate to call and ask for the status of your candidacy.

Be sure to evaluate all aspects of the job before accepting it rather than afterward. Once you have accepted a position, the employer considers your commitment binding.

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