Interviewing Skills

The interview is the opportunity to discuss your skills, abilities, achievements and experiences with a prospective employer. All interviewers are trying to determine if you are the best match for the job and if you are genuinely interested in the employer and position. How can you convey what the interviewer wants to know and be relaxed and self-confident in your presentation? The key to having a successful interview is to be prepared!

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

1) Know yourself
   - Know what you have to offer and how to talk freely about yourself. Conduct a self-assessment.  
     **Exercise #1:** Make a list of your strengths, which could include natural abilities, skills, personality traits and qualities. You can then decide which ones relate to the job. **Exercise #2:** Review all of your past experiences on your resume in order to be able to talk about them in detail in the interview. Also write down one accomplishment you achieved that you can relate from each one of your experiences. This helps you to talk reflectively about your career history and also helps answer, “What achievements are you proud of?”
   - Know what you want to do - the type of job, work environment and skills you would like to use.

2) Know about the job and the organization
   - Ask the organization to send a job description and company literature.
   - Browse the Internet for an employer's website.
   - Talk to employees of the organization, alumni and professors who have been affiliated with the organization.

3) Know what to expect in an interview
   - Know the kinds of questions that may be asked in an interview, write down and polish essay responses and practice saying them. Some very common questions to ask yourself are:
     - *Tell me about yourself.*
     - *What are your major strengths?*
     - *What are your biggest weaknesses?*
     - *What are you short term and long term goals?*
     - *Why should we hire you?*
   
   In all of these questions, you must answer in a way that shows the employer how you "match" the job. Target your responses to the specifics of the job and always give examples and details in your responses. Example: Choose your top 5 strengths from **Exercise #1** that relate specifically to the job description. Then order them from most related to least related, so you will discuss your best ones first, in case you are not given enough time to talk about all of them.
   - Make a list of questions you can ask during the interview to show your interest and enthusiasm. Some should specifically be about the program or research. Other more general ones may include:
     - *What are the challenges and/or responsibilities of the position?*
     - *Describe the work environment.*
     - *Are there any opportunities for formal or informal training?*
     - *How is an employee evaluated or promoted or supervised?*
     - *How would you describe the criteria for success in this job or the ideal candidate for this job?*
     - *If I started tomorrow, what would be my #1 priority?*

4) Know how to dress for the interview and present a professional image
   - Dress in a suit or professional dress with conservative colors, shoes and accessories.
   - Be sure your clothing fits well and is comfortable so you can concentrate on the interview without distraction.
   - Be sure your hair, nails and clothes are clean and well groomed.
DURING THE INTERVIEW

1) Be on time.
2) Bring extra copies of your resume, lists of references and any additional information you may feel useful. Place them in a leather portfolio for a professional image.
3) First impressions are important. Smile, shake hands firmly and introduce yourself.
4) Sit back in your chair straight and attentive but in a relaxed manner. Don't let your hands betray your nervousness by tapping or drumming.
5) Smile and try to be yourself.
6) Be positive and never slight a former employer or colleague.
7) Be concise in your answers, less than 2 minutes each. Don't ramble.
8) Don't exaggerate responses. Always tell the truth.
9) Try to present yourself as a professional colleague in a mutually beneficial discussion of how your qualifications might match their needs.
10) Close the interview by leaving with a clear picture of what the next step in the hiring process is. Ask, if this information is not offered, as you are leaving!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1) Write a thank you letter. Send a typed email letter the next day to every person with whom you interviewed. It should include any after thoughts from the interview and reinforce why you want the job. (Sample below)
2) Follow-up by telephone. If you do not get a response by the time you expected to hear, wait a short grace period of a few days, then call the employer on the phone. Ask where they are in the hiring process and reaffirm your interest in the position. Don't over do it - one call will do.
3) Evaluate your performance. What did you like or dislike about the interview? Think how you will do it differently next time to make future improvements. Remember interviewing is a skill you develop with practice.

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Your Complete Address
Today's Date

Interviewer Name
Title
Organization
Complete Address

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

It was a pleasure to meet with you at your office yesterday to learn more about TRW, Inc. The training program for personnel administrators seems challenging and comprehensive. I believe that my educational background and management work experience have prepared me well for such a demanding program and would be excited at the opportunity to contribute to your team.

Again, thank you for an enjoyable and informative interview. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Job Seeker
Job Interview Questions

Prepare to respond effectively to these questions most frequently asked by prospective employers.

- Would you like to start by telling me a little bit about yourself?
- Would you describe your most recent job responsibilities, highlighting the most difficult and the most satisfying?
- What accomplishments are you most proud of in your present job?
- What unique strengths and weaknesses do you bring to this position?
- Would you describe the elements you consider to be most critical to your job satisfaction?
- Describe your qualities that would make you an ideal boss.
- What are your long and short term career objectives?
- Can you give me some examples of the effective use of your problem solving skills?
- Would you share your most significant career frustrations to date?
- What hobbies or interests balance your career and the rest of your life?
- How would you or your co-workers describe your personality?
- How does your family feel about your career change?
- What do you think you can accomplish for our company?
- Why are you interested in joining our company?
- What do you feel would be required to succeed in this position?
- Can you define your ideal job?
- Do you have supervisory experience?
- Can you describe your management style or philosophy of management?
- How do you feel about relocation?
- Are you experienced in working under pressure and meeting deadlines, and can you give me examples of how you handled similar situations?
- Why are you leaving your present position?
- Had you considered leaving your company before?
- What did you think of your previous manager/company?
- Why should we hire you for this position?
- What can you contribute?
- What do you know about our company and operations?
- Who can we contact for references?
- What are your salary expectations?
- What was your salary history with your last employer?
- Do you have any questions about this position or our company?
The Salary Question

BASIC TIPS:
• Know the market value for your skills. Research salary ranges for the position you want. This gives you solid background information for an interview. There are many websites that offer salary information such as www.salary.com, www.salaryexpert.com, and www.payscale.com to name a few. These websites can be a good resource for average earning statistics in your industry. You can also try the Bureau of Labor Statistics at www.bls.gov for information as well as www.careerbliss.com for public health fields. Professional organizations and business magazines often survey salaries, and online job boards can be a good place to post a general salary question.

• Look at your financial situation. Find out how much you need to make in order to cover your bills. Remember to include increased living expenses if you are moving to a more expensive city. Several websites like www.salary.com also offer cost-of-living comparison calculators.

• Patience is valuable. Wait to discuss salary until the second or third interview. The first interview will give you a chance to explore the position and your possible responsibilities. Then you will have a better idea of what kind of salary to expect.

• A second interview signals that the employer is seriously interested in you for the position. At this point, the employer will likely discuss salary and benefits. If not, it's appropriate at this time to broach the subject. Tactfully ask what the salary range is for the position and what benefits are offered.

• What if you are asked about your salary requirements? You can always say salary is negotiable. This will “buy you time” to consider it further, play out all your options or allow the employer to offer a salary number first. You can also use the knowledge you have about average salary for that position and give the employer a range of salary you believe you should earn. Make sure the lowest figure will still cover your financial obligations.

• What if the salary offer is too low? Be prepared to relate a prepared case to the interviewer showing why you deserve a higher salary. If you know your market value, you can make a stronger argument.

• Wait to negotiate a final figure until a job offer is on the table.

• Look at the whole package, not just salary. Health benefits, profit sharing, insurance options, vacation, parking, overtime, bonuses, etc., should all be considered. Some companies may offer a lower salary, but they may make up for it in perks like flex-time or telecommuting options.

• Never make demands about salary. Stay professional and conversational.

• New graduates are often eager to take whatever salary is offered. Expect to start out in an entry-level job, but also expect to be paid what your education and skills merit. You will have more negotiating power if you have had real-life work experience such as an internship or co-op.
Interview Checklist

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

- Research the position for which you will be interviewing.
- Research the organization/employer thoroughly.
- Identify your skills that relate to the job.
- Plan what professional attire to wear.
- Obtain interviewer’s name and title.
- Confirm the time/date/location of the interview and know how to get there.
- Know the general salary range of the position.
- Review your resume and be able to elaborate on it.
- Practice interviewing, review frequently asked questions, and get feedback from others to improve your interviewing skills.
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

- Write a thank you note to the interviewer(s).
- Assess your performance and responses in the interview.
- Reply promptly and properly to any contact from the interviewer.
- Follow-up with a telephone call to find out status of your application if employer has not contacted you within the time frame he stated.