

Basic Interviewing Skills



Contents:

- Preparing for an interview—
etiquette, research, and ethics
- Common interview questions
- Proper interview attire
- Success in a variety of interview
situations



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MAJOR AND CAREER ADVISING

- Individual advising by scheduled appointment or during Walk-In Hours (9:00 - 11:30 a.m., Monday - Thursday, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., Monday - Friday)
- Self-assessment exercises
- Computerized career guidance programs: CareerBeam® and FOCUS
- Seminars on a wide range of career topics including Résumé Writing, Interviewing, Career Search Strategies, Business Etiquette & Professional Dress, etc.

JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE

- Personal advising on job search strategies
- Résumé and cover letter critiques
- Résumé and Interviewing Techniques seminars
- Mock Interview Program
- On-campus interviewing for winter break and summer jobs
- Monthly Online Summer Jobs and Internships Bulletin (January - May)
- Career fairs and networking events (see schedule below)
- CareerBeam® (Over 18 million employer leads)
- VAULT® Online Career Library

CAREER RESOURCE CENTER

- Career guides
- College and graduate school information
- Graduate admissions tests registration materials
- Computer lab

BOBCAT ONLINE JOB SEARCH PROGRAM

For Current Year Graduates and Alumni

(You must register for these services - ask for more information.)

- Résumé Referrals
- Online Job Postings
- On-Campus Interviewing for Career Positions

CAREER FAIRS, 2007 - 2008

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| • Ohio University Fall Career Fair | October 3 |
| • Ohio University Winter Career Fair | February 5 |
| • Teacher Recruitment Consortium | April 11 |

CAREER SERVICES WEB SITE

- <http://www.ohio.edu/careers>

BASIC INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

The interview is your opportunity to match your talents and interests to the needs of the employer. Your goal in the interview is not merely to convince the employer you are the right person for the job; you should also use the interview to evaluate whether this is the right position for you. Throughout the interview, the employer is looking for an answer to the question, "Why should I hire you?" Your responses must focus on answering that question. Remember: interviewing is a two-way street!

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: PREPARATION

Preparing for the interview is almost as important as the interview itself. The key to successful interviewing is **knowing yourself, knowing the position, and knowing the organization** with whom you are interviewing. To prepare for any interview, you should:

1. Review your skills, interests, and values as they relate to this position.
2. Research the organization.
3. Prepare to answer questions you might be asked.
4. Prepare questions you can ask the interviewer.
5. Practice interviewing to familiarize yourself with the interview process.
6. Plan your wardrobe so that you are dressed appropriately.
7. **Adjust any online profile including Facebook® and MySpace® so they are a professional representation or restricted from public access.**

YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT

To discuss effectively your qualifications for a position, you must have a clear understanding of **what you have to offer an employer and what you are seeking in a position**. To begin, assess your **skills, interests, and values**. What work experiences have you enjoyed? What knowledge have you gained in the classroom that can be applied in a work situation? Where have you been successful in the classroom or in positions you have held? With what types of people do you enjoy working? What work environment do you prefer? What concerns or issues are most important to you in a work environment?

Apply this information to what you know about the career field you plan to enter. **Are there any obvious discrepancies** between what you do well, what you like to do, your relevant experience, what is important to you, and the expectations for the positions you will be seeking? If so, before the interview is the time to deal with these issues!

Many interview questions relate directly to your skills, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and previous experiences. A prospective employer will want to feel confident that you have the skills required for the position they need to fill. Be sure to know how they relate to the specific position or company. Review the job description or posting to be familiar with the qualifications, skills, and responsibilities. Learn how to describe your skills in a way that is relevant to the position. The better you can describe yourself in a way the employer will understand, the better chance of obtaining the position.

EVALUATE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Handshake—firm, don't hesitate to extend your hand first. Shake hands upon meeting and before leaving the interview.
- Eye contact—direct eye contact makes you appear confident, however don't stare.
- Posture—stand up straight, do not slump in your chair, do not cross legs at the knee, maintain a "natural" posture.
- Use professional verbal communication—avoid slang terms, pronounce words completely.
- Remember—employers often make their hiring decision within the first 3-5 minutes of the interview so your communication skills are being tested—market yourself properly!

- Concentrate on giving clear and concise responses to questions you are asked. Avoid "yes" and "no" answers. Be prepared to give examples to support your answers. Responding with vague generalities will indicate you have not taken the time to think about the questions you could be asked or that you do not have the skills for the job.
- Have a positive attitude even when answering difficult questions. Be confident, respond openly and honestly.
- Project enthusiasm about the position.
- Gesturing and smiling, when appropriate, are considered behaviors used by successful, intelligent candidates.
- Speak with conviction in your voice.
- Think about how you will manage the first impression the interviewer(s) will have of you in terms of verbal and nonverbal communication!
- Be courteous and attentive to **everyone** you meet.

ETHICAL ISSUES

You must represent your skills and qualifications honestly to prospective employers whether it is in a résumé, cover letter, reference sheet, interview, career fair, or any other type of Career Services event/service. The Office of Career Services has an Academic Misrepresentation Policy in the event any student is suspected of misrepresenting their credentials in the job search process through our Office. Copies of this policy can be obtained in Career Services.

RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION

It is important to research the organization, industry, and/or educational institution with whom you will be interviewing prior to the interview. This information will help you understand the organization and the position for which you are applying. Thorough research will enable you to ask better questions during the interview and to determine which of your assets to emphasize. Questions to keep in mind when researching include:

What does the organization do? What are its products and/or services? What industries/populations does the organization serve?

How large is the organization? Is it part of a larger organization? If so, which one? What are some of its acquisitions?

Where is its headquarters? What are the other divisions and where are they located?

What is the outlook for this organization, or this industry in general?

What is the salary range for this type of position?

There are a variety of sources which can assist you when researching a specific employer. These sources include:

- CareerBeam@—net-based, employer research system accessible through Career Services' web site
- VAULT@ Online Career Library—accessible through Career Services' web site
- Career Resource Center in Career Services
- Alumni who work for the organization
- Advisors/Professors who may have connections or know alumni who work there
- Internet
- Annual Reports (if the organization is publicly held)
- Attending professional organization meetings
- Networking with students who may have interviewed or interned with the organization
- Networking with professionals in the industry who may have knowledge about the organization
- Calling or e-mailing the human resources department and inquiring about promotional materials
- Attending a career fair if the organization will be participating
- Attending pre-nights/information sessions the night prior to on-campus interviews
- Business/industry publications
- Newspapers
- Conducting informational interviews
- Internships
- Career Shadowing
- Alden Library

ANTICIPATE: QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS ARE LIKELY TO ASK

There are a number of questions employers commonly ask during an interview. By being aware of some of these questions and thinking about your responses, you will be better prepared to offer well thought-out and concise replies.

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|---|--|
| 1. Tell me about yourself. | 12. Why did you choose to attend Ohio University? |
| 2. How would others describe you? | 13. How has your college experience prepared you for this career? |
| 3. What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses? | 14. What led you to choose your major field of study? |
| 4. What do you feel you can contribute to our organization? | 15. Do you have plans for continued study? |
| 5. Why should we hire you? | 16. What aspects of your last job did you like the best? The least? |
| 6. What are your short/long term career goals? | 17. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable? |
| 7. What have you done in the past year to improve yourself? | 18. Describe the ideal relationship between a supervisor and supervisee. |
| 8. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why? | 19. What criteria are you using to evaluate the employer for which you hope to work? |
| 9. What is the hardest thing you've ever done? | 20. What do you know about our organization? |
| 10. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it? | 21. Are you willing to relocate? Do you have a location preference? |
| 11. What is the greatest failure you have experienced in your life? | |

Examples of Responses:

- If you are asked to describe your greatest weakness, include in your response the steps you have taken to overcome the difficulty. For example, "I tend to procrastinate in preparing term papers. This year, however, I devised a schedule with deadlines for completing research, for writing the first draft, and for editing and word processing. I feel that this is helping me stay on track."
- If asked why you chose your major/university, remember that the employer is interested in your decision-making skills—how you researched the information as well as the end result.
- If the interviewer says, "Tell me about yourself," confine your answers to career-related information. Too much detail about your personal history is inappropriate. Be careful not to share potentially discriminatory information!

Many employers use the behavioral ("problem/action/result") interview technique. You are asked to describe a problem you encountered, the action you took to resolve it, and the result of your action. The situation you describe should demonstrate how you used a skill or attribute which is related to the position for which you are interviewing.

PREPARE: QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

At some point during the interview, the interviewer may ask if you have any questions. Based on your research, you will most likely have areas about which you would like more information. You should have several questions in mind to ask, but also listen during the interview for points about which you may need more information. Asking pertinent questions shows that you have prepared for the interview and are knowledgeable, interested and evaluating the employer.

The following list will help you generate ideas to **prepare your own list of questions in your own language** from your understanding of what you are seeking in a position. It is also appropriate to jot down brief responses to these questions as long as you are focused on listening to the answers and provide appropriate feedback.

1. What are some of the qualifications you expect the ideal candidate for this position to have?
2. What characteristics do the individuals who are successful in this position possess?
3. Could you describe the normal daily routine for this position?
4. Is there a training period? What does it involve? Are there opportunities for professional development?
5. What career patterns have others followed who have completed the training program?
6. How would my performance be evaluated? How often? By whom?

7. Does your organization encourage its members to pursue additional education? What area of study is most encouraged?
8. How would you describe the organizational culture (or work environment)?
9. What current industry-wide trends are likely to affect your organization?
10. What will be the next step in this process? When will a hiring decision be made?

Some areas of questioning to avoid in the first interview include:

- Avoid asking questions to which you would know the answers if you had read the employer's materials.
- Salary and/or benefits. The focus during the initial interview is on the responsibilities of the position and the skills/experience you will bring to the position—not what the company can or will do for you.
- Very complex technical questions. Often the interviewer is from the human resources department and will not be able to answer detailed questions about what the position entails. Avoid embarrassing him or her by asking questions only an individual in a certain technical area could answer.
- If you will be hired. It's probably too early to tell!

PRACTICE

It takes practice to feel comfortable and be good at interviewing. You can sit in front of a mirror and answer potential questions out loud. You need to hear what your answers sound like and see how you look as you speak. How do you feel about your style? How do you think you would come across in an interview?

Consider scheduling a Mock Interview with Career Services. Your interview will be conducted as if you were interviewing for a position. Mock interviews are recorded. Immediately after the mock interview, you will watch the recording with the interviewer. The critique of the interview and the tips you receive should help you present yourself more effectively and be more confident in an interview setting. Additional information is available on our web site: www.ohio.edu/careers.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY: INTERVIEWING ATTIRE

Your appearance at a job interview may work for you or against you. Few people are hired simply because they are well-dressed, but wearing the wrong outfit has ruined the chances of many a job hunter. Select clothes that project the image appropriate to the position you want. Candidates should research the employer's standards then dress as though they were representing that specific employer.

Neatness counts. Check for missing buttons, store or dry cleaning tags, tiny rips in your clothing, or run-down heels. Be sure your clothes are neatly pressed and use a lint brush if necessary. Your shoes should be clean and polished. People may equate how neatly you dress with how neatly you work. Make sure your nails are well manicured—regardless of gender! Avoid showing anything that may be considered unprofessional such as tattoos, piercings, or exotic jewelry.

In the professional world, conservative clothing in basic colors is the unofficial uniform. In a more creative field, casual and colorful clothing may be acceptable. Dress comfortably, but appropriately. Then, relax and concentrate on the interview.

MEN

- *Solid-colored suits are best: medium to dark blue and gray or subtle pinstripes (based on current styles).*
- *Shirt and tie should be fairly conservative, No strong patterns or very bright colors!*
- *Dark dress shoes with dark socks are a must; no boots or athletic shoes.*
- *Hair should be clean and neat.*
- *Facial hair should be well-groomed.*
- *Hands and fingernails should be clean and neat.*
- *Do not wear strong cologne or a lot of cologne.*

WOMEN

- *Neutral colors are best: beiges, blues, and grays. Pastels and overly feminine items are not considered professional.*
- *Always wear hose--even on a scorching summer day. Hose should be flesh tone with no pattern.*
- *Wear closed toe and closed low heel; boots should be avoided completely.*
- *Professional pantsuits may not be acceptable in all organizations so research carefully.*
- *Nails must be clean and filed. Light-colored polish is acceptable; bright colors are distracting.*
- *Hair should be clean and neat. Shoulder length or shorter is most appropriate for business situations. Long hair should be controlled.*
- *Make-up: Enhance your features, do not overpower them. Avoid excessive make-up.*
- *Perfume: Don't use perfumes that will overpower the interviewer--use light scents.*

SOME ADDITIONAL POINTERS

Some additional areas of preparation that may have an impact on your success in the interview situation include:

- **Know where your appointment is to be held.** If possible, travel to the location in advance of the appointment to be sure you know how to get there (even for an on-campus interview).
- **Be on time.** This is a courtesy to the interviewer and creates a positive impression. An early arrival of 10-15 minutes will also allow you time to collect your thoughts and review those ideas you intend to express to the employer. When the interview begins, you want to feel relaxed and in control of the situation.
- **Know the correct pronunciation and spelling of the organization's and interviewers' names.** Listen closely when the interviewer introduces her/himself. You may also need to find out if "Chris" is a man or a woman. Answers to these types of questions can usually be obtained from the receptionist or call ahead.
- **Be friendly and polite to everyone with whom you may come in contact,** from the receptionist to the company president. People notice!

WHAT TO TAKE TO THE INTERVIEW

Part of being prepared for an interview is taking the correct documents and other “props” with you. Items you should consider include: a nice notepad in a leather folder, good pen, extra copies of your résumé and reference sheet, any completed application materials, teaching portfolio, portfolio, or performance pieces (audio, video, live performance). A professional-looking folder with a notepad inside will allow you to write down questions before the interview, write down answers to questions you ask, and jot down observations you make during the day. A folder will give you a place to put business cards and other information the organization provides during the interview.

Some interviewees create their own business cards to distribute at the interview. Candidates might also consider taking mints, a small purse for bare essentials, and money for the parking garage or public transportation if necessary. Do not take a backpack or other bulky-type tote—this does not contribute to a professional, organized first impression. Women might want to take an extra pair of hose in the event you need them by the time you reach the interview. Little details such as these can make the difference between minor disasters which leave you tense or a calm day where your interview proceeds well.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

It is imperative that you familiarize yourself with the different aspects of interviewing you may encounter during your interview. The following section explains some basic concepts that will assist you in understanding the interview process more clearly.

INTERVIEW PHASES

If you understand the different phases of an interview, then you know what should be happening during each stage. However, understand that the interviewer may not be extremely knowledgeable about the interview process—especially during second or on-site interviews. Therefore, if a step in the process is skipped, you can ask questions (carefully!) so the process is explained to you in a clear fashion.

Opening Phase—interviewer should establish rapport making interviewee feel comfortable (introduce him/herself), provide an orientation/preview of the interview process (verify your name, position applied for, purpose/outcome of the interview, how the information collected will be used, length of interview, explain why they are the person conducting the interview). Motivation is the last part of the opening phase where the interviewer motivates the person to give complete, honest answers.

Question-Response Phase—all participants must prepare carefully and have the opportunity to ask questions, reply to questions, and provide feedback.

Closing Phase—interviewer(s) should summarize points covered during interview, allow interviewee time to provide additional information not covered, explanation as to the next step in interview process (if a second interview is required, when the candidate may expect a decision, etc.). *****If you are truly interested in the position** for which you have interviewed, ask for the job in a professional, proper manner. Many employers will not extend an offer unless you make it clear that you would like to work in the organization.***

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Before moving into the actual interview process, it may be helpful to know about the different types of interviews which you may encounter. Many interviews combine several of these approaches.

A preliminary or screening interview is used to determine whether you meet the basic qualifications. This interview might be conducted face-to-face, over the phone, or by using video. Prepare for these interviews as you would for any other type. If you succeed in this interview, further in-depth interviews generally follow. Most on-campus interviews are screening interviews.

The behavioral interview focuses on how you would handle different situations in the workplace. The interviewer asks you to describe a problem or situation in which you used a particular skill. You then relate the action(s) you took and the result of these actions.

A panel or group interview is a situation where there are two or more interviewers. Remember names as much as possible and be certain to maintain eye contact with each person—not just the person who asked a question.

In an advertising interview, the interviewer is trying to sell you on the organization. In this case, express nonverbal interest until you determine if you have an interest.

In a conversational interview, you may talk about the weather, summer vacations, baseball, etc.—anything but the job. In this instance, the interviewer is trying to evaluate your communication and interpersonal skills, attitudes, interests, sources of motivation, poise, and other attributes.

Employers often use a group of interview setting when the same information must be disseminated to a large number of applicants. This approach can also be used as a technique to uncover leadership qualities, so be certain to make yourself known by taking an active part in the discussion. Candidates should be assertive, but you should not interrupt the other candidates or try to discredit them.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

Many organizations will conduct phone interviews as part of the screening process. A phone interview may be used to determine if the employer will interview you during on-campus recruiting or during an on-site interview (where you travel to the organization). However, some candidates are hired based solely on phone interviews, so you should not discount this form of interviewing as less important than face-to-face. It is just as important to prepare and practice for a phone interview! Guidelines for phone interviews include:

- Fix the message on your answering machine/voice mail so it sounds professional. Leave one “identifier” on your answering machine—either a first name, a last name, or a phone number. You need some form of identification so the recruiter knows they have called the right number.
- Work out a system of message-taking if you have roommates, family, etc. You don’t want a recruiter calling only to find out you were in the shower!
- Create a mini-job log to have by the phone—including a list of organizations and title(s) of positions for which you have applied.

- Don't say, "Now what job is this? I've applied for so many."
- Do not sound disorganized.
- If you miss a call, return it as soon as possible.
- If you are calling the recruiters, give your full name and say you're calling regarding the (name of) position because recruiters are on the phone extensively for various job openings.
- If the message was left for you at 1 p.m., and you don't receive the message until 7:30 p.m., call and leave a message THEN! Give your full name, refer to the position, and provide contact info for the next day.
- Anticipate that the recruiter might answer the phone when you call at 7:30 p.m.
- Most recruiters will ask if this is a convenient time for a few questions. Some recruiters will call to set up a later time for a phone interview.
- If you need to be somewhere when the recruiter calls, you could say, "I'm glad you called. I have about 10 minutes before I have to get to an appointment/class/work. Is that enough time or could I call you back later today?"
- If you can't hear the recruiter well, don't say, "Can you speak up?" Say, "I'm having trouble hearing you."
- Make sure your phone battery is well charged and that your roommate isn't getting ready to vacuum.
- If the hiring committee is on the other end in a conference-call setting, write down each person's name and title so you can refer to it later (and write those thank you notes).
- Have your notes, position descriptions, questions for employer, résumé, reference sheet, cover letter, pen, and paper ready at all times.
- Be prepared to ask questions at the end.
- Phone interviews allow a recruiter to determine if you are as "good as you appear on paper," if you are articulate, and if you are a viable candidate to join the organization.
- For additional information, perform a web search on the topic "Phone Interviewing Tips."

VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Similar to phone interviews, many organizations use video interviews/videoconferencing for screening purposes and may make a final hiring decision based on a video interview. Video technology saves time and money for all parties involved. There are many versions of video interviews—some are in real time, yet others are videotaped and sent to the employer. If your interview is taped or captured for viewing at a later time using various technologies, candidates are usually provided a list of questions to answer for the interview.

- Prepare and relax—somehow find a way to practice with a video camera in your face. Some employers might use cameras which are placed on top of a computer monitor.
- Prepare for question/answer session just like a face-to-face interview.
- If the interview is recorded and you were provided a list of questions, sound energetic when answering—as though you were talking to a person. Avoid sounding memorized or reading answers you have written down.
- If you are going to some type of facility where the interview will be conducted, or even a room on campus, go early and familiarize yourself with the setting. You may need to arrange the location of the camera or your chair to give the best impression possible. Aim for the camera to be at eye level—do not look down at the camera. You want to give yourself a "news anchor" look.
- Understand, and anticipate, that technical difficulties may occur. Do not get upset or disappointed if you have to reschedule, or if a phone conference call is needed instead. These situations occur when using any technology.
- Make sure you are comfortable in your suit or you will look anxious or tense. If possible, glance at the monitor to check your posture, but don't stare at the monitor or you may lose focus on the interview.
- Black suits should be avoided for video interviews—they look too dark, too serious on camera.
- Manage the time factor carefully—allow for "chat" time during or after the formal segment of the interview.
- Anticipate a possible time delay between yourself and the interviewer(s) while the signal travels. You do not want to be "talking over" the other person.
- Have a notepad for notes, questions, outlines of responses you have prepared, and a copy of your résumé.
- Find out if there is a cost to use video facilities. Sometimes the candidate must pay the fee, sometimes the employer will pay, and occasionally the fee is split between the candidate and the employer.
- For more information, perform a web search on the topic "Video Interviewing Tips."

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Immediately following the interview, you will need to write and send a thank you letter to each person with whom you interviewed 24-48 hours after the interview. Generally, thank you notes should be written unless you know the recruiter will not be in the office to receive your letter in a timely fashion. In that situation, an e-mail thank you note is acceptable. While

some follow-up on your part is appropriate, you must be careful not to bother the employer needlessly. Sometimes the hiring process does not progress as rapidly as you, or the employer, had planned. Be sensitive to this!

REASONS FOR REJECTION

There are a number of reasons why applicants are rejected by an employer. Many reasons have no relationship to your skills. The following list will give you an idea of some "typical" factors why a candidate may be rejected for a position.

- Inability to express self clearly and/or poor communication skills
- Uncertainty about future goals and/or career plans or unrealistic goals
- Poor personal appearance
- Lack of enthusiasm or interest in the job or organization (failure to ask questions)
- Excessive interest in salary, benefits, and vacation
- Lack of courtesy, maturity, or tact
- Lack of knowledge about the organization
- Lack of confidence or over-confidence
- Evasiveness

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Pre-Employment Screening/Testing

Many organizations screen applicants for abuse of alcohol and/or drugs. You may be required to undergo urinalysis or other testing as part of pre-employment screening. In most cases, this will take place after you have been offered the position but before you begin your job. Employment will be dependent upon your passing these tests. Be prepared!

Dealing with Physical Disabilities in the Interview

Physical disabilities may be seen by an employer as a potential hindrance to your ability to perform a job. If the disability is obvious, you should mention it within the first few moments of the interview—whether or not the employer asks about the disability. An employer's lack of awareness about your capabilities and your ability to work effectively in spite of your disability could lead to your rejection. By mentioning the disability in the interview, you can help alleviate the employer's misconceptions. This also gives you an opportunity to discuss what accommodations, if any, you would need.

Handling Inappropriate Questions

It is inappropriate for the interviewer to ask personal questions unrelated to the qualifications for the job for which you are interviewing. Two examples of illegal questions are, "Are you married?" or "Do you plan to start a family soon?" Every candidate needs to make a personal decision as to how she/he will respond to these questions. One strategy to use in handling such questions is to address the fear behind the question, not the question itself. An appropriate response in this situation might be a reassuring statement such as, "I assure you that if I am hired, I will be as dedicated to my career whether I am married or single or have a family or not."

You can pick up a current list of legal and illegal questions, published by the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, in our Career Resource Center. While the employer may ask these questions innocently, you should be aware that these types of questions are potentially discriminatory and are illegal. If you are the recipient of an illegal question(s) during an interview, you are strongly encouraged to inform the Office of Career Services about the situation. Another good resource is the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's web site at: <http://www.eeoc.gov>.