



## Interviewing Guide

"So tell me about yourself..." The interview is your opportunity to "sell yourself" in person. Your cover letter, resume, and networking have gotten you this far. Now is the time for you to verbally communicate why a particular organization should hire you. Perhaps the most important key to succeeding in the interview process is to be well-prepared. Questions will usually cover five areas: education; experience; career goals; skills and abilities; and knowledge of the organization. It is critical to be able to effectively communicate how your background is relevant to the position and the goals of the organization. The interview process is also a two-way street; not only are you being interviewed, but you should also take advantage of the opportunity to evaluate the job and employer to ensure it is a good match for you.

### *Preparing for the Interview – 1-2 weeks in advance*

- Collect and review your research on the organization and carefully review the position description.
- Think about your resume and your history in relation to the organization and the position so that you can clearly communicate your experiences, skills, and accomplishments with ease.
- Confirm the time, date, and location of the interview.
- Confirm the title and correct spelling and pronunciation of the interviewer's name.
- Obtain directions, and allow plenty of time to get there.
- Be prepared to discuss anything on your resume.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer.
- PRACTICE! Participate in a mock interview or review sample interview questions. Call the Career Development Center at 610-660-3100 to make an appointment for a mock interview. When making the appointment, be as specific as possible in describing the organization, industry, or field for which you're interviewing. Your career counselor will use this information to tailor the questions he or she asks you to your goals. After the mock interview, your career counselor will provide you with tips and feedback on how to improve your interview skills so that you are ready for the real thing!

### *The Big Day*

- Be on time...this means arriving at least 15 minutes before the interview. If you're very early, you can always wait in the parking lot or down the street.
- Silence your phone or leave it in the car.
- Bring extra copies of your resume.
- Always be honest, confident and positive when answering questions.
- Do not discuss salary or benefits in the first interview.
- Don't be afraid of silence. Take a few moments to collect your thoughts before answering. An interviewer will appreciate a well-thought answer as opposed to a hasty one.
- Keep your answers brief and to the point.
- Avoid using slang.
- Be aware of and control your non-verbal language - eye contact, posture, gestures, and hand movements.

### *After the Interview*

- Take notes directly after the interview and use them to remind you about what was discussed in the interview.
- Promptly e-mail or send a thank you letter to the interviewer(s), emphasizing your interest in the position and your qualifications as well as touching on one specific thing (from your notes) that you appreciated learning.

- Review your interview performance and consider any modifications for future interviews.
- If you do receive and accept an offer, inform and thank those people who helped you in the process. If you do *not* receive an offer, you might consider reaching out to the interviewer or human resources contact to identify ways you could have strengthened your candidacy.

### Appearance

- Always dress professionally, neatly, and appropriately for the organization for which you are interviewing.
- Err on the conservative side - navy blue or black are standard conservative colors.
- For women: a well-tailored suit with minimal jewelry and makeup.
- For men: a well-tailored suit, conservative tie, and polished shoes.
- As with everything else, hair should be in a neat, conservative style; make sure your fingernails are clean.
- It is important that you are physically comfortable so that you can concentrate on the interview – this is not the day to break in brand new shoes!
- Do not chew gum during or smoke prior to the interview.
- Do not overuse cologne or perfume; it's best to avoid it altogether.
- Feel free to bring your interview suit to the Career Development Center for an informed opinion from a career counselor.

How can you enter an interview exuding confidence and competence? How can you know when it's appropriate to express an opinion, or when it's best to take a deep breath, pause, and offer the most tactful statement you can muster? Read on for advice from people who regularly interview job candidates and who help decide which ones to hire:

- *Research* - learn as much as you can about the organization beforehand. Know its products and services, target market or client base, profit margin, management, culture, dress code, recent press, and anything else you can find out. Good sources are Career Development counselors and resources, a college or public library, and the internet.
- *Practice* interviewing. Career Development offers mock interviews and one-on-one coaching. Additionally, a mock interview day, where candidates can schedule mock interviews with professional, corporate recruiters from local, regional and national companies, is scheduled every semester. Call Career Development for details.
- *Relate your experience* in work, classes, and activities to the internship or full-time job you're seeking. If the connections are not obvious, what transferable skills do you have that apply?
- *Dress for Success* - plan out your interview attire *well* in advance – the morning of your interview is not the time to realize your shirt has a stain or your suit needs pressing or doesn't fit. Also make sure that your shoes are shined and in good condition; and that your hair and nails are well groomed.
- *Arrive prepared* with extra copies of your resume and list of references.
- *Speak slowly and clearly*. Don't be afraid to pause for a moment to collect your thoughts.
- *Honesty* is the best policy, especially when answering questions about your work history or performance, or answering the "weakness" question. Don't try to cover up past mistakes. Instead, focus on how you learned from them.
- *Assert yourself* by asking informed questions at the end of your interview. Remember that the interview is also a way for you to learn if the job or internship is right for you.
- *Get a business card* from each person you meet so that you may send a thank you e-mail, typed letter or handwritten note *within 24 hours* after the interview.

### Interview Styles

Every interviewer approaches the process in a slightly different way. Some interviewers are quite friendly, while others can be challenging and distant. Some interviews are conducted by just one person; others can be with multiple people in one day or in a panel with 3 or more interviewers. It is important to not only be aware of different types of interviewing settings, but to also note that there are various types of interview *styles* that exist. The following is a brief list of some interview styles you may encounter in your job search:

- *Behavioral Interview*: This type of interview is based on the theory that past performance is the best indicator of future performance. Emphasis is put on the candidate's provision of detailed and

descriptive examples of past behaviors as opposed to hypothetical situations. For example, merely stating that you were in a leadership position will not suffice to emphasize your leadership skills. Behavioral-based interview questions are typically open-ended and do not have a right or wrong answer. However, advance preparation can be extremely helpful. Remember the acronym **STARR** when formulating your response to a behavior-based interview question: describe the specific **S**ituation and the **T**ask or assignment; the **A**ction(s) he/she took; and the **R**esults or outcome of the action(s). It is also recommended that you **R**elate that experience back to the requirements of the job at hand.

- *Stress Interview:* Also known as a *confrontational* interview, this is one in which a deliberate attempt is made to make you feel uncomfortable in order to assess how you might handle a stressful situation. This may include attempts to bring out weaknesses, long periods of silence, or interruptions. As with all interviews, do your best to keep calm, take sufficient time and think before answering a question. In other words, "roll with the punches," and remember that it is a technique designed to elicit a reaction.
- *Case Studies:* These are most common with consulting interviews. A candidate is given a problem to solve and the object is not to come to a specific solution, but to allow the interviewer to observe analytical and problem-solving skills through the process you take to reach a conclusion. For example, you might be asked, "How many light bulbs are necessary to light New York City?" How might you think through such a question?

#### *Interviewing Ethics*

Never take an interview just "for practice." By doing so, you are deceiving the organization about your intentions and interest, and potentially denying an opportunity to a genuinely interested candidate. Always be honest about the information you provide both on your resume and in an interview. Not doing so can come back to haunt you, even many years later, if it is discovered that you gave misinformation.

#### *Inappropriate and Illegal Interview Questions*

It is *inappropriate* for an interviewer to ask certain types of questions. It is *illegal* to make a hiring decision based on a candidate's responses to them. These include questions about age, race, religion, citizenship, national origin, sexual orientation, marital/family status and plans, physical handicaps, financial situation, and criminal record. If asked such a question, keep in mind the information that is being pursued. Remember that not all questions are asked in an outright manner. If you are requested to disclose this information, in any form, there are a few ways you might choose to handle the situation:

- Address the question directly by asking how that information affects your ability to do the job.
- Answer truthfully.
- Remind the interviewer that the question is illegal.

#### *Inappropriate vs. Permitted Inquiries, Respectively*

- Does your religion allow you to work on Saturdays? Vs. Are you able to work occasional weekend hours?
- What is your native language? Vs. What languages do you speak/write fluently? (If job-related)
- How old are you? Vs. Are you over 18 years of age?
- What's your citizenship? Vs. Do you have authorization to work in the U.S.?
- Do you have any physical disabilities? Vs. Do you have any disabilities, which would interfere with your ability to perform the job?

#### *Some Interview Questions to Prepare For...*

Practice until you are able to answer these with ease and confidence. Don't memorize your answers or they will sound that way. Use these questions as your opportunity to demonstrate how your skills and experience make you the best candidate by referring to the qualifications of the position and making a direct connection. Remember to always be positive and honest when answering.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why should we hire someone with a liberal arts background as opposed to someone with a more technical background?

- What are your strengths? Your weaknesses?
- Tell me about your internship at XYZ organization.
- How would you describe yourself? How would your peers describe you?
- What do you know about our company?
- Tell me how your education and coursework provides a good background for this job.
- Describe a situation when you needed to solve a problem.
- What can you contribute to this position and to this company?
- What has been your most recent accomplishment?
- If you had to do anything over, what would it be, how would you change it, and why?
- What class did you like the best and why? Least?
- Do you have plans to continue your education with advanced study or a graduate degree?
- How would you describe your leadership experience?
- What do you plan to be doing 5 years from now?
- Why do you want to work in this field?
- Is there anything else you'd like me to know?
- Describe a situation where you had to reach a quick decision.
- Do you have any questions?

### *Questions to Ask the Interviewer*

Having a few thoughtful questions to ask the interviewer will convey both your interest and enthusiasm for the organization. Be sure not to ask questions that were already answered, were included in materials you were given, or those that are easily obtained through independent research prior to the interview.

Some thoughtful questions include:

- Why do you enjoy working for your organization?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- Tell me about your training and development programs.
- How would you describe your organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- Describe a typical first assignment.
- What path did you take to your present position?
- Describe the work environment.
- What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I'm interviewing?
- What products/services is the company looking to introduce/eliminate in the near future?
- What are the prospects for the organization's growth and expansion?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?