

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER TOOLKIT

THE JOB INTERVIEW

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An interview is a planned conversation between an employer and a prospective employee to mutually determine if there is a good match. A successful job interview is not a matter of luck or “winging it”; it is the crucial final step in your job search that requires more preparation than you may think. The interview is your chance to continue learning about the company and the position, not only to convince the employer to hire you, but to make sure that the company, this position and the staff you are meeting are a good fit for you. With preparation you can effectively communicate your abilities, interests, background, work experience, education, and motivation to a prospective employer and collect important information for your own decision-making process.

1) BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

PRE-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

REVIEW THE POSITION DESCRIPTION AND YOUR RÉSUMÉ

Know the job. You must understand the job and its requirements so you can articulate your knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Know yourself. Knowing yourself and understanding the requirements of the position helps you communicate your related skills and experiences.

RESEARCH THE COMPANY OR ORGANIZATION

Know the company. Gather information about: the company's history, products or services, philosophy, standing in the industry, organizational structure, or prospects for growth or change. Use this information to present yourself as a candidate who can solve problems and one who shares the organization's philosophy.

PREPARE FOR THE TYPE OF INTERVIEW

In addition to a **Traditional Interview**, be prepared for:

Screening Interview: The employer is looking for reasons

to quickly eliminate unqualified candidates.

Telephone Interview: The employer is narrowing down the candidate pool by gauging how articulate you are and if you are as strong a candidate as you appear on paper.

Panel Interview: A group interview with three or more interviewers.

Second or Third Interview: By this time, it's less about skill sets and more about fit.

Stress Interview: Particularly challenging questions that test your ability to maintain your composure.

Situational Interview: Determines how you will approach hypothetical situations (“How would you handle...”).

Behavioral Interview: Employers attempt to predict your future behavior based on your past performance (“Tell me about a time when you confronted an unexpected problem...”).

PREPARE FOR COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Refer to *Top Five Interview Questions* and *20 Common Interview Questions* in insert.

Utilize the STAR Method to prepare many positive examples, situations, and stories to describe your interpersonal and work skills and abilities ahead of time.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN LIST OF QUESTIONS

Write down good questions to ask the employer. Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates your interest and your information-gathering and decision-making skills. [see insert for *Questions to Ask*]

PRACTICE INTERVIEW SKILLS

Rehearse your answers to questions with family members and friends. The Career Services Center provides interview coaching and videotaped mock interviews.

GATHER REFERENCES, TRANSCRIPTS, WORK SAMPLES

Bring three copies of your list of references with you. Bring samples of artwork, publications, school projects, and newspaper clippings if appropriate for the position.

PLAN LOGISTICS TO ARRIVE 15 MINUTES EARLY

Consult a map and plan for traffic and parking. Perform a trial run when you visit the company to pick up company materials and assess the culture and dress of the company.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Dress according to the standards of

the organization. If you are unsure, dress conservatively.

View Dress for Success links at www.hpu.edu/careerlinks for tips.

2) DURING THE INTERVIEW

Discuss ways you can contribute to the organization. Let the interviewer know how you can meet a need or solve a problem. Emphasize your strengths. Focus on work experience, courses, and personal qualities that would be beneficial for the job. Give examples from your experience or education to support these.

- **Be Friendly:** Smile and give a firm handshake. Greet the interviewer by name.
- **Show your Enthusiasm:** Enthusiasm, energy, and a sense of humor help create a good impression.
- **Maintain Eye Contact:** Don't look at your feet or the ceiling. Maintaining good eye contact with the interviewer is a key to building trust in a relationship.
- **Body Language:** Sit up straight and lean slightly forward. Face the interviewer in a relaxed, open manner. This gives the impression that you are alert and interested. Don't fidget or wring your hands—it's distracting.
- **Be a Good Listener:** Listen to the interviewer's questions and comments. Pause to think of an appropriate response that specifically answers the questions you are asked. Don't go off on tangents. Be alert to

nonverbal cues indicating when you should start or stop talking.

- **Express Yourself:** Speak clearly. Use complete sentences and avoid answering just "yes" or "no" to questions. Don't use slang. Avoid repeating the word "Um" by thinking before you speak. Be confident in your responses. Preparation and practice will help!
- **Be Yourself:** Don't try to change your personality. You want the employer to hire you, not someone you're pretending to be.
- **Close the Deal:** End the interview with enthusiasm and express your interest in the position. Gather the interviewer's business card to avoid misspellings or incorrect titles in your thank you note.

3) AFTER THE INTERVIEW

POST-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- WRITE (NOT E-MAIL) A SHORT THANK-YOU NOTE OR LETTER IMMEDIATELY**
A courteous and professional step that gives you another chance to make a good impression, stress your strong points, and emphasize your interest in the position.
- CONTACT THE REFERENCES ON YOUR LIST TO ALERT THEM ABOUT YOUR RECENT INTERVIEW**

EVALUATE YOUR PERFORMANCE

Determine how well you emphasized your strengths and abilities. If you didn't get the job, ask for honest feedback about your performance from the interviewer. Learn from your successes and your failures. The more interviews you have, the more comfortable you will become.

FOLLOW-UP

If the interviewer stated that you would hear from him or her in one week, and one week passes without any contact, then it is appropriate to make a follow-up telephone call to inquire if a decision has been made. Be pleasant but not pushy. If no timeline was stated during the interview, then two-and-a-half weeks is considered appropriate.

DON'T GET DISCOURAGED

Rejection is an inescapable part of any job search. The key is not to waste your time and energy feeling dejected, but to learn from the process. Be persistent! Your efforts will pay off in the end.

4) SAYING THANK YOU

Express your appreciation for the interview in a short thank-you note or letter. Restate your interest in the job and summarize key strengths based on what you learned during the interview.

- Address the note or letter to "Dear Mr. or Ms." rather than using the first name of the person(s) with whom you interviewed (even if the interviewer has invited you to call him or her by a first name).
- If you type your thank-you note, use 8½" x 11" business stationery of good quality.
- Be sure that the letter is spaced to use at least three-fourths of the page.
- Do not repeat everything that was said in the interview or printed on your résumé.
- A handwritten note conveys a personal touch an e-mail lacks.

■ STAR Method

- S** – Situation (describe with specific detail)
- T** – Task (objective or goal)
- A** – Action
- R** – Result (includes knowledge: What did you learn? What skill did you develop?)

Example: Situation. "As a member of a group working on a project, I noticed another member missed meetings and didn't come prepared." **Task.** "Utilizing one another's strengths to have a quality project was important." **Action.** "I decided I would talk to him rather than simply be angry. I found out he was frustrated because he felt his ideas weren't being considered." **Results.** "After our conversation I made sure he had a chance to be heard. He appeared to make more of an effort on his part of the project and didn't miss any more group meetings. I learned how important it is to manage group discussions and keep lines of communication open when there's a problem."

SAMPLE THANK YOU NOTE

Written on plain, business-like note card stationery

July 26, 20xx

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. (last name):

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the _____ position. I appreciate the information you shared, and I learned a great deal about the plans you have to expand your presence in the finance industry.

I'm excited at the prospect of working at Camden Investment Management. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Dan Rehling

RESEARCH THE COMPANY INFORMATION IS POWER!

- Access the company website. Visit the company a few days before the interview to gather company literature and assess the corporate culture.
- Google the names of the interviewer(s) and the CEO or others.
- Make use of business directories, professional journals, city magazines, and newspapers in libraries. Ask the librarian for suggestions.
- Access Hoovers Online (www.hoovers.com) and CareerOneStop (acinet.org).
- Talk to Career Services Center counselors, faculty members, family, and friends to gather more information.

OTHER TOOLKITS AVAILABLE AT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER:

- Guide to Cover Letter Writing
- Guide to Résumé Writing
- The Job Search
- Networking



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