

INTERVIEWING GUIDE

TIPS, EXAMPLES, QUESTIONS TO ASK,
AND DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

THE BEST WAY TO SECURE A JOB!



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Introduction



There is probably no bigger test of ability than to be successful during a job interview. The secret to success is preparation and practice. If you have gotten an interview, most likely you have the qualifications they are looking for.

The position doesn't always go to the most qualified person; it often goes to the one who is best fit for the organization (personality, confidence, enthusiasm, positive outlook, and interpersonal skills).

The interview is your chance to market yourself as well as gather information about the organization and position.

Remember, you are also deciding if this is the right role/place for you. This guide can help you through the interviewing process, but there is no substitute for practicing with your Career Counselor.

Getting Started

Research the company and position. Use the internet, company website, library, industry magazines, career center, and your personal network to learn:

- The public profile of the company
- Size and structure of the company
- What the company is known for
- Career paths within the company
- What products/services are offered
- Research similar companies
- What the key clients/markets are
- The dress code
- Work place language/jargon
- Location for the interview

Use the following websites to learn more:

www.bls.gov/oco, www.onecenter.org, and www.wetfeet.com

Also:

- ⇒ Think about your networks, do you know anyone who works/has worked there?
- ⇒ Know what you want compared to what the company has to offer.
- ⇒ Know yourself thoroughly. Be clear on how your skills relate to the position/company.
- ⇒ Consider developing a portfolio that can highlight your accomplishments.
- ⇒ Know your salary expectations.
- ⇒ Prepare answers to common interview questions.
- ⇒ Prepare questions that you can ask the interviewer and the company and job. This will show you're very interested.
- ⇒ Get your interview outfit ready.
- ⇒ Participate in a mock interview
- ⇒ Consider a "practice" drive to see how long it will take.
- ⇒ Visit Career Services to use OptimalFirstImpressions Interviewing Software.

Q & A TIPS

- When asked questions, avoid “yes” or “no” answers. Expand on your strengths and relate them to the position. Point out any strong points; admit to any weaknesses if asked about them, emphasizing how you are working to overcome them.
- Always focus on the positive. Highlight your accomplishments and give specific examples and support for your claims. Describe a situation where you used the skill and elaborate on the outcome.
- Avoid long, rambling responses.
- If needed, take a moment to think before answering. However, continuous long pauses display that you are not confident. A way to create more time is to repeat the question.
- If you do not understand a question, ask for it to be explained or repeated. You can also ask if you have been clear “Is that what you were looking for?” or “Did I answer your question?”
- If possible, give some consideration as to why they might be asking a particular question. How can I use this question to demonstrate my suitability for this position?
- Don’t be too modest. Make it clear you have the skills to do the job.
- If you are in a panel interview, start and end your answer by directing your attention to the person who asked the question. Include others during the body of the answer.
- Make sure you are providing the most valuable information about yourself even if the interviewer is not asking the right questions. Have possible comments prepared to enable the interviewer to get to know you better.
- Never discuss your salary until they bring it up or they have offered you the position. It’s just another way for them to screen you out.
- Anticipate any and all questions about your resume.

Use a cheat sheet in preparation for an interview. Don’t read from the sheet, but keep it handy. These are some items you might want to include:

Meeting with (name, title, company, address, phone number, FAX, email)

Major accomplishments

Things you need to know about me

Strengths/weaknesses

Things I can contribute

Management or work style

Answers to difficult questions

Questions to ask the interviewer

Day and date

Q & A Examples



When preparing your answers, just get the main ideas. Don't memorize responses- you want to sound prepared, not packaged.

Tell me about yourself.

This question is almost always asked, and your preparation (or lack of it) will be showcased. Indicate your experience, accomplishments, and skills relevant to the job you are seeking. They are NOT asking for your entire life history. Start by giving a summary of your past experiences, next describe your current qualifications, and lastly give your goals for the future.

What are your greatest strengths?

This is a loaded question and one that is almost always asked (so be prepared). Tailor your answer to the job- think about what they are looking for. A good way to do this is to study the job description. Make sure you elaborate on your strengths; give examples of your success in previous work, school, or community activities. Try to think of at least three.

What is your greatest weakness?

"Kryptonite"- although it's funny, its not what they're asking. Everyone has weaknesses, but avoid red flags and show how you have turned your weaknesses into a positive.

The interviewer is trying to find out 1.) are you aware of your weaknesses?, 2.) have you thought about how you might improve?, and 3.) are your weaknesses going to effect job performance?

Try to design the answer so that your weakness is ultimately a positive. Example: workaholic, but continually try to make time for yourself. Avoid unresolved weakness.

Why are you interested in our company/position?

You must do research to answer this questions. Indicate that you know the organization and its reputation, mission, approach to training, their goals for the future, and that there is a match between you and the organization. This will help you to relate to the issues that they believe are important. Show that you make logical decisions and plan your future carefully. Back up your statements with specific examples that include how you can contribute to the company's success.

Why should we hire you?

Focus on what your particular contribution will be to company success: hard work, dedication, humor. Highlight your qualifications that relate to the company's needs. We all bring something unique; think about what sets you apart from your competition.

Tell me about a great accomplishment, challenging situation, team project, or failure.

Consider all four questions. Talk about specific skills. What role did you play? Demonstrate that you learned something positive from the experience and now are able to achieve future success. Talk about positive things and what you would do differently next time.

How do you prioritize your work to meet deadlines?

Give an example to demonstrate how you have done this. Pulling an all-nighter is not a good answer. Planning ahead, keeping lists are good.

Questions To Ask The Interviewer



Ask genuine questions about information which is not readily available in the company information sources.

Make sure that you have been paying attention so that you don't ask a question that has already been answered. Ask as many questions as needed, but do not out-interview the interviewer.

Not a good question- "Does your company have a policy regarding concealed weapons?" – here are better ones:

If hired, how can I make your job easier?	Why do you enjoy working for your firm?
What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing	How did this position become available?
Describe the typical first-year assignments.	What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
Tell me about your initial and future training programs	What characteristics does a successful person have at your organization?
What are the challenging facets of the job	Will there be opportunities for increased responsibility and broader experience?
What are the organization's plans for future growth?	What is the quality and variety of the organization's clients?
What are the organization's strengths and weaknesses?	How much contact will I have with management?
How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?	What do you enjoy/dislike most about working in this organization

WHAT TO WEAR

Men

- A suit is almost always appropriate for all types of interviews. The best colors are charcoal grey and dark blue.
- Don't wear cologne.
- Don't smoke before the interview.
- Shave or have a neatly trimmed beard. Goatees, "5 day stubble," and long sideburns usually are not appropriate.
- Shoes and socks (not white or too short) should be in a color that compliments the suit and that are not too casual.
- Wear a belt that matches your shoes.
- A white shirt is safest, with sleeves that extend $\frac{1}{4}$ inch beyond the jacket sleeve.
- Choose a tie that has conservative patterns and colors. The tie should fall about the midpoint of your belt buckle.
- Don't wear jewelry.
- Trim fingernails.
- Make sure your clothes are neatly pressed.
- In most instances, it is best to err on the side of conservative. You want to be remembered for your qualifications rather than flashy clothes.

Women

- A skirted business suit (same color jacket and skirt) is almost always appropriate for all types of interviews. The best colors are grey, medium or dark blue, burgundy, camel, or black. The skirt should lie about an inch below the knee.
- Do not wear sleeveless tops or sleeveless dresses.
- Don't wear perfume.
- Don't smoke before the interview.
- Your hair should not be in your face or distracting.
- Always wear hose; do not wear shoes that are open. The most appropriate shoe to wear with a business suit is a classic pump with closed mid-height heel and tow with little or no decoration.
- Make sure your jewelry is not too casual or flashy, wristwatch included.
- You may choose to carry a purse, but only bring what is necessary.
- Low-key makeup is advised.
- Your fingernails should be professional length.
- Make sure your clothes are neatly pressed. In most instances, it is best to err on the side of conservative. You want to be remembered for your qualifications rather than flashy clothes.

Informational Interviewing



The best way to get first-hand advice!

Why do an Informational Interview?

- Gain real world information and advice on a career field or job search strategies
- Build confidence in your ability to discuss career interests
- Network with career-related contacts
- Find additional leads to other Informational Interviews and possibly jobs

Finding People to Interview

- Write down names of everyone you know (include friends, family, classmates, co-workers, employers, neighbors, professors, Career Services Center, etc.).
- Now ask everyone on your list to recommend people who are employed in the career field you are interested in. You will be surprised who your contacts know.
- Also, use the phone book, professional journals, newsletters, and internet to locate prospective interviewees.

Before the Interview

Treat the Informational Interview just like a job interview. Dress and act professionally, and prepare as much as possible so you are making the most of the interviewee's time.

- Research the company and career field
- Develop open-ended questions
- Plan ahead what you want to communicate about yourself: skills, work values, and goals

Next Step: Set up the Interview!

Don't be afraid to call or write professionals. Most people enjoy talking about themselves as well as helping others. Make it clear that you are looking for information, not a job. If that person is unable to see you, ask for the name of someone that might be able to help.

Sample Letter

Your return address)

(Date)

(Contact name)

(Contact title)

(Company name)

(Company address)

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

Your name was given to me by (name), from (how they know each other). I am a recent graduate of Radford University, where I majored in Communications. After completing an internship with a small advertising agency, I decided to pursue advertising as a career.

Your agency has a wonderful reputation and is one of the largest in Virginia. I would very much appreciate the opportunity to ask for your advice about entering the advertising field.

I will call you at your office during the week of January 19 to see if a brief meeting or telephone conversation can be arranged. I would appreciate any time you could spend sharing your expertise.

Sincerely,

(Your hand-written signature)

(Your typed name)

What To Bring



- Samples of work
- Copies of qualifications/certificates/transcripts
- Spare copies of your resume and references
- Portfolio if you have done one
- Appointment book/calendar
- Breath mints
- Pen/paper/notepad
- Questions to ask
- Interview cheat sheet

During The Interview

Develop rapport by discussing the interviewee's views and opinions, personal career development, and likes and dislikes regarding the field. Get into specific questions as they relate.

Possibly ask the interviewee to give you advice about your resume and qualifications as well as job search strategies.

As you near the end of the interview, ask for referrals to others in the field.

Never overstay your welcome – remember, their time is valuable.

Even though you may have a lot of questions, you should be listening more than talking. You might discover information about unanticipated areas.

Do not ask for a job. You agreed to ask for advice and information.

Questions To Ask

Career Preparation:

- How did you prepare for your career?
- What are the most important qualifications (i.e. education, skills, personality, etc.)?
- What educational preparation (degree) do I need to obtain?
- What prior experience do I need to get?
- How would you rate my qualifications?

Personal Experiences:

- What do you like most/least about your work?
- How does your work effect your personal time?
- How did you get your job?
- How many hours do you work each week?
- If your job was eliminated, what else could you do?
- If you had to do it over again, what would you have done differently?

Career Information:

- What is a typical work week like?
- How much autonomy do employees typically have: dress, hours, vacation time, etc.?
- How would you estimate my future prospects in this career field?
- How often do people in this field change jobs?
- What are the salary ranges for positions in this field?
- What are some of the challenges and major issues in your field?

Job Hunting:

- Who are some key employers I should consider?
- What job titles should I look for?
- How can I locate jobs (newspapers, online, professional journals, etc.)?
- How long do most employees stay in one position?
- When moving positions, do people move companies or move up within a company?
- What other related fields should I consider?

Advice:

- Would you mind critiquing my resume/portfolio?
- What professional organizations would you recommend joining?
- Can you suggest other people/resources that can provide additional information?

After The Interview

- ⇒ Record, Analyze, and Evaluate the Informational Interview
- ⇒ Take all information given with a grain of salt. Don't settle for just one or two interviews about a given area of work; a broad information base is essential.
- ⇒ Don't forget to send a thank-you letter after the interview.

Contact Career Services with questions or when you need assistance. It's never too early in your academic career to visit the Career Services office.



