



Career and Internship Services

The Job Interview

The interview is designed to determine if there is a match between the employer's needs and your interests and qualifications. The interview process allows the interviewer and you to obtain information about each other. While the interviewer is seeking information about you, you should use the interview to learn about key parts of the position. Before you go to an interview it is important to know what it is you want to do, so be sure you know your career focus.

WHAT EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR IN AN INTERVIEW

The most common criterion employers are seeking will vary but the following will help you understand what you need to focus on in the interview:

Communication skills, problem-solving skills, judgment, decision-making, honesty and integrity, leadership (initiative and responsibility), accomplishments/high standards, interpersonal skills, teamwork ethic, flexibility/adaptability, motivation and commitment.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Devote time to prepare for interviews. This will help you develop self-confidence and demonstrates to the employer that you have a high level of interest in working for that organization. Following are steps that can contribute to your success in obtaining job offers.

1. ANALYZE THE POSITION

Review your knowledge about the type of work for which you will be interviewed. For example, if you are interviewing to be a marketing analyst, lab technician or a graphic designer, be aware of the typical job duties and qualifications. If you are unclear about the position, review occupational information and conduct informational interviews to gain a better understanding of the type of work you are pursuing (see informational interviewing handout).

Review a copy of the job description and highlight important qualifications. Be ready to discuss how your skill, knowledge and experience will meet those qualifications.

2. RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER

Learn as much as you can about the employer's purpose, services and/or products, where its branches are located and what its future prospects are. Understand how this organization compares with similar and competing organizations. Is the company planning to introduce new products or services? What is the size of the organization? What are the employer's current needs or problems? Is the company growing or stagnating? Information can be obtained from various types of sources: including: company website, article search, Wetfeet Press (www.wetfeet.com), Vault Report (www.vault.com), Hoovers Online (www.hoovers.com), on-campus employer visits, and through networking with alumni/company employees. Investigate and understand the industry to learn about common issues, directions and trends. This will help you in formulating thoughtful questions.

Through networking you can often learn about key organizations in your field of interest and difficult-to-obtain inside information about individual organizations. With this information, you will be better able to explain to the employer why you are particularly interested in working for them.

3. REVIEW YOUR QUALIFICATIONS

Review your past experiences and determine how they have prepared you for the position for which you will be interviewed. Consider courses, paid and volunteer work experiences, projects, activities, hobbies, etc. For each of these experiences, identify the skills, abilities and areas of knowledge you demonstrated.

4. PRACTICE

Practicing your responses to typical questions and discussing your qualifications will make you feel more comfortable in your responses. Practice in front of the mirror, with a friend, and/or videotape or audiotape your responses. Avoid feeling that you have to memorize answers to questions. The goal is to become familiar with the process of presenting yourself to others and to give the impression that you have given thought to these important questions.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

A typical interview process will involve an introduction consisting of small talk, a discussion of your background and qualifications, an opportunity for you to ask questions about the employer, and a closing where the next steps in the interview process are discussed. The interview format will vary depending on the interviewer and the recruiting philosophy of the organization. The following are typical formats:

The Standardized Interview

This format is highly structured and designed to take place in a limited time frame. Questions are usually prepared and standard.

The In-depth Interview

Here the focus is on you, as the interviewer probes for information in certain areas. The questions are varied and open-ended. You have the opportunity to explore the position and demonstrate deeper knowledge and capability.

The Stress Interview

In this interview the recruiter is confrontational and may ask particularly difficult questions. The interviewer may try to intimidate you. The objective is to evaluate your maturity and how well you can control your behavior in difficult situations.

The Panel Interview

Commonly used in government and academic employment interviews where two or more individuals may interview you. Typically, one person is the leader and will introduce the other interview panelists. The leader will provide employer information, describe the job position and summarize at the close of the interview with a discussion of the next steps in the interview process. Be sure to direct your answers to all the panelists.

The Telephone Interview

Increasingly, this type of interview is becoming more common. It is more economical for companies to conduct at least two screening interviews before they offer you the face-to-face interview. The telephone interview may last from 15 to 60 minutes. If the interviewer isn't interested in extending you a face-to-face interview, you will probably get only 5 minutes or less after the first question. Have your resume and any company research any notes in front of you.

Interviewers have stated that they are looking for the following characteristics in a candidate during the telephone interview: superior communication skills, positive attitude, quick-thinking skills, and problem-solving ability.

Make the telephone a useful tool for communicating your strengths and interest in the company. Be sure to follow-up every 10 days. Leave a voice mail message. restating your interest in the position. Summarize why you think you are the right fit for the position on the interviewer's voice mail. Be brief in your communications on the phone. Talking too much can be a strike against you.

The Second Interview

The interview process may involve several rounds of interviews. If you get the second interview, you are a serious candidate for the job. You will be given the opportunity to meet other members of the organization. If you are participating through the on-campus recruiting program, the employer may ask that you visit their organization for this second interview. If travel arrangements are involved usually, the company will pay for your expenses and make the necessary travel and lodging arrangements.

On the day of your visit, you will go through a series of interviews with various individuals including your potential supervisor and co-workers, higher-ranking staff and others. You may spend a whole day interviewing, including a luncheon and/or dinner. Through these interviews the employer will be evaluating your background and qualifications including your social skills. This process is designed to determine if you are the right fit or not.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

1. Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early.
2. Dress appropriately for the position for which you are interviewing.
3. Don't use perfume or aftershave or wear distracting jewelry.
4. Give a firm handshake when you meet the interviewer.
5. Be enthusiastic and interested, but do not overdo it.
6. Address the interviewer by his or her surname unless invited to do otherwise.
7. Be alert. Sit up in your chair and maintain constant eye contact with the interviewer but don't stare.
8. Demonstrate a genuine interest in the employer's operations and convey alert attention when the interviewer speaks.
9. Take pride in past performances.
10. Seek to understand the employer's needs.
11. Display sound ideas.
12. Be prepared to take control if the employer falls down on the interviewing job.
13. Thank the interviewer for his/her time at the end of the interview.
14. Be sure to ask for a business card and when you can expect to hear from the employer regarding their hiring decision.
15. Write a thank you letter after the interview. A thank you letter gives you the chance to restate your qualifications and interests, and to add information that you forgot to mention in the interview.

QUESTIONS

Emphasize the most relevant and impressive aspects of your background and qualifications. Think in terms of how you could contribute your knowledge and skills to the benefit of the organization.

Do not belittle your experience with comments like, "I was just a cashier..." Use specific examples to demonstrate your skills, strengths and abilities. Emphasize that the skills you have used in the past are **transferable**. Do not give simple "yes" or "no" answers. Provide specific examples. Do not lie. Any information stated is subject to verification by the employer. Do not complain about previous employers. It will reflect negatively on you.

Some interviewers may ask technical questions. They may ask questions about a class you took (accounting or economics course), or they may give you a technical problem to solve. Don't panic; take your time in answering these questions. It is okay to ask for clarification if you don't understand the question.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Employers may ask job applicants questions that focus on their career goals, skills, interests,

background, and future plans. They may also inquire about whether or not you took time to learn about their organization. Employers are assessing your qualifications with their needs.

General

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in our company and in this particular opening?
3. What do you know about our company? Our products/services?
4. What personal qualities do you believe will make you successful?
5. What do you perceive to be your major weakness/strength?
6. Why did you decide on Dominican University?
7. Tell me about your previous work experience.
8. What have you learned or gained from previous work experience?
9. What courses did you like best and least? Why?
10. What do you expect to be doing in five years?
11. How do you feel about relocating?
12. Do you like to travel?
13. What motivates you?
14. Describe your relationships with previous employers?
15. What job have you done that show initiative and willingness to work?
16. What jobs have you enjoyed the most/least?
17. What are your long-range career plans?
18. Why did you choose this career path?

Behavioral

Employers also ask behavioral questions to determine if you have demonstrated certain qualities in past behaviors. Usually, the interviewer will focus on the skill areas that are most important for the position.

Interpersonal & Communication

1. Tell me about a time when you had to be assertive.
2. Tell me about your most challenging personal encounter with someone? How did you deal with that individual?
3. Have you ever experienced a strong disagreement when working on a team? What did you do?
4. Tell me about a time when you had to present complex information? How did you ensure that the other person(s) understood?
5. Describe a situation where you were able to use your active listening skills or written communication skills to get an important point across.

Initiative

1. Describe a situation where you had to convince others of your opinion and how you accomplished that.
2. Describe a situation where you excelled at some task, over and beyond what was expected.

Creativity

1. Tell me about a new idea that you developed that was different from the standard way of doing business. What did you do to get the cooperation and promote teamwork from your co-workers/peers? What was the result?

Leadership

1. Describe your leadership style and give me an example of a situation where you successfully led a group.
2. Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.

Decision Making

1. We make decisions all the time. Describe two very important decisions that you have made

within the last 3 to 4 months. What were the other options available at the time? Why do you believe you made the best choice at the time? What were the results?

Flexibility

1. Describe an occasion when a problem occurred in your work that was a complete surprise to you. Why was the problem so unexpected? What action did you take? What do you do now to prevent such surprises?
2. Describe a project or assignment that was extremely complicated and complex to you. What skills did you use to manage it? What was the outcome?

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Developing answers to questions using the **SAR** approach can help you prepare for interviews:

SITUATION, ACTION AND RESULT (SAR)

Consider using The **SAR** approach when answering questions about your skills and accomplishments. In using the **SAR** approach, you would first refer to the **Situation or Problem** you encountered, explaining why it was a problem. Then you would describe the **Action** you took to solve the problem or to change the situation and, finally, you would complete your story with the **Result** or outcome you brought about and feel proud of. Whenever you can, quantify the outcome, focusing on bottom line results.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Employers may only ask questions that are specifically related to the job. Personal questions relating to your age, marital or family status and plans, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation are illegal. If you are asked illegal questions remain calm and don't make an issue of the question. One response might be, "I have given my career plans much thought and preparation, and I am confident that my personal plans will not interfere with my career, " or "I'd prefer to discuss the position and my qualifications."

REASONS EMPLOYERS GIVE FOR REJECTING APPLICANTS

- Inability to express self clearly
- Uncertainty about future goals and career plans
- Poor personal appearance
- Lack of interest in job and company (failing to ask questions)
- Too interested in salary and vacation schedules. Wait until the job offer.
- Lack of courtesy, maturity, or tact
- Indecisive and uninformed about the firm
- Sloppy application form or resume
- Lack of confidence or overly confident
- Evasiveness

QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

Asking employers questions further demonstrates your interest in working for their organization and also gives you more information to assess job offers.

Questions to ask about the position:

1. What are the opportunities for growth?
2. Identify typical career paths based on past records. What is a realistic time frame for advancement?
3. How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
4. Describe the typical first year assignments.
5. Tell me about your initial and future training programs.
6. What are the challenging facets of the job?
7. What are your expectations for new hires?
8. Describe the work environment?

9. How can you utilize my skills?
10. What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
11. Why do you enjoy working for your firm?
12. What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
13. What characteristics does a successful person have at your company?
14. What career opportunities are currently available for someone with my degree and skills?

Questions to ask about the company/industry:

1. What are company's plans for future growth?
2. Is the company stable and financially sound?
3. What industry trends will affect this company?
4. What makes your firm different from its competitors?
5. What are the company's strengths and weaknesses?

Thank You Letter

After your visit:

Mail or email a thank you letter within one or two days of the interview. Send the letter to the person in charge of your visit with copies to others involved. You should mention what you particularly appreciated from the interview and your interest in both the job and the organization. If you are not selected for the position, consider calling or writing a letter that will show your continued interest, especially if you felt you had a good rapport with the interviewer.

Sample: Interview Thank You Letter

123 Grand Ave.
Novato, CA, 94305
(000) 222-3333
johnf@yahoo.com

April 24, 2007

Ms. Sarah Newman
Human Resources Manager
McGraw-Hill Publishers
1400 Embarcadero
San Francisco, CA 94120

Dear Ms. Newman,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you last week. The discussion we had was particularly informative and I found myself even more enthusiastic about the Assistant Editor position. I was very impressed with the philosophy of your organization, and the informal conversation over lunch confirmed my interest in McGraw-Hill Publishers.

To reiterate my qualifications, I believe that the strong research and writing skills I have acquired here at Dominican University of California, together with my work experience at the Daily and Jones-Smith Publishers, make me a strong candidate for the position. I work well independently, manage my time efficiently, and communicate easily with all types of people. To clarify my present situation, I will be graduating the week of May 15th and will be available for employment at that time.

Again, I appreciate your time and consideration of my application. It was a pleasure to talk with you. Should you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at home. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

John Fischer