
PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

There are two basic types of interviews – the informational interview and the job interview. The informational interview is used to explore the job market and to approach employers when no actual job openings are known. The job interview is used when a definite position is available. Job interviews are “two-way streets.” The employer determines if you have the qualifications suited for the job. You must find out if the employer provides the opportunities you seek.

I. INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Informational interviews are aimed at potential employers and individuals with useful employment information. You will want to arrange an informational interview when you need: 1) information on present or future job opportunities in your interest and skill areas; 2) advice on your job search campaign; and 3) referrals to other people who may be able to give you similar information which may lead to job interviews. You may wish to leave a copy of your resume with the interviewer for future reference.

Some of your questions could include:

- 1) *What’s involved in this occupation in terms of regular duties and activities?*
- 2) *What skills and abilities are required to do a good job?*
- 3) *What departmental and/or organizational relationships are expected or necessary in performing the job?*
- 4) *What is the work environment like in terms of challenges, pressures, deadlines, routines, new activities, etc.?*
- 5) *Are job prospects good, stable, or very competitive?*
- 6) *Which local organizations employ people in my occupation?*
- 7) *How would someone with my background get started in my occupation?*
- 8) *What kinds of positions could I qualify for?*
- 9) *Who do you know that would be willing to provide me with additional information?*

II. JOB INTERVIEW

When an employer is interested in your qualifications for a specific position, a job interview is arranged. A job interview is usually an exchange of information between two people when both parties conduct an evaluation of the other.

Although employers want a general picture of you, they analyze many facts during a short time. The interviewer wants an intelligent exchange of information in order to determine whether you’ll be screened out or considered for further interviews. Employers usually make notes of their initial impressions. Frequently, this first impression determines your getting the job or not.

A. INTERVIEWING STYLES

- 1) A direct interview is structured, impersonal, and generally used only for screening purposes.
- 2) A group interview has several interviewees and one or more interviewers.
- 3) A board or panel interview uses several interviewers for one interviewee.

B. INTERVIEW HINTS

Preparation

- 1) Learn about the organization and interviewer prior to the interview.
- 2) Prepare a list of questions you wish to ask.
- 3) Bring a pen and notebook with you for recording pertinent information.
- 4) Be on time. It's better to be a few minutes early than late.
- 5) Study the attached list of frequently asked questions and be ready with answers.
- 6) Be prepared to explain why you're interested in the organization and how you can contribute toward its goals.
- 7) The interviewer will control the flow of the interview, but you must control the content and express your qualifications and obtain information you need to evaluate your interest in the job.
- 8) Know the salary range for the position; however, do not discuss salary or fringe benefits during the first interview unless the employer mentions it.

Dress

- 1) Dress in a businesslike, conservative manner appropriate for the position. Some positions will require a coat and tie for men, and a dress or suit for women.
- 2) Check your appearance in a mirror.
- 3) Take precautions for bad breath.
- 4) Avoid strong perfume or aftershave.
- 5) A conservative appearance is best.

The Interview

- 1) Greet the interviewer in a friendly manner, and shake the interviewer's hand, if offered.
- 2) Remember the interviewer's last name and correctly use it occasionally during the course of the conversation.
- 3) Avoid talking while the interviewer reads your resume or employment application.
- 4) Conduct yourself normally and show your true personality.
- 5) Show interest by asking and answering questions with vitality in your voice and expression.
- 6) Portray a relaxed but attentive, high energy posture, with direct eye contact.
- 7) Sell yourself with enthusiasm, sincerity, tact and courtesy.

- 8) Avoid criticism while discussing your prior employment or fellow workers.
- 9) Refrain from discussing personal, domestic or financial situations.
- 10) Obtain a date for the decision. Most interviewers will not offer you the job right away and it is best if you do not make a commitment either during the interview. Ask when you will be notified or when you can call for a decision.
- 11) Thank the interviewer before leaving. Later, if the interviewer doesn't hire you, ask for referrals to other employers who may be looking for your qualifications.

Answering Questions

- 1) Listen carefully to the questions. What is behind the question? What does the interviewer really want to know? Think the questions through for a few seconds before answering.
- 2) If a question is ambiguous, either ask for clarification or respond to your advantage.
- 3) Assume every question is asked for a purpose.
- 4) Respond firmly but tactfully to offensive or improper questions.
- 5) Use ploys to obtain thinking time. Ask for clarification or use a bridge. (A lead in phrase such as, "That is a good question...").
- 6) Tactfully decline to answer questions concerning your private life.
- 7) Maintain rapport between yourself and the interviewer.

After the Interview

- 1) If you are a prime candidate for the job, the employer may call you back for a second interview which will be more specific and direct.
- 2) Write a follow-up letter to the employer expressing your appreciation for the interview. Reiterate one or two important points made during the interview.
- 3) An employer usually gives you the hiring decision immediately after the interview or within a few weeks.
- 4) Assess your performance and apply what you learned to subsequent interviews.

III. QUESTIONS AND MORE QUESTIONS...

A. Questions to Ask Yourself (For Deciding What You Want)

- 1) What are my strengths? Weaknesses?
- 2) What are my primary interests and activities?
- 3) What are my favorite school courses?
- 4) What are the characteristics of my past work experiences and the reasons I have enjoyed them?
- 5) Which of my skills and abilities do I enjoy the most?
- 6) What are my criteria for selecting a position (musts and wants)?
- 7) What jobs do I daydream about?

- 8) How do I picture myself in the future – 5, 10, or even 20 years from now?
- 9) What would my ideal job be like?
- 10) What strengths and experiences most qualify me for my ideal job?
- 11) What gaps in my experience, knowledge or skills need to be overcome in order for me to achieve my ideal job or career?
- 12) If my ideal job is not readily achievable, what jobs could I take that would lead me in the right direction?
- 13) To whom could I talk to obtain more information related to my career planning?
- 14) On what other activities must I work to prepare for job hunting and for my career?
- 15) What is my immediate and long-term career objective based upon my analysis?

**B. Information-Gathering Questions for an Employer
(Informational Interviews)**

- 1) How did you get your job?
- 2) How much specific training did you have before you took the job?
- 3) What is the salary range for entry-level positions in your field?
- 4) What are the tasks included in your job?
- 5) What do you like most about your job?
- 6) What are the most frustrating parts of your job?
- 7) What is the position title of your immediate superior?
- 8) If you had any advice to give to someone who wanted to enter your field, what would it be?
- 9) What are the employment prospects in your field?
- 10) What are the opportunities for advancement from a position like yours?

C. Questions from an Employer during a Telephone Interview

- 1) Tell me about yourself.
- 2) Why are you interested in this position and this organization?
- 3) Why do you want to leave your present employer?
- 4) If you are offered a position, how soon can you start?
- 5) What are your salary requirements?

D. Questions from an Employer during an Interview

- 1) What makes you think you are qualified to work for this organization?
- 2) What have you been doing since you left your last job?
- 3) Why should we hire you?
- 4) Tell me why you were fired from your last job?
- 5) Describe your personality.
- 6) Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
- 7) What are you looking for in a job?
- 8) Describe several problems you've had in your occupational life and how you have solved them.
- 9) What did you do to improve your last job?

- 10) Why did you choose your particular field of work?
- 11) What do you know about our organization?
- 12) What kind of boss do you prefer?
- 13) Tell me a story.
- 14) What are your major strengths? Explain why you view each strength as strength. Weaknesses?
- 15) What are some of your more important accomplishments?

E. Questions for an Employer during an Interview

- 1) In what direction is the organization moving?
- 2) How would I spend a typical day on the job?
- 3) What are the basic responsibilities of this position and what amount of time would be spent on each?
- 4) With whom would I be working?
- 5) What are the major problems faced by this area?
- 6) How much travel and of what duration is expected?
- 7) How much pressure might I expect?
- 8) What style of management prevails in this area or in the organization?
- 9) What are the primary results you would like produced?
- 10) Does the organization tend to promote from within?
- 11) How many people have held this position in the past 5 years?
- 12) What training opportunities exist?

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