
Interviews

Before the Interview

Know the Job Description

- Carefully read the job description and note what skills, abilities, and experiences the position requires.
- Based on the job description, prepare 10-15 examples of previous experience (professional or personal) that demonstrate your strengths and highlight how you are prepared and qualified for the position.
- Prepare how to clearly explain your degree program, and articulate how that will help you succeed in the position.

Research the Employer - knowing information about the company is vital to a successful interview.

- Look online for information about the company; use a search engine, CSO, Hoovers, and Reference USA. Come to the interview prepared to confidently discuss the company and the position.
- Use this checklist to ensure you are prepared:
 - Company statistics: size, location, organization chart, product line, history, top clients, top competitors, stock history.
 - Company news: Are they growing? Have they been growing? What are their current problems? What are some recent successes? What are they envisioning in their future?
 - Position information: Is training available? Who will interview you? How does this position fit into the bigger picture?

Practice Interview Techniques

- You can do a video-taped practice interview with a Career Counselor (call 303-492-6541 to schedule the interview). This is an opportunity to practice your skills, receive feedback areas to improve, and celebrate areas you feel comfortable with.

The Day of the Interview

- Arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview actually begins.
- Read the Dress for Success Quick Tip for ideas on appropriate attire. Bring along any necessary additional materials (your list of questions, paper, a pen, copies of your resume, transcripts, references, additional samples of your work, etc.).

During the Interview

Entrance

- Be yourself. Be enthusiastic and smile.
- Confidently shake hands with each person you meet, while maintaining eye contact.
- Build rapport through small talk (weather or sports) and avoid any controversial topics.

Your Interview

Consider the interview an opportunity for the hiring committee to get to know you and to share how you are a good fit for the position. A strong answer will include:

- A strong opening statement. Avoid starting with a filler (um, hm, etc.) by taking a moment to collect your thoughts before responding. If you need more than a moment, it is okay to ask for more time; for example: 'That's a great question, can I have a minute to think about it?'
- Relevant and specific examples of your strengths and abilities; avoid speaking in generalities.
- Language that puts you on their team; 'As a member of your team, I would....'
- Enthusiasm, confidence, sincerity, honesty, and a positive attitude.
- A strong concluding statement that summarizes your response to each question.
- Your nonverbal cues are 50% of the interview, so be sure to:
 - Occasionally nod your head

- Lean forward
- Sit with your hands, feet, and arms unfolded
- Smile appropriately
- Maintain good eye contact and a pleasant facial expression
- Avoid:
 - Poor body posture, either sitting or walking
 - Squirming in your seat or sitting on the edge of the chair
 - Nervous habits or gestures

Common mistakes employers say students make in interviews:

- Wimpy handshake
- Poor eye contact
- Not professionally dressed
- Not comfortable talking about themselves
- Not practice or prepared
- Not citing specific examples when providing answers
- Offers lame responses to weakness question (i.e. "I'm a perfectionist")
- Asking about salary during first interview
- Not showing sincere interest or enthusiasm for the company or position
- Not prepared to ask questions

Ending the Interview

- ASK what the next step in the hiring process is and a general timeline for the decision making process.
- If you are still interested in the position, tell the interviewer why you are a good fit and that you are excited about the possibility of joining the team.
- Some students will ask the interviewer if they have any concerns about their candidacy. If there are hesitations, you can either address the concern in the interview or in your thank you note.

After the Interview

- Write down what you did well and what you can improve. Write down any questions that stumped you.
- **Write a thank you.** Address why you are a good fit, any concerns/hesitations that arose, and state that you are still interested in the position.

Additional Types of Interviews

- Screening Interview: Quick interview (1 hour or less) either in person, video, or on the phone. Identifies skills, abilities, and experience.
- Team Interview: You and other candidates are interviewed as a group; you may all be asked the same questions and respond in a sequential order, or you may be observed interacting with the rest of the group. Make sure to participate and be engaged.
- Meal Interview: Use your best table manners and etiquette to manage the questions and your food.
- Case Interview: Popular for consulting firms. You are provided with a scenario and asked to identify the problem and a resolution.

Behavioral Interviewing

Providing examples in your responses is a successful way to demonstrate your skills, abilities, and experiences in a meaningful way. Because past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior and many companies rely on behavioral interviewing to screen candidates. Recent studies have concluded that this type of interviewing has a 70 percent predictive validity while traditional one-on-one interviewing has only 20 percent. Even if you are not asked a “behavioral question.” it is still appropriate to follow the STAR formula in any response. People remember stories and examples more frequently than general responses.

- STAR formula:
 - **S**ituation or **T**ask
 - **A**ction you took
 - **R**esult
 - Example: During my two years as a server, I interacted with over 1000 customers. In my last month of employment, I waited on a party of 35 teenagers and parents. I carefully took each order and double checked my entry into the computer, so I was surprised when 4 of the meals were wrong. I immediately noticed the mistake and took full responsibility. I went into the kitchen and asked the cooks to quickly prepare 4 new meals. While I waited, I provided additional bread for the customers. As soon as the meals were ready, I took the dishes to the table and explained that I would not charge the table for the 4 meals. The table was grateful for my ongoing communication and ended up leaving me a very large tip.
- Examples of questions:
 1. Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information.
 2. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
 3. Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone’s opinion.
 4. Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem. Then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
 5. Give me an example of an important goal you have set and tell me about your progress in reaching it.
 6. Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation you have completed.
 7. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done.
 8. Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
 9. Give an example of how you have worked effectively with a group of people to accomplish a specific goal.
 10. Tell me about a team member from whom it was tough to gain cooperation. How did you handle this sensitive situation?
 11. Give me an example of a good decision you made recently. What alternatives did you consider? Why was it a good decision?

Commonly Asked Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
3. Why did you choose your major? How has what you learned in school prepared you for this position?
4. What are your top 3 strengths? What is your greatest weakness?
5. How do you think a friend, classmate, or professor who knows you well would describe you?
6. Why should I hire you?
7. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this job?
8. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
9. What work environment are you most comfortable in?
10. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
11. Describe an ideal relationship between a supervisor and subordinates.
12. Why did you decide to seek a position with our organization?
13. What were the most important contributions you made in your last job?

Sample Questions to Ask

1. Can you describe the characteristics and skills of a successful person in this position?
2. Which parts of the job are most challenging?
3. What do you enjoy most about your job? Least?
4. What activities are routinely performed in this job?
5. What other departments/divisions do you interact with the most?
6. What makes you different from your competition?
7. To manager: What is your management style?
8. What would be your expectations for me in the first 60/90 days?
9. How would you describe the work culture?
10. Is this a new position or am I replacing someone? In what ways did the person in this position succeed? What were the areas in which he or she fell short?
11. What is the length of the training program/period?
12. What is the average time to move within a particular career path?
13. How will I be evaluated?

Additional Information

Books

60 Seconds and You're Hired; Robin Ryan
Competency-Based Interviews; Robin Kessler
The Career Coward's Guide to Interviewing, Katy Piotrowski
301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions; Vicky Oliver

Web sites

<http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/services/instruction/career.htm> - research prospective companies using Hoovers, Reference USA, and Mergent Online
<http://www.businesswire.com>
<http://www.robinryan.com/quiz.htm>

CAREER SERVICES • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER

Willard Administrative Center 133 UCB Boulder, CO 80309-0133
Phone 303-492-6541 FAX 303-492-5723 E-mail: career@colorado.edu <http://careerservices.colorado.edu>