



CAREER SERVICES / JOB INTERVIEW

**“The interview has nothing to do with how qualified you are
and everything to do with how you communicate.”**

- Sari de La Motte, from *Beyond a Firm Handshake: 21 Ways to Communicate You're the Right
Person for the Job (2011)*

INTRODUCTION

Certainly, every interview is designed to see if you are the right person for the job. In many cases, after review of your resume, along with any supporting documents, if you are asked for an interview, the employer already thinks you have what it takes (on paper) to do the job. The interview is an opportunity to confirm this through specific questioning. However, more than that, the interview helps the employer to assess your “fit” with the organization and whether you’ll work well with others based on their culture and work values. How you carry and present yourself, and how you communicate throughout the interview are critical to getting past this stage to a job offer.

Keep in mind, however, that an interview is also YOUR chance to evaluate the employer and the job. Not only is the company interviewing you, the interview is also a time for you to assess whether the job is what you expect and whether the organization matches your own values, work-style, career interests, etc. You, too, have a say in whether this potential pairing will be successful. This should be an empowering process for you!

Therefore, the primary objectives of an interview are:

- To show how you meet specific requirements of a job (again)
- To communicate clearly
- To build rapport – it’s about fit!
- To gather information and initial feedback

This guide is designed to assist in your preparation for interviews –to give you food for thought, helpful tips and extra resources.

PRE-INTERVIEW RESEARCH

The first step in preparation is doing research. It’s not enough to just be able to speak to a role and duties. Employers are seeking continuous learners, proactive employees and informed candidates. Therefore, taking the time to dig deeper than the job description and get informed about the organization overall is a great idea. There are many ways to find out more information, but here are a few good ones:

- Company website (look for press, annual reports, etc.)
- Internet search (just “Google” them!)
- Local business journal or papers (search for articles about the organization)

- LinkedIn company page (or other social media sites, like Twitter)
- Your professional network (talk to people you know and see what *they* know!)
- Informational interviews (meeting with current or past employees)

You are looking for information that will provide context to the role you are seeking, critical facts about the organization, and cultural cues to help you assess the values and culture of the organization. Remember that knowledge is power, and this research will help you build your confidence going into the interview. It can also help you develop excellent questions you may want to pose to your interviewer.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

College Journal reports that, according to studies, “body language comprises 55% of the force of any response, whereas the verbal content only provides 7%, and paralanguage, or the intonation -- pauses and sighs given when answering -- represents 38% of the emphasis.”

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewsnetworking/a/nonverbalcomm.htm>

What do these statistics tell us? What you say only comprises a very small percentage of the impact you have on a listener. How you carry and present yourself as well as how you communicate will leave the greatest impression. So, it’s important to think through all of these pieces carefully.

Professional Presence – Online and Otherwise

Even before you start sending out resumes, but especially before the interview, it’s very important to think through how you might appear via online venues, your cell phone and email. First, it’s not a bad idea to have a **special email account** just for your job search. This way you don’t miss any important job-related communications that could get mixed in with personal matters. No email addresses like “maxismydog@yahoo.com”! Using some form of your name is most appropriate. For example: “john.doe@gmail.com”. Second, make sure the **voicemail message** on your phone is appropriate for an employer to hear – no music or special effects; just a message that says who you are and to kindly leave a message. Finally, and most importantly, in today’s day and age, do an audit of your **social media accounts** or other sites, to make sure that what employers find, won’t harm your chances for hire. You can be sure that most employers have a process to search for candidates online, as a way to verify information! Google yourself, and then also secure the privacy settings on your social sites.

Dressing for Success

Your grooming and attire make a statement about you even before you open your mouth. Therefore, it’s important to think through the details of presentation but also make sure you’re comfortable too. In reality, the most important thing you bring to an interview is confidence. What you wear and how you wear it helps convey that. If you aren’t comfortable in your outfit – that will come across in an interview. Some general rules of thumb for dress and appearance:

- Minimal make up
- No large or flashy jewelry
- Limited or no perfume/cologne
- Ironed clothes, no wrinkles
- Good grooming – clean appearance, hair neat, finger nails clean, etc.

Special note: Consider covering obvious tattoos and removing visible body piercings. This is a sensitive issue for many. Depending on the industry or organization's culture, like it or not, candidates are judged for these areas of self-expression. If you feel strongly about the job, consider the above suggestion until you can gauge receptiveness of the organization. If you don't think you can compromise your right to self-express on this point, just know it could be a factor in whether you get an offer.

It's always great if you can get a sense of the dress code for a particular organization before your interview, and most [industries have a common style of dress that you can research](#), but it's not always easy to gather specific info. When in doubt about what to wear, always err on the side of being conservative in your choices and follow standard interview attire guidelines. **Generally, this means "business professional" or "business casual" attire.**

<i>Interview Attire</i>
Business Professional (click links for images)
For Women:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Solid color, conservative suit with coordinated blouse○ Moderate shoes, tan or light pantyhose, limited jewelry
For Men:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Solid color, conservative suit, long sleeve shirt○ Conservative tie, dark socks, professional shoes
Business Casual (click links for images)
For Women:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Khaki, corduroy, twill or cotton pants or skirts, neatly pressed○ Sweaters, twinsets, cardigans, blouses/collared shirts○ Solid colors work better than bright patterns
For Men:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Khaki, gabardine or cotton pants, neatly pressed;○ Cotton long-sleeved button-down shirts, pressed, polo or knit collar shirts, sweaters○ Leather shoes and belt, tie optional

Non-Verbal Communication Matters – Building Rapport

As mentioned already, you make an impression the moment you walk through the door. You feel confident and comfortable in your interview attire; now it's a matter of building rapport with your interviewers. The energy you bring to the interaction makes a huge difference. And the way you carry yourself does too.

Here are some tips for making a great non-verbal first impression:

- Embody a positive and attentive attitude
- Smile! ☺
- Have a firm handshake (no jello hands!)
- Make regular eye-contact
- Whether seated or standing, maintain a straight posture, maybe even lean in a little
- Mirror your interviewer*

What is Mirroring?*

Mirroring is a way to establish a relationship of mutual trust and understanding. It's about connecting. When mirroring goes well, the person you're speaking with, whether a customer or an interviewer, deems you trustworthy because, subconsciously, they find similarities that connect you both. Mirroring is the practice of adopting another person's behaviors, mannerisms, and ways of speaking. Three main rules for mirroring:

- 1. Mirroring is NOT mimicking. It's more subtle.** The person to whom you're speaking should never feel that you're copying them. So for example, if an interviewer rubs his nose or puts his hand on his chin, you should wait about 30 to 50 seconds and then touch your face in a similar way. **Note:** You don't need to do exactly what the other person is doing; you just need to do something similar.
- 2. Only reflect positive speech and body language.** If the interviewer seems angry or annoyed, that's a behavior you don't want to take on yourself. In cases like this, try to be positive and friendly, and you may help them open up.
- 3. Don't get distracted.** You want to notice and reflect back your interviewer's mannerisms, but don't pay so much attention to what they're doing that you stop hearing what they're actually saying. Remember that one of the reasons mirroring establishes rapport is that it forces you to see things from someone else's perspective.

Mirroring with ease and confidence takes some practice but is a skill you can develop, so work on this with friends and family, and it could become the most powerful tool in your interview toolkit!

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are different types of interviews, and students should be familiar with all of them to a certain extent. The most common will be a one-on-one interview with a hiring professional. In many instances, there will be multiple steps in the interview process (more than one interview), where you could encounter any of the possibilities below:

Phone Screen

With the hectic schedule that many employers keep and the high cost of travel, don't be surprised if your initial interview is over the phone instead of face to face. Typically phone interviews don't last more than 30 minutes. This may be a way for the organization to ask a handful of their most important questions, in order to narrow down their applicant pool for face-to-face interviews. Phone interviews are usually scheduled in advance, but sometimes the employer will just call when they want to talk with you.

Helpful Tips:

- Be prepared to be called –if you are not in a position or location to talk, kindly ask if you might call them back at a certain time.
- Find a quiet place to talk
- Be mindful of your voicemail messages -- if you miss the call, call back as soon as possible
- Breathe and speak clearly to make yourself easy to hear and understand

- Don't over talk or under talk: stay calm, and don't be afraid to take a few seconds to think about a question before answering
- Smile while you speak -- it can actually make you sound more personable

Helpful Link: [17 Tips to Ace your Next Phone Interview](#)

Video Conference/Skype

If applying for jobs locally, this won't be something you experience; however, Skyping is an easy way for employers to save on travel expenses for interviews when the candidate is at a geographic distance. It gives them a chance to see you without having to be in the same location.

Helpful Tips:

- Choose a well-lit, clean, and organized location. Appearances count.
- Light should be hitting your face, not your back -- don't Skype with your back to the sun because that will make it very difficult to see you.
- Maintain eye contact much like you would with an in person interview
- Look into the camera, not at the small picture of the interviewer on your screen
- Dress professionally -- again, appearances are very important
- Don't open a browser window to your favorite website. It might be a habit, but stay focused.
- Make sure you have a strong signal on your computer and a lot of battery power. If an error occurs, you can seriously impress the interviewer by being prepared for the situation.

Helpful Link: [Video Job Interviews – About.com](#)

In Person, One-on-One

This is the most common interview format, with you the candidate speaking with the hiring manager for the organization as a whole or with the hiring manager for the department within the organization for which you would work.

Helpful Tips:

- Follow your interviewer's lead in terms of demeanor and energy (see "What is Mirroring" above) –unless, of course, they are a grump.
- Some interviewers are better than others – be prepared to take a lead in conversation, so that you can make sure to relay the information you want about yourself, if they don't draw it out of you.
- It's okay to bring notes and take notes!
- Make sure to bring a few extra copies of your resume with you
- If you have examples of your work in a portfolio, bring those with you also!

Panel

The panel interview, otherwise known as a "team interview" causes great stress for many candidates. For those people who are already nervous of meeting one-on-one with a hiring manager, the panel interview can cause additional stress because multiple people will be interviewing you together. The key to managing interviewing stress is the same for all kinds of interviews - preparation. Plan for your panel interview in the same way you would for all other interviews and don't let the thought of multiple interviewers add to your stress.

Helpful Tips:

- Make eye contact with more than one person on the panel. One person may have asked you the question, but you are still addressing your answer to everyone.
- Take extra copies of your resume and business cards to the interview.
- Do not be distracted by odd behaviors you perceive from the panel participants or by note-taking.
- Try to get contact information for the interview panel. You will want to thank everyone promptly.
- Feel free to ask questions of any or all the interviewers on the panel. You may get additional insight into other areas of the company.

Helpful Link: Forbes - [Job Seekers: 7 Tips for a Successful Panel Interview](#)

Group

This kind of interview is used in business settings most often, as it offers an employer the opportunity to see multiple candidates together, usually focused on a group task or discussion in response to a question. The interview session allows the interviewer to see how candidates work and interact with others, and in many cases, solve a problem as a team.

Helpful Tips:

- Must be an active participant, not just observer
- Confidence without aggression is key
- Ask good questions and give praise to others when due

Helpful Link: [Standing Out From the Crowd: How to Nail a Group Interview](#)

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Although you will certainly be required to answer questions during a job interview, ideally, the goal is to **have a conversation** with your interviewer(s). Whether this happens will, in part, be due to the style of the interviewer; however, you can influence this! It is less appealing, and more stressful some might say, to remain passive in an interview situation – to wait quietly for the questions to begin. The goal is to be an equal partner in conversation and to actively look for ways to engage your interviewer(s) from the moment you walk in the door.

Traditional vs. Behavioral Interview Questions

Traditional interview questions could include hypothetical, personality or cognitive-related questions that relate to how you might handle certain scenarios, show your personal traits or reveal how you think through problems and situations.

Examples:

- Why are you interested in working for us?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What would you do if you were having difficulties with another employee?
- Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?

Behavioral based interviewing is interviewing based on discovering how the interviewee acted in specific employment-related situations. The logic is that how you behaved in the past will predict how you will behave in the future. These questions give the candidate an opportunity *to give concrete examples* of what they have done in their past work history that helped them to be successful in their job. This is a VERY popular and common approach to interviewing and is used regularly by employers, many times in combination with some traditional questions.

Examples:

- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Give me an example of an important past goal you set, and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the action of others.

Helpful Link: [Monster.com - 100 Potential Interview Questions](#)

Using the STAR Technique

How does one *prepare* for behavioral interview questions? One of the best methods is called the STAR technique, in which you come up with some examples, or stories, from your work that demonstrate certain skills, traits or talents. This advance preparation will allow you to be more nimble in the interview and, hopefully, not appear as stumped with certain questions. There is no way to know exactly what questions will be asked, but focusing on some key accomplishments from your work will be a great way to come armed well for any number of questions. The story can always be adapted slightly to “fit”.

STAR stands for:

- | | |
|---|---|
| S = Situation
or
T = Task | Describe the context during which a job was performed or a challenge at work was encountered. |
| A = Action | How did you the complete task or attempt to meet the challenge? |
| R = Result | What were the outcomes or results generated by the action taken? What did you learn? |

Example: *What have you done in the past to contribute towards a teamwork environment?*

Possible answer (simplified for illustration purposes only):

You might recount a time when communication within your work group had broken down (**situation**). Your role was to serve as a team lead for a particular project. So, to resolve the problem, you organized regular informal lunch meetings for people to discuss relevant issues (**action**). Over time, morale improved, as did the lines of communication (**result**).

Helpful Tip:

Try to keep your answers and examples fairly concise, maybe 1-2 minutes (this is actually longer than you think!). You need to figure out the most important details to relay succinctly. If your story rambles on with too much detail, you will lose the impact and their attention. In many cases, your interviewer will probe further if they desire additional information or wish to explore the scenario further. The STAR format will help you relay your stories in a thoughtful, yet concise manner.

Helpful Link: [Quintessential Careers – Sample Behavioral Interview Questions for Job-seekers](#)

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Everyone gets nervous before interviews, so accept the fact that you WILL have nerves. However, a key way to lessen those nerves and increase confidence is in your preparation and practice. It's highly advisable that you seek out practice partners –this could be a parent, mentor, friend, teacher or career counselor. You may even have opportunities through your academic program to practice with fellow students and others.

ASKING POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Usually at the end of interview, if not prior, the interviewer will give you a chance to ask them some questions too. *Don't miss the opportunity to leave a great last impression!* It's advisable to come up with some questions *before* you get to the interview. Either the job description or your pre-interview research may have revealed some areas for questioning.

Helpful Tips:

- **Don't just ask to impress** – what do you *really* want to know that will help you determine if this is the right job and organization for you?
- **Good questions reveal the depth of your research and interest.** Never ask for information you could have easily found in a Google search. You can make a lasting positive impression with good questions that show you've done your homework.
- **Don't ask about salary, vacations, benefits, etc.** - these kinds of topics should be saved for when you've received a job offer and during the negotiation phase. Bring this up too early, and it will signal to the employer it's only about the money to you and not the opportunity.

Helpful Link: [30 Questions You Should and Shouldn't Ask in a Job Interview](#)

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

As the interview is coming to a close, it's very powerful to have the last word and to reiterate your value and interest to the employer. If possible, make sure to speak to the following:

- **Reinforce your *skills and talents for the job at hand*** – based on what you've learned about the position, remind them why you are the best candidate for the job.
- **Reiterate your strong *interest in the position and organization*** – if, after the conversation, you still find the job appealing, make sure to tell them before you walk out the door.
- **Clarify that no additional information is needed** – this can be a crucial final question –ask if there are any concerns or questions that remain for them, as to whether you can do the job at hand.

- **Ask about next steps in process and timeline** –they may offer this information naturally, but if not, make sure you are clear before you leave!

INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

Saying ‘thank you’ after an interview is not out of fashion, and in fact, is still expected! Times have changed, though, and although hand-written letters were the only way to go back in the day, sometimes a thoughtfully composed email can be just as good. Some things to consider:

- **Write your thank you note right away** –ideally, send it off the next day.
- **If expediency is desired, opt for an email thank you.** It allows for a quick, more detailed response.
- **How many of us have said, “If I had only said THAT!” after the fact?** Email option also allows you to reinforce or enhance any particular interview response since you walked out the door.
- **If time is on your side and you wish to be more personal, opt for a nice hand-written note.** These are still very much appreciated by employers as proper etiquette.