

# **The Interview Guide**

## **Career Services**

### **The Interview: What should you expect?**

Many interviewers have different styles for scheduling interviews. You may wish to ask how long you should plan to be there when the appointment is set. Some people interview candidates with a panel of coworkers, at some places, a schedule will be set up where you meet with different individuals. However, most of the time, you will meet with one person for 30 minutes to an hour. No matter the length, interviews usually follow the same format. A schedule for a 30 minute interview is shown below.

#### **Greeting (Five minutes)**

Most interviewers will spend a few minutes introducing themselves and telling you something about the organization. They will often begin with a question like, “Tell me about yourself.” This is your opportunity to use the “two-minute summary” mentioned below or elaborate on something that you know or have learned in your research about the organization. “I wrote a paper last term about the travel industry so I am familiar with the basic operations of an airline...”

#### **Qualifications (20 minutes)**

The bulk of your interview will be a conversation about your qualifications. The interviewer will be seeking information to answer the question, “Why should I hire YOU? Can you do the job?” The interviewer will also be trying to determine, based on getting to know you in these few minutes, how well you will fit into the organization. The interviewer is seeking the answer to questions like, “Will you do the job? Will you work well with the team?” They are evaluating your work ethic, “Will you show up on time? Will you get the job done? Will you go the extra mile?” Researching the company in preparation for the interview and dressing appropriately are good ways to demonstrate these qualities.

You will get a chance to ask a few questions. Do yourself a favor and plan three to five questions that will provide information that you really want to know. What is important to you? Ask questions like, “What is the work environment like? What are the opportunities for promotion? What are the actual duties I would be performing? Is this a team position or is the work more individual?”

#### **On your way out...(Five minutes)**

As the interview closes, make sure that you understand what happens next. Can you provide additional information? Is there anyone else that you should contact? Will there be a second interview? When will a decision be made? Ask for a business card from the primary person interviewing you.

After an interview, the first thing you should do is to write a thank you note. This may be handwritten or typed on resume paper like your cover letter. A handwritten note is preferable. Mail the note within 24 hours of your interview. Most companies will be making a decision within a few days of completing interviews. If your note arrives after they have chosen their candidate, it won't be of any help to you. For more information, see the information in Career Services on thank you notes.

## **How to interview: Your step-by-step guide!**

### **Research! Research! Research!**

In reality, this takes from 20 minutes to two hours. Given that entering a career is the reason you are going to college, just stop rolling your eyes and get it over with. Besides, hardly anyone goes to the trouble so some quote about the road less traveled (see below) is applicable here. The point is; ask for the company's website when you set the interview or get on the internet, search and surf around, and spend a little time reading about the place where you are trying to spend eight-plus hours a day for the next several years. You want to work someplace that makes you feel important, like you are contributing, they want to hire someone to whom their company is important. Either that or they want to hire someone who goes the extra mile (*research!*) or they want to hire someone who is savvy enough to *research* a company before they interview. Take your pick, and take 20 minutes and do your *research*. And stop rolling your eyes.

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

*-Robert Frost  
-The Road Not Taken*

### **Check out the job.**

What it says. Check out the job. Bradley-Morris placement specialists say the single most important part of interviewing is to "Do the job in the interview." This means that behind the interview is a position that needs to be filled. Find out what needs to be done and convince the interviewer that you can and will do it. How can you do this if you don't know what needs to be done? Ask yourself, what is the title of the job that I want? And what does a (fill in the blank) do for eight-plus hours a day? Bet you can't answer.

So how do you find out? If you are a quick study, ask at the interview. Look at the Department of Labor's Dictionary of Occupation Titles (DOT) at your local library. Better yet, ask for a job description when the interview is set. If you know anyone who does the job, ask him or her.

Before you go into an interview, answer the following questions:

1. What is the work that needs to be done?
2. What skills do I have that make me able to do the work?
3. How can I communicate/demonstrate that I can do the work?

### **Prepare a Two-Minute Summary.**

(paraphrased from the Career Opportunities News)

This should be the easy part. You need to research again, but the topic is you. Prepare about two minutes worth of information to answer the question, “Tell me about yourself...” Remember, this is the most common interview question, and if you are prepared, you will control the interview for two minutes. This is your chance to set the tone for the interview, tell the interviewer exactly what you want to know and make a strong impression.

- Focus on your education, training or work experience and how it is related to the position you seek. You must tie yourself to the job.
- Emphasize what you have done, your accomplishments. What YOU have DONE and therefore, can DO AGAIN is more important than anything you were. Example: I was a member of the Student Activities Union or I planned a two-day event on campus with activities, meals and about 200 guests.
- You may want to include one or two items that reflect your personal interests. Example: I enjoy reading and space travel. Just kidding. Don’t take this too lightly.
- Talk about what you do well!
- Think out of the box. Use your entire background to cite relevant classroom experience, summer activities, volunteer projects and things you learned from past employment.
- Showoff that research you did by connecting your skills and experiences to the potential employers function or needs.

## **Other Interview “Do’s”**

**Speak Up.** The only way they will know about your qualifications and accomplishments is if you tell them. Humility is a wonderful quality for everyday life but not in an interview!

**Know your resume and cover letter.** Know the details behind the information you have included and the stories that demonstrate your skills. Be able to explain what you meant by “high-energy self-starter” and “3.5 major GPA.”

**Don’t rely on your resume to get you the job.** A resume gets an interview. Now YOU are in, you have to take over and expand, explain and make sure the interviewer knows why and how you can do the job.

**Express interest in the company.** Why do YOU want to work THERE? You will do this well if you have, that's right, done your *research*!

**Benefits and salary,** don't ask about them on an initial interview.

**Focus on the opportunity at hand.** What will you get to do? Who will you be fortunate enough to work for and with? Where is the organization going?

**No negative discussions allowed.** It doesn't matter if you didn't like your professor, Career Services messed up your resume (as if that would happen) or you didn't like your last boss. Being negative reflects on you.

**Speed impresses.** Send a thank you note with everything, including your interviewer's name spelled correctly. Mail it the same day.

## **Body Language**

Remember that more than half of the "communication" between two people takes place non-verbally. You can set and alter the tone of an interview with open, attentive and friendly body language. Some quick notes:

- Give a firm, palm-to-palm handshake. If your palms are sweating, sit with them flat on your pants or skirt. You can also put anti-perspirant on your palms before you leave home. (Don't forget to wipe off any visible residue before you walk out the door.)
- Sit up straight and lean forward to demonstrate your interest in the proceedings.
- Don't look down. Look your interviewer in the eye the way you would a friend who is telling you an interesting story.
- It is perfectly acceptable, even desirable, for you to smile. Most people smile back.

## **What does that person behind the desk want?**

(paraphrased from the Job Hunting Handbook)

Although the interview will probably be informal and friendly, the manager will be looking for some serious answers. As she glances over your resume or application, she may ask questions about your experience, education, strengths and weaknesses. All of her questions will be designed to answer three important questions:

- 1) Can you do the job?
- 2) Will you do the job?
- 3) Can you get along with her other employees?

### **What does the manager fear?**

- 1) That, if hired, you'll be incompetent or take too long to become productive.
- 2) That you won't put in an honest day's work and you will need someone to constantly check on you.
- 3) That you will be lazy and give only the minimum effort, having to be told when to do everything.
- 4) That you'll frequently call in sick, arrive late, leave early, and refuse overtime.
- 5) That you're a quitter and you'll walk out at a time when they need you.
- 6) That you are a chronic complainer, braggart or someone who blames others for your mistakes/sloppiness/forgetfulness.
- 7) That you're arrogant, conceited, rude, pushy, broody or moody.
- 8) That you'd say or do something to embarrass the company/department/manager or your fellow workers.
- 9) That you'd steal, embezzle, lie or cheat.
- 10) That you'd show no pride in your work or your appearance.

## **What will they ask?**

Most interviewers, no matter how original they try to be, end up asking variations of the same questions. In addition to questions about your specific qualifications, they will try to get to know you by asking some form of the following:

Tell me about yourself...

What are your long range and short range goals and objectives?

What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

What do you really want to do in life?

What are your career objectives?

What do you expect to be earning in five years?

Why did you choose this career?

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

How would you describe yourself?

How would others describe you?

How has your college experience prepared you for your career?

Why should I hire you?

What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?

What qualities should a successful manager possess?

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Describe your most rewarding college experience.

Why did you choose St. Andrews College?

What led you to choose your field or major?

What college subjects did you like best? Why?

What college subjects did you like least? Why?

Do you have plans for a graduate degree? When?

How do you work under pressure?

How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?

Why are you seeking a position with this company?

What do you know about this organization?

Will you relocate?

Are you willing to travel?

## Questions for the Interviewer...

Though you should not ask questions about salary or benefits, there is much you can learn in an interview. You can gain information to judge whether you think you would enjoy the position, work life at this particular organization, leadership and the team with which you will work. Though these things seem less important than salary and benefits, they can make or break your happiness and definitely influence your success at your new position. Keep your questions oriented on this opportunity with this organization. You will present yourself as someone concerned with the future rather than someone who will be bought by the highest paycheck. This creates a more powerful position for you. Not only does the company have to set the right price, but they have to offer an atmosphere and opportunity that will attract you.

1. How large is the company? The team? Where do I fit?
2. What would my responsibilities and duties be?
3. Is there a training program?
4. What is the biggest problem facing the organization today?
5. How does the organization communicate? (Meetings/written)
6. What are the opportunities for advancement? Is the company growing? Does the organization have policies to promote from within?
7. Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
8. What is the performance review process? Are salaries reviewed frequently? Are raises merit based?

## When does an interview require table manners?

It is a frequent fact of life that some interviews occur around meal times. If you are in education, your interview may be all day. Someone, who is really a member of the interview panel, will escort you to lunch. Sometimes interviews occur during a meal, and sometimes the interviewer will take you to lunch or dinner, especially if you are interviewing in a location far away from home. Employers want to hire someone with some degree of refinement, who can mix with other people, and who are eventually leadership material.

### Some quick tips from the etiquette books:

- Engage in conversation but let the potential boss do most of the talking. This actually allows you more time to eat.
- Don't order a meal more expensive than your host's and don't drink hard liquor. Imagine...
- Salt and pepper your food *AFTER* you taste it. We don't know why but it is an etiquette law that is still on the books.
- Don't eat soup or pasta or anything else that you wouldn't order on a first date. You just don't know each other well enough to clean spaghetti off each other and garlic breath is bad in confined spaces (like the car on the way to the airport.)

- Save your complaints for meals that you pay for yourself. However, don't ask for a doggie bag either. It's just well, weird, to do that at an interview.
- If you are confused, just be patient and watch your host. Wait for your host to indicate that it is time to leave.
- Avoid business matters until the host brings up the topic.
- Thank the host without protest or argument when they pick up the tab. This is probably a tax write-off and they certainly expect to pay for your meal if they are interviewing you.
- At the door or in the parking lot, again express your thanks and tell the host that you are interested in the job. Shake hands and say goodbye. Simple!