

# SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING

Every interview follows a rather predictable pattern of conversation that proceeds according to this structure:

## Warm-up

During the first few minutes of the interview, an employer will be making a first, lasting impression of you. How you greet the employer, the firmness of your handshake and the way you are groomed and dressed will all be a part of this initial impression. The interviewer may begin with “small talk” as a means of putting you at ease before moving into information exchange.

## Information Exchange

This is the main part of the interview when you will be asked the most questions and learn the most about the employer. If you are prepared for the interview, you will be able to promote your qualifications effectively as you respond to questions. Practice your answers as much as possible so that your responses come easily to you and sound natural. If you try to create an answer on the spot, you are more likely to use distracting filler words, such as “like” and “um.” With practice, you will gain confidence and become more polished in your presentation.

## Wrap-up

As the interview is wrapping up, the employer will ask, “Do you have any questions?” Always ask at least one question because this demonstrates your prior research and interest in the job (e.g. “When can I expect to hear from you regarding a hiring decision?”). Do *not* ask about salary or benefits unless the employer brings them up first. The employer may also ask if you have anything you would like to add. Use the opportunity to thank the employer for the interview, summarize your qualifications, and reiterate your interest in the position. The last impression is as important as the first impression.

## COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY.

Because a job interview is a communication process, your skills will become more polished over time. It is helpful to remember the following:

- **Speak clearly and enthusiastically** about your experiences and skills. Be professional, but don't be afraid to let your personality shine through.
- **Listen carefully.** You will need to remember what you learn about the job and make sure you are actually answering the question that was asked.
- **Be positive.** Employers do not want to hear a litany of excuses or bad feelings about a negative experience. If you are asked about a low grade, a sudden job change, or a weakness in your background, don't be defensive. Focus instead on the facts (briefly) and what you learned from the experience.
- **Pay attention to your nonverbal behavior.** Smile when greeted, look the interviewer in the eye, sit up straight with both feet on the floor, control nervous habits (cracking knuckles, drumming fingers, etc.).

## INTERVIEW TIPS

- ✓ **Plan to arrive for your interview 10-15 minutes prior to the appointed time.** If you arrive earlier, go for a walk, get a cup of coffee, drive around the block, or sit in the lobby. Arriving too early confuses the employer and creates an awkward situation. By the same token, arriving late creates a bad first impression. Ask for directions when making arrangements for the interview, and add the company's number into your cell ahead of time.
- ✓ **Carry a portfolio notepad** or a manila file folder labeled with the employer's name. Bring extra resumes and a list of questions you need answered. You may refer to your list of questions to be sure you've gathered the information you need to make a decision. Do not divert your attention by taking notes during the interview.
- ✓ **Be prepared to market your skills and experiences** as they relate to the job described. Employers have problems that need to be solved by employees with particular skills; work to describe your qualifications appropriately.
- ✓ **After the interview,** take time to write down your impressions, remaining questions and information learned. If you are interviewing regularly, this will help you keep employers and circumstances clearly defined.
- ✓ **Follow the interview with a thank-you letter.** Employers regard this as evidence of your attention to detail, as well as an indication of your interest in the position. For tips on how to write a thank you letter, see our Job Search Correspondence handout (link).

- **Don't be afraid of short pauses.** You may need a few seconds to formulate an answer. The interviewer may need time to formulate an appropriate question. It is not necessary to fill up every second with conversation.
- **Limit your use of “filler” words** and phrases such as, “Umm,” “Like,” or “You know what I mean?” Practicing your responses helps.

## PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

### Study the job description or job posting.

Then think about your most important milestones: projects, grades, presentations, and work experiences that make you proud and align with the job's requirements. Use your best examples to concisely tell the story to the interviewer. Additionally, here are common attributes that many companies look for. Think through your activities and experiences and identify those you can use to show you have these attributes:

- |                           |                                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ✓ Strong communicator     | ✓ Demonstrates honesty and integrity |
| ✓ Adaptable/flexible      | ✓ Goal-oriented                      |
| ✓ Able to work in teams   | ✓ Strong follow-through              |
| ✓ Self-directed/motivated |                                      |

### Practice your answers.

Employers believe the best predictor of future behavior is recent past behavior. Ex: Do you know someone who is always late to class? What's the likelihood she'll also be late to work? That's the principle of "**behavioral-based interviewing**," a common interviewing technique. Interviewers want to get a picture of how you behaved in a recent situation because it will help them determine how you'll behave in a similar situation on the job. Answering such questions requires a good deal of preparation and insight into what employers are looking for. Think about situations where you performed well, achieved positive results, or had a positive impact on the situation. Practice these anecdotes until you are comfortable with them.

## COMMON INTERVIEW

### QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS ASK

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you consider your greatest strengths? ...weaknesses? Give specific examples of each, when you address your weakness discuss how you are working to improve it.
3. What are your long-range and short-range goals or objectives and how are you preparing to achieve them?
4. How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
5. What lead you to select your major (or field)?
6. **\*Describe a situation when you went above & beyond your assigned tasks to complete a project or assignment.**
7. What does it mean to you to be a member of a team?
8. **\*Describe a time when you took a leadership role as a member of a group or team.**
9. What have you learned from participation in student organizations/volunteer groups/community activities?
10. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
11. **\*Give me an example of how you convinced your supervisor to assign you a specific project.**
12. **\*Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer/co-worker/team member.**

*\*Behavioral questions, which draw upon your real-life experiences.*

### STAR METHOD

Behavioral questions are the norm in most interviews. Prepare and organize your response to behavioral questions using the STAR method:

**SITUATION** – Explain the situation in detail. Was it a class team? What was the project? What was difficult about the project? Illustrate (briefly) the situation or problem that needed solving.

**TASK** – Explain the task that needed to be completed or goal you were working toward.

**ACTION** – What did YOU do to pull the team together? What specific action did you take? Don't talk about what "we" did or "they" did. Talk about your role in the situation and describe what you specifically did to address the situation or problem.

**RESULT\*** – Discuss the outcome of the project or team. Did the team succeed? How did you know the team was successful? Don't forget to talk about the outcomes, whether quantitative or qualitative.

*\*LEARNING – If you are asked about a situation in which you weren't successful, talk about what you learned, how you modified your behavior, and how you've incorporated this lesson into your routine.*

### ADDITIONAL TIPS

- ✓ Make sure your responses are clear and concise. Watch the interviewer's body language. If he/she seem uninterested, wrap up your answer.
- ✓ If you can't think of an answer, say so. Don't try to bluff your way through because the interviewer will know it.
- ✓ The best candidates are able to speak to everything on their resume.
- ✓ Use Career & Employment Services to practice sample questions and participate in mock interview sessions.