

INTERVIEWING

Being offered an interview means that the employer has decided that you are a capable candidate. They now want to learn more about your experience and determine if you are the right fit for the position. Fit encompasses everything from your professional appearance and personality to your ability to communicate and apply your past experiences to the new position. In any interview you have three goals:

- Determine if you are a good fit for the organization. (This goes both ways. You need to feel like you fit too.)
- Prove that you are qualified for the position. (Be able to comfortably discuss your qualifications and experience.)
- Convince the interviewer that you understand the position and organization. (Show them you have done your research and are taking this seriously.)

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

1. REVIEW YOUR EXPERIENCE

Spend some time reviewing your accomplishments and skills. Look over the job description and circle the skills and qualities that the employer is looking for and then begin to brainstorm examples of how you possess those qualities and skills. Interviewing is all about having examples ready. Take the time to write down some stories about times when you used certain skills or exhibited specific qualities so that you can use those stories as examples in the interview. The more examples you recall beforehand, the more prepared you will be in the interview. For example, when they ask you about a time you took a leadership role, you should have a few different examples to choose from. When you describe these situations use the **STAR** acronym to help you tell the story concisely:

Situation	Explain the setting of your example. Give the interviewer some context.
Task	What was the goal that needed to be achieved or the problem that needed to be solved?
Action	What did <u>you</u> do to achieve that goal or solve that problem? Be specific. Talk about the skills that <u>you</u> used and the steps <u>you</u> took. Avoid talking about “we” or “us”. The employer is interviewing you, not a group.
Result	What ended up happening? Did you achieve the goal? Did you solve the problem and perhaps come up with a way to prevent the problem in the future?

Always use the **STAR** acronym when answering behavioral questions. Behavioral questions are based on the idea that past behavior predicts future behavior. A list of behavioral questions can be found at the end of this handout.

It is also important to prepare your answers to the three most common interview questions:

Tell me about yourself (or some variation of that).

Most interviewers will begin the interview with this question. Therefore, it is helpful for you to have an answer prepared so you feel comfortable and confident at the beginning of the interview. The interviewer wants to know about the professional you, not the personal you. Focus on what brought you to this point (this interview). Discuss relevant details that led up to this point: college major/experiences, research you have done, and job/internship/volunteer experiences that you have had. Avoid discussing pre-college events unless they had an impact on where you are now in terms of career goals. This answer should be concise and no more than 2-3 minutes.

What is your greatest strength?

This is a wonderful question that not only allows you to separate yourself from the competition, but also allows you to prove your fit for the position. At this point, you know the skills and qualities that the employer is looking for, so your greatest strength(s) should be in line with those stated needs. Be sure that you do not simply state a strength, such as organization. Saying you are organized is not enough. You need to prove it with examples. For every strength you mention, you must prove you have that strength by offering up an example of a time when you have utilized that strength.

What is your greatest weakness?

This can be a dangerous question, but with a little preparation it will be a breeze. The employer wants you to do two things when answering this question. (1) They want to see that you can admit to having a flaw (so do not say something about how your perfectionism is a weakness). (2) They want to hear what you are doing to improve that weakness. Therefore, it is always best to avoid mentioning anything that is a personality trait (e.g. procrastination, OCD, etc.). Personality traits cannot be easily improved. Instead, choose a skill that you can improve. Choose a skill that is not essential to the position and then explain how you are improving it. Keep your response concise. You do not want to dwell on your weaknesses.

Example: You are not as familiar with Photoshop as you would like to be. So you have been taking some free seminar classes at the library each month to improve your skills in this area.

CONTINUED ON BACK→

2. RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION/POSITION

In order to put your best foot forward in the interview you must know as much as you can about the position and organization. In fact, if you do not do any research the interviewer will assume that you are not serious about the position. First, you want to spend some time on the organization's website. You also want to do some industry research and, if possible, talk to people who work in the field or even at the organization of interest. Ultimately, you want to have a basic understanding of the following:

- Organization's History
- Industry Issues and Trends
- Organization's Culture
- Mission or Philosophy of the Organization
- Salary Ranges for Position Type
- Organization's Competitors and Future Plans

It is also important to do your research so you are able to craft well thought out questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview. Some example questions to ask employers are included at the end of this handout.

3. PRACTICE

Thinking you know what you are going to say and actually being able to articulate your thoughts are two very different things. Therefore, it is imperative that you practice answering interview questions before the big day. Make an appointment with a career services for a mock interview or sit down with a friend and practice answering the common interview questions (found at the end of this handout) and other questions you feel might be asked based on your research. Practicing will help you hone your answers into concise explanations and examples void of any unnecessary fillers.

THE INTERVIEW

Learn as much as you can about the logistics of the interview beforehand. Make sure you know exactly where the interview will be taking place. (If necessary, make a practice run so you feel comfortable getting there on the day of the interview.) Make sure you understand the general length and type of interview (e.g. one-on-one, panel, group etc.) you will be participating in. Know the names of your interviewers (if provided to you prior to the interview) and the title of the position you are applying for. Arrive 10-15 minutes early and bring the following with you: copies of your tailored resume on quality resume paper, copies of your references, transcripts (if requested), and a portfolio (if you have one).

Dress appropriately. Choose something conservative and professional that is appropriate for the culture of the organization with which you are interviewing. A suit, typically in a dark color, is always a safe choice for both men and women. (See the Professional Attire Handout.)

Pay attention to your nonverbal communication. Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake and a smile. Maintain appropriate eye contact throughout the interview (but do not stare them down). Sit up straight and lean slightly forward to suggest interest. Avoid being too stiff. Keep your hand gestures in check and avoid fidgeting. Remember to smile and show enthusiasm!

Follow business etiquette. Always begin the interview and end the interview with a firm handshake. Follow the hosts lead if you are taking part in a dining interview.

Listen. Be sure to answer the questions that are being asked of you. If you forget a question or need clarification, ask the interviewer to rephrase or repeat the question. If you are asked a question that you do not know how to answer immediately, take a moment to collect your thoughts. Remember, you do not need to have an answer ready to go immediately for every question. The interviewer wants to know that you took time to think through their question before answering. Keep in mind that an interview is just a conversation.

Avoid using filler words such as "uhm", "like", and "you know". Also be sure to avoid jargon and abbreviations (e.g. WVU, WVUSPH, etc.).

Be yourself. Answer the questions truthfully. Do not be who you think they want you to be. Just be you.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Take some time to write down your thoughts, impressions, and observations. What went well? What did not go well? What were the difficult questions? Did you share a humorous moment with one of the interviewers? Write everything that you can remember down. This will help you later when making decisions about accepting job offers and will also help you write better thank you letters.

Write your thank you letter(s). You should write a thank you letter to each of the people who interviewed you. You must send your thank you letter(s) within 24 hours of the interview. You can either e-mail them or send handwritten notes. (When possible, shoot for the handwritten note. It sends a stronger message.) Be sure all names are properly spelled and be sure to include some personality. If you and your interviewer spoke for a moment about a book you both read, mention it in the thank you letter. These personal touches will help them remember you and will let them know that they made an impression on you.

Inform the employer if at any point you decide that you are no longer interested in the position or have accepted another job offer. This is an important professional courtesy to uphold. This can be as simple as an e-mail thanking them for their consideration and explaining that at this time you are no longer interested in the position or have accepted another option.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS →

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.
What are some of your long-term and short-term goals?
What are some of your greatest strengths?
What is your greatest weakness?
How do you define success?
What is your greatest accomplishment?
What three adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
What do you know about us?
What are your salary expectations?
Why are you interested in working here? Why this position?
What made you choose to pursue a career in _____?
What important trends do you see in this industry?
How would you describe a productive work environment?
How have your past experiences prepared you to take on greater responsibility?
Why should we choose you over other applicants?
Do your grades reflect your abilities?
Why should we hire you?
Describe your ideal supervisor.

BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult person.
Describe a situation in which you failed to reach a goal.
Tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure and deal with deadlines.
Tell me about a time when you had to use communication skills to complete a task.
Describe a time when you worked as part of a team. What role did you play?
Describe a time when you made a mistake.
Tell me about a time when you didn't agree with a rule or policy.

STRESS QUESTIONS

Can you work overtime? Travel? Entertain at home?
Have you done the best work you are capable of?
How do you think this interview is going?
How long would you plan on staying in this position?

OFF-THE-WALL QUESTIONS

What song best describes your personality?
How many dogs are there in the US?
What is a recent book you've read or movie you've seen that had an impact on you?
If you could meet one person (dead or alive) who would it be and why?

QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS/INTERVIEWERS

What are your organization's three most important goals?
What attracted you to work at this organization?
Could you describe a typical day in this position for me?
How will my performance be measured? By whom?
What is the company's policy on providing professional development for employees?
What are the most critical factors for success in your business?
What challenges might I face if I were to be in this position?
What personal qualities or characteristics do you most value in employees?
How would you describe the organization's culture?
What are the organization's plans for future growth?
What makes this organization better than its competitors in your opinion?
What's the next step in the selection process?
What does the timeline look like for filling this position?

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

In the United States, employers cannot legally ask you questions about the following topics:

- Age
- Marital/Family Status
- National Origin/Citizenship (They can ask if you are authorized to work in the US.)
- Sexual Orientation
- Disabilities (unless related to the ability to perform the job -See Americans with Disabilities Act)
- Personal Information (e.g. height, weight, etc.)
- Arrest Record (unless related to the job)
- Club and Social Organization Memberships Unrelated to the Position

If you are asked an illegal question, you have two options. You can choose to answer the question, but you understand that by offering the information you are allowing the employer to make a hiring decision about you based on that information. Alternatively, you can choose to not answer the question. If you choose to not answer the question, do so respectfully. You may say that you do not feel comfortable answering that question, that you do not see how that question relates to the position, or you can simply state that you believe that is an illegal question and would prefer not to answer.

A NOTE ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA:

If you have a public profile on a social media site you are, in essence, throwing away all of the legal protections granted to you by the illegal questions discussed above. By putting your picture out there with information about your marital status, social organization membership, etc. you are giving an employer the ability to make hiring decisions about you that are not based on your actual abilities. Make sure your social media accounts are private and protected from this type of discrimination.

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