

Interviewing Guide



Career Services
Alvernia University
Bernardine Hall, Suite 1104
610-796-8225

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THE INTERVIEWING PROCESS

Before getting too far along into the interview process, we should first define "interview." According to Webster, an interview is "a formal consultation usually to evaluate qualifications (as of a prospective student or employee); a meeting at which information is obtained."

For the purpose of the job seeker, both portions of the Webster definition are correct. Employers will evaluate your qualifications and will try to obtain information about you. Although these definitions are correct, they imply that the interview is a one-way street, that the employer is the one who evaluates and gathers information. In fact, the interview is a two-way street. Both the interviewer and the interviewee evaluate and collect information about each other.

Employers try to determine if candidates:

- Will fit into the organization
- Have the skills necessary for success on the job
- Can do and will do the job well
- Are promotable

Just as the employer is evaluating the candidate, so should the candidate evaluate the employer. The truly sophisticated job hunter will look at the employer with a critical eye to determine how he/she will fit into that organization. In fact, the job seeker should be interviewing the employer.

You, the candidate tries to determine: How do you fit into the organization? What will be expected of you? Do you feel comfortable with the people you have met? Do you like the work you will be expected to perform? Do you believe in the products/services provided by the employer?

Now that you have a basic understanding of what an interview is, let's begin to discuss the cycle of the interview.

THE INTERVIEWING CYCLE

1.

PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Contrary to popular belief, the interview does not begin when “they’ begin asking questions. In fact, the interview begins when you start to get in touch with yourself. Long before the interview you should:



- Identify your skills and abilities
- Know your strengths and your weaknesses
- Analyze your career objective(s) and goals
- Review your resume, know it inside & out (*this is particularly true if you did not write the resume yourself or had extensive input from others*)
- Research the organization, their literature and available material
 - Size, number of employees
 - Major products or services
 - Competitors and the competitive environment
 - Major changes in policies or status
 - Reputation, values
 - Major weaknesses or opportunities

- Prepare to make a good impression (manners, appearance, posture)
- Confirm schedule, interviewer(s) name(s), date, time, location

Having done these things you are now ready to proceed to the next step.

2. GETTING DRESSED

Looking professional at the job interview is as important as sounding professional. Make sure you take into consideration these tips:

ALL CANDIDATES

- Manicured nails (light or clear polish only)
- Shower, wash your hair, use deodorant, brush your teeth and use mouthwash
- No gum, cigarettes or candy
- No visible body piercing
- A leather portfolio or slim briefcase: try not to carry too many bags
- Neat and professional hairstyle: no ponytails
- Light perfume or aftershave only

LADIES

Wear a well coordinated suit: Navy blue, black, gray or any non-loud color

Wear a long sleeved blouse in a complementary color: white, cream, pastel

Neutral or skin-tone stockings

Subdued, sparse, natural make-up

Sparse jewelry, a pin or necklace: no dangling earrings, one ring per hand, one bracelet

Moderate shoes: medium heel, closed -toe; leave the spike heels at home



GENTLEMEN

Tailored suit in navy, gray, beige

Dark suit (wool or wool blend) with light shirt (cotton)

Necktie should be silk with conservative pattern

Dark shoes with laces (matches your belt); be sure to polish

Dark socks: over- the- calf recommended

No rings other than wedding ring or college ring

No earrings (if you normally wear one, take it out)

Get a haircut; short hair always does best in interviews

Mustaches are a possible negative, but if you must, make sure it is neat & trimmed



3. INTRODUCTIONS

The interview actually starts with the introductions and not with the first question.

When meeting the interviewer, pay attention. Listen for the interviewer's name and title. Listen to how people introduce themselves to you (Ms., Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc). It is important that you address the recruiters in the manner in which they prefer. So look and listen!

When introduced to the interviewer, present yourself in a professional and confident manner. A firm, but not bone crushing, handshake along with good eye contact is essential in this first meeting. (This can be practiced ahead of time with friends or relatives, at church or other gatherings.)

Take note of the interviewer's office and décor. This information can be used as an "ice breaker" to help start the conversation. As you proceed into the interview room, watch for signals from the interviewer. Generally, he or she will gesture toward a specific seat in the interview room. If not, wait until you are directed to sit down! Sit straight up with hands folded in your lap. Get comfortable, but don't slouch or become so relaxed that you make the interviewer uncomfortable.

Now you are ready to answer the interviewer's questions.

4. BREAKING THE ICE



The initial phase of rapport building exists to set both the interviewer and the interviewee at ease. This is when you may find the interviewer asking about things that do not seem to relate to the interview or the position for which you are applying.

DON'T BE DECEIVED !! Every question, no matter how trivial, has a direct relationship to the hiring process. When the interviewer tries to break the ice, help him or her out! Remember, this portion of the interview will set the tone for what is to follow.

5. QUESTIONING

Generally, you will find that there are two segments to the questioning. During the first segment, the interviewer will have the opportunity to question you about your skills, abilities, interests, values, goals and aspirations.



In the second segment, you will have the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions related to the job, the organization, the employer's expectations of the new employee, etc.

Just as in your resume, honesty is a must in the interview. If you are asked a question for which you have no answer, it is better to say "I don't know" than to ad lib a response. Experienced interviewers know when you try to "snow" them, and this will not help you in the interview. Instead, your best strategy is to prepare for the interview in advance.

The best way to prepare for the questioning portion of the interview is to study!

Know yourself! Read your resume. Know what you've written about your work experiences, your education and your extracurricular activities.

Research the organization (a minimum expectation!). What are the employer's primary products and/or services? Where are they located? Know something about their operations and/or current events.

Review the "Questions Asked of You" section of this guide. You should be able to easily answer the questions asked.

Show some emotion. Be enthusiastic about the organization and the opportunity.

Be prepared to ask several questions. Show an interest in the possibilities.

6. "THE SELL"

As the interview begins to wind down, the interviewer will begin to "pitch" the company and/or the position to you, the applicant. Do not mistake this for an actual job offer or even for particular enthusiasm about your candidacy. In all likelihood they offer the same pitch to all serious candidates. Recognize that this is the only opportunity the interviewer has to persuade candidates to take the job. If it is at all possible that they may want you, they need to have seized this time to talk about the advantages of the position and the employer.

Listen carefully, ask questions, and express your own enthusiasm for the activities and culture being described. Be ready to move to your own questions and then to the close.



7. THE CLOSE



When the interview is over you will know. Watch for the signs: body language, a simple gesture, or a subtle question may signal the end to the interview. When you get the message that the interview is over, conclude your discussion in style and with grace, but also be sure you understand what happens next in the process. Before you conclude the interview you should:

- Ask the interviewer for a business card. You will want to send a thank-you note soon after the interview, this way you'll have their correct spelling and title.
- Ask when you will find out if a decision is made.
- Ask how they will contact you (phone call, letter, etc).
- Ask who will be contacting you (the interviewer, other HR staff, etc).

As the interview concludes, offer the interviewer a firm handshake, thank them for their time and exit.

8. POST-INTERVIEW TASKS

Review: Take some time to replay the interview. What worked well? What didn't work so well? Which questions were you less prepared to answer? How do you feel about the interview in general?

By answering these questions and by addressing areas of concern, you are actually preparing for your next interview. You have completed the interview! Now it is on to your next interview and time to start this process over again.

Thank you letters: After every interview a thank you letter must be sent within 24 hours. Even if you did not enjoy the interview and you are not interested in the position, it is important to thank the interviewer for the time he/she spent with you. You never know if five years from now, that person will be in a position to hire you

for a position that you would really like.

If you are interested in the position:

1. **HEADING:** Remember to use the same heading you used in your cover letter.
2. **FIRST PARAGRAPH:** Remind them of the meeting date, the position and how you thoroughly enjoyed yourself. Please do not lay it on too thick. Tell them that you have what it takes to succeed in the position.
3. **SECOND PARAGRAPH:** Remind them about your qualifications and how they match the employer's needs. You may want to refer back to specific points from the interview to make your point. This shows you were really listening and you do have something to offer.
4. **THIRD PARAGRAPH:** Thank them once again and let them know you are available for a follow-up interview at their convenience.

5. Sincerely,

Your Signature

Type your first and last name

If you are NOT interested in the position:

You should still express appreciation for being considered and for the courtesy extended to you. If you can imagine no circumstances under which you would accept the position, you should not continue with the process. If you have decided to withdraw yourself from the applicant pool, this would be a good time to put that in writing. Try to give a reason for your withdraw that will leave you on good terms with the interviewer.

COMPETENCIES SOUGHT BY EMPLOYERS

15 TRAITS SOUGHT BY EMPLOYERS

- Ability to communicate
- Flexibility
- Intelligence
- Interpersonal skills
- Willingness to accept responsibility
- Self-knowledge
- Initiative
- Ability to handle conflict
- Leadership
- Competitiveness
- High energy level
- Goal achievement
- Imagination
- Vocational skills
- Direction

10 "HOTTEST" SKILLS ANY MAJOR CAN ACQUIRE

- Budget management
- Speaking
- Supervising
- Writing
- Public relations
- Organizing/managing/coordinating
- Coping with deadline pressure
- Interviewing
- Negotiating/arbitrating
- Teaching/instruction

WHERE TO LOOK FOR EVIDENCE OF THESE SKILLS

- Volunteer work
- Part-time/summer jobs
- Participation in activities, school or community
- Study/work/travel overseas
- Internships
- Community service activities
- Specific skill courses

QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED OF CANDIDATES

Tell me about yourself.

Why do you want to work as a...?

What qualifications do you have?

Why did you choose Alvernia College? Why did you choose your major?

What was your favorite course/least favorite course? Why?

Are your grades a good indication of your abilities?

How has your education prepared you for this position?

Why do you want to work for us?

How did you learn about us?

How many other companies have you approached?

What do you expect from your employer?

What makes a good manager?

What activities have you participated in during college? Tell me about your involvement?

Tell me about a goal you have NOT attained? Why not?

What do you see as the biggest challenge currently facing organizations such as ours?

What motivates you? What are the most important rewards you expect from your career?

How long do you plan to work here?

Tell me about your current (or last) job/position.

What have you learned from previous work experiences that will assist you in this position?

What accomplishments are you most proud of? Why?

What are your short/long term goals? Where do you see yourself in five/ten years?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

Do you have any geographic restrictions?

Are you willing to relocate?

Are you willing to travel?

What criterion is most important to you in choosing an employer?

What position are you most interested in and why?

What are three of your strengths and weaknesses?

What strengths do you have that we have not discussed?

Do you prefer working alone or with others?

What is your favorite book? Last one you've read?

How would your best friend describe you?

What is the newest thing you learned or did?

What do you do in your free time?

How familiar are you with computers? To what extent?

How do you deal with stress?

Have you thought about attending graduate school? When? Where? Subject/Major?

Who is your hero? Why?

When do you hope to retire?

Give an example of any major problem you faced and how you solved it.

What was your greatest failure, what have you learned from it?

Why should I hire you?

TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

and how to handle them

What kinds of work have you done? Highlight skills you think are important in the new job and cite examples of successes or unique achievement in past situations

How did you like your last employer? Never criticize a former employer in an interview. You might express appreciation for what you learned on that job. If pressed as to why you left, it might be for a situation offering more opportunities for advancement.

What kinds of people rub you the wrong way? This is no time to get into personal likes and dislikes, the interviewer really wants to see if you get along well with most people. A good answer may be that generally like those with whom you have worked but that you do get upset with people who don't do their share of the work.

What are your major weaknesses? Once again, this is not time to let it all hang out. The best approach is to describe a weakness that may actually be an advantage to the employer: being impatient to get things done or the tendency to take your work too seriously.

What made you apply for this job? Be ready to cite several reasons why you think your current level of skill and interest help qualify you for the position and also several points why you are particularly interested in the employer (which reflects the research you have done on the organization!)

Where do you hope to be 10 years from now? Your best answer may be that you seek the opportunity to show how well you can perform and hope to go as far as dedication to the job and working intelligently will carry you.

What are your salary expectations? Hopefully you will not be asked this question until the employer has a strong interest in you. A good response is to ask if there is a salary range for the job and what it is. Then you can begin to quietly negotiate.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS: WHAT'S THE RIGHT ANSWER?



Various federal, state and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you. An employer's questions—on the job application, in the interview or during the testing process—**must be related to the job you are applying for**. For the employer, the focus must be: "What do I need to know to decide whether or not this person can perform the functions of this job?"

OPTIONS FOR ANSWERING If you are asked an illegal question, you have three options.

You are free to answer the question, but if you choose to do so, realize that you are giving information that is not job related. You could harm your candidacy by giving the "wrong" answer.

You can refuse to answer the question. By selecting this option, you will be within your rights, but you are also running the risk of coming off as uncooperative or confrontational, hardly the words an employer would use to describe the "ideal" candidate.

Your third option is to examine the **INTENT** behind the question and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For instance, the interviewer asks, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" or "What country are you from?" You've been asked an illegal question. You could say, however, "I am authorized to work in the United States." Or if your interviewer asks, "Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel?" You might answer, "I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires."

Here are some EXAMPLES OF ILLEGAL QUESTIONS—and their legal counterparts.

Inquiry Area	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
National Origin/ Citizenship	Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your native tongue?	Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read, speak, or write fluently? (This question is okay, as long as this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.)
Age	How old are you? What is your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
Marital/ Family Status	What's your marital status? Do you plan to have a family? How many kids do you have? With whom do you live? What does your spouse do? What kinds of day care arrangements have you made for your children?	Would you be willing to relocate and travel as necessary?
Physical Characteristic	How tall are you? How much do you weigh? Are you physically handicapped?	If important to performing the job: How much do you weigh? How tall are you?
Financial History	Have you ever filed for bankruptcy? Where do you bank?	
Military History	What is your military service status? If a veteran, what kind of discharge did you receive?	
Background Check	What memberships do you hold in social, religious and community groups? Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

QUESTIONS ASKED BY YOU

ALWAYS have a few questions prepared to ask the employer. This shows preparation, professional maturity and most importantly... interest! So ask yourself, what do I need to know in order to make an informed decision?

- Have you had a chance to review my resume? Did it raise any questions about my qualifications that I can answer?
- Can you describe the duties of the job for me? What is a typical day like?
- What type of orientation and training programs do you have?
- What do you consider ideal experience for the job?
- Can you tell me about the people I will be working with?
- What are the primary results you would like to see me produce?
- Can you give me some idea as to the retention rate(s) for new staff?
- To whom will I report?
- Can you tell me about your personnel evaluation process? Who will evaluate me? How often will I be evaluated? When will I have my first evaluation?
- What are your expectations of new staff members?
- Can you tell me about professional development opportunities with the organization?
- To what extent are technical support services (computer hardware/software and courses) provided to staff?
- Can you tell me about any opportunities for advancement?
- How would you characterize the working environment here?
- Can you tell me about the organization's philosophy of management?
- How is completion of a graduate degree viewed?
- How would you describe the dress code?
- With who will I be interacting most frequently and what are their responsibilities?

As the interview concludes, you may want to ask:

- What is the next step in the interview/hiring process?
- When can I expect to hear from you?
- How will you contact me?

AVOID asking about

- salary
- health benefits
- vacation
- retirement package

It will reflect misplaced priorities. Don't worry, you will find out that information later in the process.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone interviews just like face-to-face interviews take preparation, concentration and a little bit of luck. The telephone interview is basically a "trial run" for the face-to-face interview. Employers view it as a chance to screen applicants and see if they are interested enough to bring the candidate in. Just a reminder: "it is not always the most qualified person that gets the job, it is the person that can best sell their accomplishments and best fits in with the existing team."

PREPARATION

Be organized. Once you have sent out resumes and networked, create separate folders for each contact established. In each folder have a copy of your resume, a copy of the job description and the names of the contact people

REMAIN CALM

Often the phone interview is scheduled, just like an on-site interview. However, if the phone interview has not been scheduled, the call will probably come in at the worst time: 8:00AM or 4:25PM.

In any event, sound positive, friendly and in control. "Thank you for calling Dr. Smith, could you please wait a moment while I close the door?" Get the correct folder out, make sure everything is in there and RELAX. Have a pen and pad of paper ready.

WATCH OUT FOR FAMILIARITY

Just like in a face-to-face interview, address the interviewer by Dr., Ms., or Mr. If there are multiple people on the line write their names and titles down.

SOUND INTELLIGENT

You are a professional and a pro knows what they are talking about. The interviewer(s) will probably do most of the talking, but do not be afraid to ask questions during the interview. ("What major projects are currently in progress?" "What sort of person do you envision in this position?"). Avoid yes and no answers because they provide no information.

ACT LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

Speak directly into the phone and do not eat, smoke, pick or chew during the interview. Take notes because they can be helpful in the fact-to-face interview. Note taking can also help you if the interviewer is interrupted during the interview, you will know where the interviewer left off. Use what you have learned from your research about the organization; a little "schmoozing" goes a long way.

ASK QUESTIONS

Ask about the responsibilities, priorities and major goals of the position. Do not ask about money or benefits. Save it for the face-to-face.

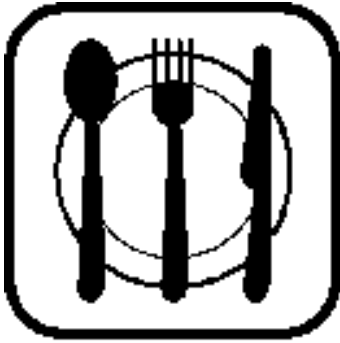
SELL YOURSELF

Take the initiative and tell the interviewers(s) WHAT YOU CAN DO AND HOW YOU WILL DO IT. Talk about your major accomplishments, projects and career contributions.

ASK FOR A FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

That is your objective. If you have not been invited, make yourself available. If the position sounds like it is what you want then tell them. Once all the arrangements have been made, get a written itinerary of WHO, WHAT, WHEN and WHERE.

DINING INTERVIEWS



Food and business cannot be separated anymore! Because of this, many organizations take not only clients, but also POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES out for a meal. This is another strategy of interviewing candidates. If you are applying for a position that involves a lot of client contact the employer may want to make sure you are making a good impression of yourself and representing the organization well. Like it or not, good manners are associated with competence in your job and in business...they say a lot about you!! So... don't get too comfortable or relaxed if you're taken out to lunch as part of the selection process. No matter how informal, you are still being interviewed!!

Some quick suggestions on common questions and mistakes:

- use your brains
- follow your host
- to use silverware: start from the outside and work in
- your glass is to your right, your bread and butter plate is to your left
- napkin goes in your lap while eating; on the chair when away from the table, folded gently on the table only when you are finished and leaving the table
- no elbows on the table
- chew with your mouth closed; don't smack your lips
- bring food to your mouth; don't lean into the food
- don't pick your teeth at the table
- don't pick up anything that falls to the floor (except your napkin)
- excuse yourself when you leave the table
- do not pass items hand-to-hand; place them on the table
- pass items when requested without helping yourself first
- don't order food you have to "fight" – eg. spaghetti, chicken, hoagies
- allow the host to be the host: set the pace, pay the bill, leave the tip
- ask your host for suggestions and follow his/her lead regarding cost and type of food
- don't order alcohol
- don't order the most expensive item on the menu
- put butter on your plate, not directly on your bread
- tear off a bite-sized piece of bread, butter it, then eat and enjoy
- cut off only 2 or 3 bite-sized pieces of meat or salad at once
- don't blow on soup nor stir it to cool
- wait until everyone is seated before beginning to eat
- when in doubt, don't eat with your fingers
- never put "stuff" on the table (purse, keys, papers, etc)
- excuse yourself if you burp, hiccup, sneeze
- blow your nose after leaving the table
- don't reapply lipstick or chapstick, use a nail file, or put your hands to your hair while at the table

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

An increasingly popular way for employers to determine whether you're the right fit is the use of the behavioral interview. This type of interview focuses on your past behavior in actual work or conflict situation. It operates from the assumption that past behavior predicts your future behavior.

Today, more than ever, each hiring decision is critical. Behavioral interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that might cloud the hiring decision. By focusing on the applicant's actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions that can sometimes be misleading, interviewers can make more accurate hiring decisions.

Typical Behavioral Interview Questions

- Tell me about a recent project you had to plan. What went well? What might you have done better?
- Tell me about a specific time when you eliminated or avoided a potential problem before it happened?
- What is the most difficult situation you have faced? How did you handle it?
- Tell me when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you were criticized. What was the issue involved, who made the criticism and how did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to approach several different people for support or cooperation. How did you approach them?
- Give me an example of how you exercised leadership in a recent situation. What did you do to gain the team or groups' cooperation?
- Describe a time on the job when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Tell me about a recent team you worked with/on. How may you have handled someone who was not as cooperative as needed?
- How would you motivate someone who is not motivated?
- At your job, how did you know if your internal/external customers were satisfied?
- Tell me about a time you had to conform to a policy with which you didn't agree.
- Even though we may do everything possible to satisfy a customer, it seems that some will complain about how they were treated. Tell me about the last customer who complained about the service you provided.

Follow up questions will test for consistency and determine if you exhibited to desired behavior in that situation:

- Can you give me an example?
- What did you do or say?
- What were you thinking?
- How did you feel?
- What was your role?
- What was the result?

Preparing for Behavioral Interviews

To prepare for this type of interview, consider the following strategy. Think about brief accounts from your past that highlight skills for which the company will be looking. Think S.T.A.R:

- the situation or task you had to perform
- the action you took
- the results of your actions

NEGATIVE FACTORS ON THE INTERVIEWING & HIRING PROCESS

- Unprepared for the interview: lack of knowledge about organization and positions
- Overbearing—over aggressive, conceited, superiority complex, know-it-all
- Inability to express self clearly—poor communication skills
- No purpose, goals or direction; not focused on what he/she wants to do
- Asks no questions about the job/company
- Lacks involvement in campus activities
- Does not belong to professional association associated with her major
- Poor communication skills—uses slang, improper grammar
- Lack of enthusiasm, doesn't smile, appears uninterested
- Poor appearance, inappropriately dressed for the interview
- Lack of confidence, nervousness (to a fault), ill at ease
- Overemphasis on money
- Poor academic record
- Expect too much too soon; unwilling to start at the bottom
- Makes excuses, evasiveness
- Lack of tact, courtesy and maturity
- Condemnation of past employers
- Poor eye contact
- Limp handshake
- Candidates who want job only for short time
- Lack of or little sense of humor
- Candidates who are merely "shopping around"
- No interest in organization or in industry
- Too much emphasis on whom one knows, trying to impress
- Unwillingness to relocate
- Strong prejudices
- Narrow scope of interests
- Little or no interest in community activities
- Inability to take criticism
- Late for interview without good reason
- Indecisive

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Do a good job in the pre-interview activities to insure a successful interview.

Interview with a variety of organizations. Don't focus all your attention on the = Fortune 500 companies. Remember, the largest growth in the job market will be with small to medium size companies.

Prepare for any and all contingencies. This means that you should consider all possibilities. Don't reject an employer or a position because you think you know something about the industry/job. Talk to the employer. Explore the opportunity. Remember, you are under no obligation to accept an offer if one comes your way. Look throughout the region, and to the extent possible, look at opportunities across the country. Flexibility will be key to any successful job search.

Be persistent! If you haven't heard from an employer in a timely fashion, call them to find out what is going on.

Interview with any and all organizations, using all resources available to you. Take on-campus interviews, develop your own leads, follow up newspaper ads and develop your own network.

Maintain an accurate record of all your interviews. Who did you interview with (organization and individual)? When and where did you interview (date and place)? What did you think of the interview? Was there anything of note that was said during the interview? Did you send the thank you?

Most importantly, keep at it!

