Interview Guide

The interview is designed to evaluate in greater detail whether your experience, skills and personality match the needs of your potential employer. The interview is an exchange: the employer is evaluating you, and you should be assessing the employer. Making the most of an interview requires research and preparation, a strategy during the interview, and appropriate follow-up after the interview.

Types of Interviews

Screening:
The first discussion you have with an employer is typically a 30 minute conversation. At this stage, the conversation is general. The recruiter’s task is to reduce the candidate pool to a manageable number.

Phone:
The phone interview is often a screening interview. If a recruiter calls to conduct a phone interview without prior notification, ask to schedule the call at a later time when you are sure you will have privacy and quiet. You do not have to answer questions on the spot. Being polite but assertive in asking to reschedule is key. Your tone of voice, conversational style, and energy level are especially important during a telephone interview as the employer cannot see your positive body language. Be sure to make the call in a quiet location where you won’t be interrupted and where cell phone reception is dependable. Also have your resume and questions handy. Consider sitting at your desk so that you can simulate a face to face interview and project your voice.

Skype Interviews:
Here is a checklist for ensuring a successful Skype interview.

- Be sure to exchange Skype IDs and know who is connecting who.
- Be sure the Internet connection for your interview location is reliable.
- You should do a test call the day before your interview to ensure good connection and correct ID.
- Set up your Video Conference prior to the interview so you are ready to go at the scheduled time.
- Should something go wrong, check all connections and remember to stay calm. Don’t let this throw you off.
- Be sure there are no distractions around you during the interview especially loud noises.
- Be sure you have sent the interviewer your most recent resume.
- Dress professionally from head to toe. Even though they can’t see you in person, this is important.
- Make sure the interviewing area where you are sitting is clean and organized.
- Interview the way you would if you were face to face.

Formal Interview:
Interviewers at this stage are typically those who will directly supervise or work with you and may not be recruiters. Keep in mind that your audience has changed. Depending on the situation, the employer’s objective at this stage is to identify a few (2-5) finalists for the position or to make a hiring decision. This interview typically takes place on-site at the employer’s office and involves several interviewers. Questions are a bit more penetrating, often requiring you to apply your experience to job-related situations. You will be expected to ask more sophisticated questions given all you have learned from your previous interview. Often, second interviews require that you eat a meal with your interviewers. Being interviewed over a meal is challenging. Do not mistake it as less important than the other conversations during the day. It is a good idea to decline alcoholic beverages even if those interviewing you order them.

Group:
You may be interviewed by a group of individuals, perhaps a search committee or management team. The challenge here is to connect with all interviewers by maintaining eye contact with each member of the group as you respond to the questions. Bring several copies of your resume so that each interviewer can have a copy and do your best to obtain a business card from each interviewer. If you aren’t able to do so, you may have to call the administrator to ask for an individual’s email as you write your thank you notes.
Types of Interview Questions

Résumé Based:
Resume based questions are most common and are based on specific components of the résumé. These questions are often phrased as "Can you tell me about what you did (at your internship)?" or "What responsibilities did you take on as (Treasurer of your club)?" To prepare for these, think about each item on your resume and what was important about each. What did you learn? How did you grow? What skills did you gain? Use specific examples from your experiences to answer these questions!

Theoretical:
Questions such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "How would you describe yourself?" are also very common questions. You can best answer these questions by anticipating questions based on the job description and preparing some responses, citing examples from your resume. It is important to give tightly-focused, concrete answers to even the vaguest of questions. Accomplish this by relaying real world stories as examples.

Behavioral:
This type of interview question is based on the theory that past behaviors predict future behaviors. These questions will often be phrased as "Tell me about a time when (you had to be creative to solve a problem)." Review your resume and understand how experiences you may have had relate to the specific skills required in the position.

The STAR model is a framework for answering behavior questions.
1. **Situation:** Open with a brief description of the Situation and context of the story (who, what, where, when, how).
2. **Task:** Explain the Task you had to complete highlighting any specific challenges or constraint (e.g. deadlines, costs, other issues).
3. **Action:** Describe the specific Actions that you took to complete the task. These should highlight desirable traits without needing to state them (initiative, intelligence, dedication, leadership, understanding, etc.)
4. **Result:** Close with the result of your efforts. Include figures to quantify the result if possible.

In preparation for this interview, review the list of questions that follows and consider what situations might fit each of the behavioral questions.

Case:
Most typically used by consulting and finance firms, the case interview evaluates an applicant's ability to analyze a problem and clearly relate his/her thought process. The interviewer wants to see how you break a problem down into manageable pieces, how you think under pressure, and observe your ability to be convincing and persuasive. The two most common kinds of cases questions are estimations (also called numerical cases) and client questions. Estimation questions include questions such as: "How many gas stations are there in Chicago?" and "How many car batteries are sold in the US each year?" The other type of case question – client questions – presents you with a concrete business problem to be solved like "Trinity is trying to reduce summertime energy costs. What can be done?" Again, an interviewer is not looking for a correct answer but rather a cogent thought process.

It is important to prepare for case interviews by consulting with a Career adviser. Our office also suggests you use the following resources:

- **Case in Point by Marc Cosentino** - Complete Case Interview Preparation
  This website provides case studies in various industries. Reading through them may help you prepare for the case study interview.
Preparing for Interviews

Research the Organization and Position
Before your interview, find out as much as possible about the employer, the industry and the position. Study annual reports, the organization's website and recent news articles. Researching competing organizations can also give you good information to use as a comparison. Try to thoroughly understand the requirements of the job or training program. Do not waste time in the interview asking for this information if it is available elsewhere. When conducting your research, make sure to utilize the resources available to you through the Career Development Center.

Another great way to conduct research is to speak with alumni/ae or others who work for the employer. Ask about the current interview process and keys to success. NEVER initiate a discussion of salary, particularly during in an initial interview.

Know Yourself
Understanding yourself is fundamental to successful interviewing. Identify experiences, skills, successes, and personal characteristics that meet the needs of the position or training program.

Review the Interview Questions and Legal sections that follow and map out a strategy for the questions you would consider most difficult. Think about what is behind the question and address those issues. For example, "What are your weaknesses?" is not a question about your fallibility but, rather, a way to see how you handle stress, how self-critical you are, and how you are working to improve any identifiable weak points in your personality or experience.

For each response you make, introduce your point, develop it, and then bring your answer to a close. Rambling and going off on tangents are classic interviewing downfalls! Focus your thoughts around these key questions: "Why are you interested in ABC organization?" "Tell me about yourself," and "Why should I hire you?"

Practice:
Know how interviews "feel." Do not use your first interview as a proving ground. Instead, practice in a no-risk situation. The Career Development Center provides you with a number of different ways to practice and strengthen your interviewing skills:

- **Mock Interview with a Career Adviser:** A career adviser will spend an hour simulating a “real world” interview and then provide you with immediate feedback. To schedule a practice interview, call or email the Career Development Center.
- **InterviewStream:** Using a webcam, individuals will be able to simulate job interviews by responding to pre-recorded interview questions and practice both verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Remember – it is important to practice and prepare, but don’t rehearse or memorize your answers.

Questions Recruiters May Ask

*Many of these questions are taken from or based on information taken from publications of the National Association of Colleges and Employers*

1. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
2. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
3. How would you describe yourself?
4. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
5. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
6. How has your college experience prepared you for this career?
7. Why should I hire you? What sets you apart from other people who want this job?
8. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful here?
9. How do you determine or evaluate success?
10. What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
11. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
12. Why are you interested in this field? What do you know about it?
13. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
14. Why did you select your college or university?
15. What is the most challenging situation you have ever faced?
16. What do you like to do when you are not working?
17. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
18. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
19. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
20. How do you work under pressure?
21. Why would you like to work for this company?
22. What do you know about our organization?
23. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
24. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
25. What have you learned from your mistakes?
26. Where else are you interviewing?
27. Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?
28. Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision? How does it affect you today?
29. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?
30. Discuss a time you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?
31. Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. Were you successful?

Questions You Might Ask

When asked by an interviewer if you have questions, it is not a good idea to be empty-handed. Ask questions that will add to your knowledge base, not questions that should have been answered through basic research.

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1. What qualities are you looking for in a candidate for this position?
2. What is the most important responsibility? The least?
3. Where are the last three people who held the job working now?
4. What is your organization’s biggest challenge?
5. What role would you like me to have in addressing this challenge?
6. To whom would I report?
7. What is my potential boss’s background?
8. Who are the other people with whom I would work?
9. What are going to be my most important relationships: clients, customers, other employees?
10. How often are performance reviews given and how are they conducted?
11. What is the work environment/culture like?
12. What learning or professional development opportunities are there?
13. What does it take to be very successful in this company?
14. How would you describe the management style of the company?
15. What goes on during a typical workday?
16. How much independent work is there? How would you describe the teamwork in this position?
17. What question do you have about my qualifications or background that would be helpful to clarify? (Asked near the end of an interview)
Legal Issues

Federal regulations prohibit interviewers from making hiring decisions based on age, national origin, race, gender, religion, citizenship, sexual orientation and disability, unless it is directly relevant to core job function that cannot be accommodated for in a reasonable way. Employers are prohibited from excluding applicants from employment consideration solely on the basis of any of the factors listed above.

What to do if asked an inappropriate question:

If you were asked, "What is your native language?" how would you react? Although it is up to you whether or not you answer the question, you might think ahead and plan a response.

Why is the question illegal? The problem is that this question could be used to determine national origin. The employer can ask whether you know a particular language only if it is required for the job. For example, if job responsibilities include supporting Spanish-speaking customers, it's fair to ask if you speak Spanish. A recommended answer might be, "I am fluent in Spanish and English."

If you think you have been asked a discriminatory question, notify a CDC staff member to discuss the circumstances and to assist you in determining how you wish to handle the situation.