

Interviewing Techniques

Interviewing is the opportunity to influence and persuade the employer that you are the best candidate for the position. It requires the three P's – *Preparation, Practice and Performance*. By striving to achieve the three P's you significantly increase your chances to make a good impression for the internship and/or job you desire.

The following is a basic guide to interviewing – including information on preparation, practice and performance. But we'll start with what interviewers look for and the types of interviews you may encounter.

What Interviewers Look For

Interviewers primarily look for two things:

- Your unique qualifications for the position – Are you the best qualified candidate for the job?
- Your organizational fit – Will you fit the personality of the team and the culture of the organization?

Consider the three key questions of interviewing:

- Why this position? – An assessment of your career goals and path.
- Why here? – An assessment of your organizational fit.
- Why you? – An assessment of your unique qualifications.

If you pass this “test,” add a fourth question to the mix – Can I afford you? This is the interviewer's assessment of your salary and benefit expectations, as compared to their budget and financial outlook.

Almost any question an interviewer will ask you comes back to these key questions. Start your process by reflecting on what answers you would give.

Types of Interviews

Phone Interview – This is typically a brief and focused conversation used to screen you “in or out” of a more in-depth face-to-face interview. For a list of do's and don'ts regarding phone interviews go to: www.quintcareers.com/phone_interviewing-dos-donts.html.

Traditional Interview – The interviewer uses broad-based questions that require factual responses. Some examples of traditional interview questions are:

- Can you describe yourself?
- What are your strengths? Your weaknesses?
- Why should I hire you?

More questions can be found on the following site:

www.quintcareers.com/interview_questions.html.

Behavioral (or Performance-Based) Interview – This type of interview probes into your past behavior regarding certain situations. The concept of the behavioral interview is that future success can be predicted through past performance. Some examples of behavioral interview questions include:

- Can you describe a time when you had to use your analytical skills and you were successful?
- Tell me about a time when you failed at something and how you dealt with it?
- Can you talk about a situation where you were asked to show leadership?

For more information go to the following site: www.quintcareers.com/behavioral_interviewing.html.

Situational Interview – In this type of interview you are presented with a hypothetical situation (usually a “real-life” situation that you would confront on the job and/or in the workplace), and you’re asked to explain what you would do. It is meant to assess your analytical, problem-solving and judgment skills. For more information go to the following site:

www.quintcareers.com/situational_stress_interviews.html.

Stress Interview – This is an interview that assesses your ability to deal with stressful situations and/or positions. The interviewer may use interviewing techniques that cause you stress to see how you will react. For more information go to the following link:

www.quintcareers.com/situational_stress_interviews.html.

Second or Subsequent Interview – It’s the final step in securing a job offer. The goal for the employer in this interview is to focus on your specific skills and qualities, and to better determine your organizational fit. For more information go to:

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviews/a/secondinterview.htm>.

It is important to note that traditional, behavioral, situational and/or stress interview questions can be encountered within one interview situation. They are not types of interviews typically used in isolation.

The Preparation Phase

Prior to the interview you should consider the following to fully prepare:

- Thoroughly research the industry, the organization, the position and the interviewer. Go to the following site for information on researching employers: www.rileyguide.com/research.html. Try to find out more about your interviewer on LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com.

- Print five or more copies of your resume on a heavier stock resume paper. You want to have one for you and additional copies for others who may be part of the interview process.
- Prepare and print a list of three to five references (along with appropriate contact information), from most important to least important. Use references who can speak to the quality of your work, as well as your skills and positive qualities/characteristics.
- Develop a list of questions to ask the interviewer (ten to twelve relevant questions). Go to the following site for some sample questions:
www.quintcareers.com/asking_interview_questions.html.
- Make sure you have the interviewer's contact information – including name, title, phone number and email address. Know who you're interviewing with and how to contact them in case of emergency.
- Have a professional looking pad folio (with a fresh pad of paper) and several pens for taking notes.
- Take a practice run to the location of the interview. Know how to get there and how long it takes, and be familiar with alternate routes in case of accidents or detours.
- Layout and prepare your professional attire for the interview. Make sure it is appropriate for the job, organization and industry. Go to www.quintcareers.com/dress_for_success.html for more information.

As a point of interest, according to a study commissioned by CareerBuilder, employers say the colors worn by job candidates convey certain messages. Here are some of the associations: black (leadership), blue (team player), gray (logical/analytical), white (organized), brown (dependable), red (power) and green/yellow/orange/purple (creativity).

- Get a good night's sleep on the night before the interview. It will help you be at your best.
- Pack emergency-repair items – small sewing kit, extra pair of pantyhose, spot-remover wipes, tissues, comb and brush, hairspray, makeup for touchups, breath mints and an umbrella.
- Get very familiar with your resume; be able to explain and talk about anything and everything on it. It will be the talking point during the interview.
- Write answers to commonly asked questions (but don't memorize or over rehearse your answers), and have stories to tell about your qualifications and skills. More about this later in the handout!
- Remember the power of your non-verbal cues, including eye contact, posture, and nervous habits. Go to <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewsnetworking/a/nonverbalcomm.htm> for more information.

On the day of the interview you should consider the following to fully prepare:

- Dress for success – see previous section.
- Go easy on perfume, cologne, makeup and jewelry, and cover any tattoos.
- Leave plenty of time to get there. It's much better to arrive early than to be rushing because you're late.
- If you smoke, don't smoke in the car on the way to the interview – or at any point prior to the interview.
- Be prepared to enter the building 15 to 20 minutes early – not sooner or later.
- Leave your cell phone in the car. You don't want this as a distraction during the interview.
- If you're chewing gum dispense of it before entering the building.

- Greet the receptionist, and anyone you meet at the company, with courtesy and respect. Treat them as if they have the authority to offer you the job.
- Confirm the pronunciation of the interviewer's name (if questionable) with the receptionist.
- Use the restroom. This is one last chance to check your general appearance.
- Use your time in the waiting area to do additional research on the organization. Check out marketing materials, company awards on the wall and anything else that provides a glimpse of who the company is.
- Be aware of how employees are behaving. This will give you insight into the culture of the organization.

The Practice Phase

Remember the old expression ... practice makes perfect. It also helps to relieve some of the fear and anxiety typically associated with interviewing. As a result, participate in multiple "mock interviews." If at all possible, do this with different interviewers to familiarize yourself with different styles and questions.

Contact Clarkson University Career Services at career@clarkson.edu for a mock interview. In addition, seek out professionals in the field who can provide you with practice interviewing and practical advice.

The Performance Phase

On the day of the interview it's all about performance. Your preparation and practice have brought you this far; now it's time to put it all into action. Consider the following:

- Greet the interviewer with a smile, direct eye contact and a firm handshake. Remember, it is important to project confidence and enthusiasm at this first encounter.
- Call him or her by Mr. or Ms. or Dr., until given permission to call them by their first name.
- Wait until you're offered a chair before being seated.
- Be aware that most interviews are 50% talking and 50% listening. Be an active listener and provide concise and focused responses to the interviewer's specific questions.
- Be comfortable with silence. Don't feel the need to fill silence with extended responses or nervous chatter. When you become uncomfortable with silence after responding to a question ask the interviewer, "Have I sufficiently addressed the question? Do you need any additional information?"
- Speak with a strong and clear voice to project confidence.
- A short pause before responding to a question to collect your thoughts is fine. Don't rush to answer a question that requires some thought and reflection on your part.
- Avoid telling jokes, using poor language or slang, talking about controversial topics, speaking negatively about a present or former employer, talking about personal issues or family problems, or acting desperate for a job. None of these will be well received by the interviewer.
- Show what you can do for the organization, rather than explain what they can do for you. It's all about the value you can bring to them.

- Focus on accomplishments and achievements. Employers predict future success through past performance.
- Be specific, concrete, quantitative (when possible) and factual in your responses.
- Concentrate on the skills the employer needs and desires, both technical and applied.
- If you don't have skills from related experience, focus on your "transferable skills" gained from other experiences, extracurricular activities, community service and your academic preparation.

Some commonly asked questions you may encounter are as follows:

- **Can you tell me about yourself?**
An open-ended question typically used at the beginning of the interview. Keep your focus on your career goals, your qualifications for the position, and your fit for the company.
- **Why did you choose your major? Why this position?**
The employer wants to know more about your short term career goals. They want to know if you are knowledgeable about the career you have chosen, and if you have made an informed decision.
- **What do you see yourself doing five to seven years from now?**
The employer is probing about your long term career goals. They want to know that you're serious enough about your career that you've taken the time to think long-term, and that you have a plan for achieving your challenging (yet realistic) goals.
- **Why are you interested in working for our company?**
Always research the employer to get to know them, and find something that connects with you. This is about your organizational fit.
- **What are your strengths?**
Have at least three ready to talk about, and make sure the strengths you talk about are related to the qualifications for the position.
- **What are your weaknesses?**
We all have them, so have at least three you can talk about. The key to this question is being able to tell the employer what you're doing right now to improve in those areas.
- **Can you tell me about a time when ...?**
The classic behavioral-based question. Employers predict future success based on past performance, so they're looking for you to tell stories about your past experiences. Have stories ready for any key words you use to describe yourself, as well as key words the employer uses to describe the position. When telling the story use SAR statements – describe the **S**ituation, tell what **A**ction you took and then close with a **R**esult (positive and quantifiable – when possible).
- **Why should I hire you?**
This is your opportunity to tell the employer why you're uniquely qualified for the position. Don't talk in generalities here. Leave them with something that will make them remember you when you walk out the door.

For an extensive database of other commonly asked interview questions, along with sample excellent responses, go to the following site: www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/

Closing the Interview/After the Interview

- Take this opportunity to ask your questions for the employer.
- Reinforce your interest in the position prior to leaving.
- Inquire about the timeline or next steps in the interviewing/hiring process.
- Request the business cards from each person you interviewed with. You'll need these for your thank you letters and any follow-up.
- Immediately write down notes after the interview concludes so you don't forget important details.
- Write a thank you note to each person you interviewed with within 24 hours of the interview. For some sample thank you letters go to: http://www.quintcareers.com/sample_thank-you_letters.html.
- Follow up in a professionally persistent manner.