INTERVIEWING

DON’T UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE of the job interview. But there’s no need to get butterflies or sweaty palms if you’re prepared to effectively package and present your skills and abilities, work and volunteer experiences, academic accomplishments, and career interests. The pointers in this chapter will help you plan, prepare, and practice for a great interview.

INTERVIEW TIPS AND STRATEGIES

THE PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW is to determine whether you are right for the job—and whether the job is right for you.

The job interview is a two-way exchange of information between you and a prospective employer. Equally important, the interview also provides an opportunity to ask pivotal questions about the organization and the position. This will help you decide if there is a good match between your qualifications, career goals, and the position for which you’re interviewing.

What Employers Want to Know
• Do you know who the company is and what they do?
• Why do you want to work for them?
• Can you tell them why they should hire you?
• Are you enthusiastic about working there?

Ultimately, you need to articulate the answers to these questions in a way that persuades them you are the perfect candidate. This takes preparation, and practice!

Consider the interview from the Employers Perspective—They have a need for a job to be done. The interviewer wants to find out:
• Can you do the job? (Skills needed to do the job)
• Can you handle the work? (Transferrable skills: manage, communicate, coordinate, etc.)
• Does your personality fit the job and the team? (honest, open-minded, flexible, tolerant, team-player)
• Do you really want to work there?

THE CARR METHOD
Create a list of your skills and accomplishments with examples that demonstrate them. Relate these to the job requirements. Practice describing this out loud. A tool to help you structure this is often called the CARR method.

This method allows you to frame your responses in an organized way.

Context: Workplace environment, employees, etc.
Action: Explain your actions, framed in the context of the situation.
Result: Explain the result and its benefit.
Relate: Connect your experience with the desired qualities to the job requirements.

The “CARR Worksheet” is available for download at ucla.in/pNHnJ4.

MOCK INTERVIEWS
Available at the UCLA Career Center. Following this one-on-one practice session, a career counselor will critique your performance and offer suggestions on ways to improve your presentation and communication skills.

Please register at BruinView™.

Practice, Practice, Practice!
BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

KNOW YOURSELF
Think of yourself as the marketing representative for a very unique product. Before your “sales call,” you must be able to offer convincing proof that you are the person best qualified for the position. Clearly defined self-knowledge will help you answer the interviewer’s questions about your career goals and where you see yourself within the organization.

KNOW THE TYPE OF INTERVIEW
There are three main types of interviews: the resume-based interview, the case interview, and the behavior-based interview. Each has its own particular format and knowing the format ahead of time will allow you to be better prepared. More information on interviews follows in this chapter. Additional resources can be found in the Career Center Library.

KNOW THE INDUSTRY, ORGANIZATION, AND POSITION
Candidates who know the employer’s business and the requirements of the position are the ones most likely to make it to the next round of interviews.

INDUSTRY RESEARCH
Industry research helps you understand typical career paths, identify appropriate-level positions, and gather information about salaries and working conditions in your field of interest. It also helps you to know the competition, rank, and reputation of different companies in the field.

COMPANY RESEARCH
Company research will help you prepare appropriate points to emphasize and questions to ask. It will also give you a head start in responding to such interview questions as: “What do you know about our company?” and “Why are you interested in working for this company?”

TAKE A TEST DRIVE
If possible, take your test commute at about the same time of day you would be traveling on the day of the interview and note the time it takes to get there. On the day of the interview, arrive at your destination 10 to 15 minutes early.

KNOW WHERE TO PARK
Contact the company in advance and get specific instructions on where to park and procedures to follow. Bring money/change for parking, just in case. For larger firms, parking in the building can be expensive so they often validate. It is fine to ask about this.

WHAT TO WEAR
As a general rule of thumb, your interview attire should be professional, equivalent to that worn by senior managers when they meet with their best clients. Unless they specify that you should dress casually for the interview, you can’t go wrong “dressing up” for the occasion in business attire, a conservative style and color.
Research organizations in advance of interviews—Since most on-campus interviews are relatively short, it is important that you use this time to sell yourself to an employer. Don’t waste this opportunity by spending too much time on issues that could have been answered by reviewing the company’s website. Displaying your knowledge about a potential employer will greatly enhance your chances of interview success.

Define your career goals and the opportunities you want—One of the keys to making a successful sale is product knowledge. In the case of job interviews, that product is you. You need to perform a thorough self-evaluation well in advance of your interviews. Know what your strengths, weaknesses, skills and abilities are and be prepared to discuss them during the interview.

Be enthusiastic and sincere during your interviews—it is important for you to convey a genuine sense of interest during the interview. You must appear eager and flexible, but not too rehearsed. Don’t fixate on being nervous. Even seasoned pros can have the “interview jitters.” Above all, never be late for an interview appointment.

Be honest—Don’t claim interest in an employer if you really do not intend to work for that organization. Don’t lie on your resume or during the interview. While you should never draw attention to your weaknesses, don’t attempt to hide a shortcoming by being untruthful. Learn how to deal with perceived (or real) weaknesses before your interviews by talking to a campus career services professional and/or reading books on job interviewing techniques.

Be realistic—Carefully evaluate what an employer has to offer you…and what you have to offer the employer. Don’t accept a position that isn’t suited to you “just because you need a job.” Although most entry-level salaries have been on the rise, do not set your starting salary expectations too high. If a starting salary seems inordinately low, but is for a position that you really want, you might be able to arrange for an early salary review.

Some of this material is adapted from Recruiting Trends by L. Patrick Scheetz, Ph.D., Collegiate Employment Research Institute. © Michigan State University.

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WHEN YOU ARRIVE

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early, turn off your phone.
- Check in with the receptionist. Be friendly and polite to everyone you meet.
- While you are waiting, relax by looking at company literature or magazines. Do not use your phone.
- Greet the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake. Maintain good eye contact and demonstrate your enthusiasm.

Having questions that have been well thought out in advance will impress the interviewer. A few examples…

- What is the management style and corporate culture?
- What are the characteristics of your most outstanding employees in a similar position?

Do not ask questions that deal with salary, vacation, and other benefits. If a follow-up interview takes place, there will be ample time to discuss these issues.

TYPICAL QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS ASK CANDIDATES

- What can you tell me about our company, our products, and our mission statement?
- What do you know about the position I’m interviewing you for?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? Your weaknesses?
- Describe what you would consider to be the ideal job.
- In what significant ways do you think you can contribute to our organization?
- Why should we hire you instead of another candidate?
- Do you have anything else you’d like to tell me?
INTERVIEW SETTINGS

ON-SITE INTERVIEWS
The on-site visit may be your first contact with the prospective employer, or it may be the final step in the selection process. The on-site interview gives you a chance to tour the facility, interact with staff at all levels, learn more about the organization’s products and services, and experience the work environment and its employees. Your initial on-site interview will generally last 45 minutes to one hour. If things are going well, it may last several hours. It is not uncommon for follow-up interviews for entry-level jobs to consume an entire day. An important point to keep in mind is scheduling. Do not schedule more than two initial interviews in one day—one in the morning and one in the mid afternoon. When you receive an invitation to a follow-up interview, try to clear your schedule for the entire day so that you do not have to cut short your opportunity to present your qualifications and obtain a job offer.

VIDEO CONFERENCE INTERVIEWS
This pre-screening technique is used primarily to interview cross-country candidates by organizations that are looking for cost-effective ways to recruit. It may also be used for localized searches. The video conference interview falls into two types. In either case, video conference interviewing contains the challenges of the telephone interview without any of its advantages. You need to make a special effort to ensure that your enthusiasm and your warmth are projected to the interviewers.

Type 1—You will be asked to report to the office of an independent vendor that specializes in contracting out its video conference facilities to corporate customers. The facilities and technology can be rather elaborate, and you may be interviewed by a “professional interviewer” who will ask pre-determined questions. A video recording of your interview is then turned over to the organization that is interested in your qualifications.

Type 2—in other circumstances, you may be invited to a company’s branch office or to a facility with a less sophisticated set up. The video conference equipment may consist of a PC, a slow scan camera, and a microphone. In this setting, you will usually be interviewed by someone in the company’s human resources department or another staff member.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW
The telephone interview is a pre-screening technique often used by employers who neither have the time nor budget to meet face-to-face with each candidate during the preliminary stages of the selection process. If the interviewer decides there is a fit worth pursuing, a face-to-face interview will follow. Sometimes the recruiter will call ahead and schedule the telephone interview for a specific time in the future. Other times, the caller will jump right into the interview without giving you advance notice. Do not take the telephone interview lightly. Be prepared to present your best background and qualifications.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

THERE ARE THREE MAIN TYPES of interviews: the resume-based interview, the case interview, and the behavior-based interview. It’s not unusual for an interviewer to “mix and match” various combinations of these techniques during the course of your interview.

THE RESUME-BASED INTERVIEW
The interviewer using this “question-and-answer” technique will seek to confirm your qualifications by asking you to describe in greater detail the experiences summarized on your resume. Currently, this is the most widely used method of interviewing by most companies and organizations.

Preparation Tips
• Review your Resume: Write out and rehearse the details surrounding each item on your resume.
• Be prepared to describe in detail how a particular accomplishment or experience translates to a benefit to the employer’s organization and the position you have applied for.

THE CASE INTERVIEW
The interviewer will present you with a complex problem involving issues or situations that are not likely to be familiar. You will be asked to formulate a solution to the problem under tight time constraints.
Methods of presenting the case study can range from formal written documents containing considerable information to brief oral descriptions of the problem accompanied by little guidance or information. In either extreme, the interviewer will be looking for these qualities:

- Demonstrated enthusiasm for solving complex problems.
- Use of a structured, hypothesis-driven approach.
- Logical thought process and analytical rigor.
- Ability to synthesize information and draw analogies.
- Creativity accompanied by common sense and good business instinct.
- Comfort with drawing conclusions in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Preparation Tips

- Figure out in advance what approach works best for you in analyzing ambiguous and complex issues. Then practice using this technique until it becomes second nature. Remember, there is seldom a single right answer.
- Demonstrating enthusiasm, logical and analytical thought processes, and comfort with ambiguity are your primary goals in case interviewing.

Case Interview Resources

The UCLA Career Center Library has a number of resources available to help students prepare for case interviews. Visit the library, Monday-Friday 9am-5pm to review the Vault Guide to Case Interviews, Case in Point, and Consulting For Ph.D.s, Lawyers, And Doctors books.

THE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

Behavior-based interviewing is currently popular with a growing number of employers and builds upon the basic premise that future performance is best predicted by past behavior. The interviewer will cite an experience, skill, or attribute that the company looks for in its employees and will ask you to describe a specific time that you demonstrated that characteristic. The key word is “specific.” A person well trained in this interviewing technique will not let you get away with a general or vague answer. Compared to a traditional interview, the behavioral interview is much more structured and probing. Its focus is on “real life” experiences and actions. A typical line of questioning might be: “Tell me about a time when you...?”

Preparation Tips

- Mock Interviews and The CARR Method covered on page 40 are the best preparation for the behavioral interview.

THE CLOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

AFTER YOU HAVE FINISHED your questions, you will probably hear a comment similar to, “Well, if you don’t have anything else, that should be all for today. Thanks for coming.” This is an opportune time to make a strong close by summarizing your qualifications and expressing your interest in the position. Be sure to get a business card from the interviewer so you can send a thank-you note the next day.

Before leaving the interview, be certain you understand the next step. Will the interviewer contact you? Will you make the next move? It is appropriate for you to take the initiative to set a time frame for getting a response.

THANK-YOU LETTER

Always send a thank-you letter following an interview. It is a professional courtesy and demonstrates your consideration, enthusiasm, and appreciation for the opportunity to interview. A brief, to-the-point letter can still be effective and can sometimes be the difference between getting the job or not. Check the letter carefully for grammar and spelling, and make sure you have the interviewer’s name and title correct.

- Thank the interviewer for his or her time and interest in meeting with you and explaining the position.
- Emphasize the skills, strengths, and abilities you can bring to the job.
- Express your interest in the position.

See the Sample Thank-You Letter on the next page.
William Smith  
123 Main Street, #100, Los Angeles, CA 99999, (555) 555-5555  wsmith@ucla.net

June 27, 2013

Ms. Joanna Company  
Human Resources  
WM Investments  
12345 Santa Monica Blvd., Sixteenth Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90067

Dear Ms. Company,

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the financial analyst position. I enjoyed speaking with you and learning more about WM Investments, the department, and the position.

My enthusiasm for the position and interest in working for WM Investments has been greatly strengthened as a result of our interview. As I mentioned, I have been drawn to the field of investments long before my academic program began. I hope that my skills, experience, and enthusiasm reflect what you seek in a candidate. I am certain that my strong work ethic will support your staff and clients alike. I am confident that my academic background and work experience provide a good fit with the requirements of the job.

If there is any additional information you need, please contact me at the email and/or phone listed above. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you again for the interview and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William Smith

William Smith