



# PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

The best approach for effectively preparing for job interviews is to carefully research the organization/position, clearly know your strengths and goals, and practicing the interview process. This material is outlined in the following manner to address these important planning steps:

1. Steps to take well in advance of the interview
2. What to do once the interview is arranged
3. What to do during the interview
4. What to do following the interview
5. Commonly asked questions

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## Steps to Take Well in Advance of the Interview

- Know Yourself  
It is not easy to articulate your strengths to an interviewer if you have not articulated them to yourself. Be sure you can discuss your skills/abilities, training, experience, education and career plans and goals. A common reason recruiters reject candidates is their inability to clearly communicate their goals, strengths and career direction.
- Prepare answers to anticipated questions
- Select an interview wardrobe
- Create an interview portfolio, which could include a resume, writing samples, and any samples of other work pertinent to the position you are pursuing.

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## What to do Once the Interview is Arranged

- Consult the organization's website for information on the organization, services and mission.
- Prepare a list of at least six questions to address during any preliminary interview. If practical, drive by the organization to be sure you know where you will be interviewing.
- Identify your goals for the interview.
- Schedule a mock interview with the staff in the Office of Career Services.

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## What to do During the Interview

### *Part One: Introduction and Rapport*

During this part of the interview, the interviewer will attempt to make you feel comfortable so that you can interact freely. Topics may include school events, sports and cultural activities, world events and general conversation about school.

- Know where, when and who: arrive ten minutes before the interview, and be clear on the exact location (building and room number of your interview). Also be clear with whom you will interview.
- Check your appearance to ensure a positive first impression.
- Stand up when the interviewer approaches you, smile and introduce yourself and greet him or her by name. (i.e., "Nice to meet you Mr. Johnson").
- If the interviewer moves to shake hands, do so—but it is appropriate to wait for him/her to make the first gesture. Shake hands, do it firmly, standing straight and maintain good eye contact. Be yourself and professional: it is self-defeating to portray yourself as someone else, or to attempt to fabricate or misrepresent your experience. Genuineness with appropriate candor and good judgment is important.
- Think of the interview as a two-way conversation: an opportunity for both parties to gather information about each other and to learn about your common goals, interests and experience.
- Be positive in your responses.
- Listen: it is easiest to answer clearly and effectively if you listen well.

## What to do During the Interview (con't)

### *Part One: Introduction and Rapport*

- Do not be afraid of silence! Pauses in any interview always seem longer to you than to the interviewer. A pause before answering a question not only gives you a chance to formulate your thoughts; it lets the employer know you are thinking. Rapid-fire answers many give the impression of canned superficial responses. If you are unsure of the questions, clarify the question with the interviewer. When you have answered the questions, stop; do not ramble.

### *Part Two: Employer Questions*

Interviewer will ask questions attempting to evaluate your skills, abilities (leadership, flexibility, problem-solving skills), personal qualities and goals.

- Use examples whenever possible: instead of “I have a lot of initiative” state instead, “One of my strengths is initiative. For example, I thought it would be beneficial to my residence hall to start a student council, so I recruited interested students and went to the administration with a proposal. Now I have an active residence hall council.”
- Remember the interviewer is seeking a candidate who is competent, responsible, likeable and genuine. After your qualifications have been established, the interview is an assessment of your personal qualities, attributes and goals. The following aspects are also important to keep in mind:
  - *Eye Contact:* look directly at the interviewer and not down or around the room
  - *Body Language:* use good posture—relaxed but alert with natural hand motions; no nervous tapping or foot juggling; smile some of the time when appropriate.
  - *Voice:* an even pace, not too fast or slow; clear and audible; tone should show natural variation, not monotone; voice should reflect enthusiasm.
  - *Self-confidence:* you want to convey a genuine belief that you can do the work and are excited about the prospect; do not display over-confidence or cockiness.

### *Part Three: Candidate Questions*

This is your turn to gain information from the interviewer. Each question that you ask will provide you information that will be important if you need to make a decision about accepting an offer.

- You do not need to wait until the end to ask your questions; mid-part of the interview, feel free to ask some of your questions, so the interview has a two-way conversational tone.
- Do not ask canned questions: develop questions with nuance and thought behind them. The quality of the questions you ask are as important as the responses to the interviewer’s questions.
- Do not ask questions about salary or benefits. Develop a range of questions that may include the following topics: position responsibility and challenges, questions about the organization (its mission, products, services, and competitors), training and orientation, career-path options longer term.

### *Part Four: The Close*

Usually in this phase, the interviewer will ask if you have any final questions, and then will review what will happen next.

- Emphasize your particular interest in the position
- State why you feel you are a good fit for the position and organization
- If the interviewer has not told you the process that will follow, clarify the timeframe for making a decision and determining your status with them.

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## What to do Following the Interview

### • *Take Notes – Debriefing*

The first 30 minutes after your interview is a crucial time. Before your interview becomes a fuzzy memory, take the time to jot down notes about your meeting. This will help you plan your next steps with the employers. Try to write something about the positive attributes and negative aspects of the interview and how you handled them.

## What to do Following the Interview (con't)

- *Thank You Letters*

Thank you letters should be sent as soon as possible after every interview. It is not only common courtesy, but because most people do not write them, your note will set you apart from most applicants.
- *Follow-up Phone Calls*

There will always be some anxiety surrounding follow-up phone calls. As Tom Jackson states in *Guerrilla Tactics in the Job Market*, a follow-up strategy will increase your odds of getting the offer by 30% or more!

  - Remind the employer who you are, since they probably have interviewed several candidates for the job.
  - Try to talk about specific activities you have done that may be helpful in meeting the employer's needs.
  - Reinforce the positive aspects of your candidacy.
  - Arrange the next step in the selection process.
- *Accepting, Stalling and Rejecting Offers*
  - Never accept a position offer until you have obtained a clear explanation of your responsibilities.
  - Think carefully about offers. Check your own gut feelings.
  - If you do accept an offer:
    - Make sure the initial assignment meets your approval.
    - Know your starting date and to whom you will be reporting.
    - Know if the opportunity offers future growth potential.
    - Write a letter to the person who offered you the position including all important points pertaining to your position and do not forget to keep a copy for yourself!
  - After accepting a job offer:
    - Do not interview for any other position.
    - Reject all other offers by telephone and with a short letter.
    - Never renege on an offer that you have accepted.
    - Report offers and job acceptances to the Office of Career Services.
  - Declining a job offer should also be done with care. Here are a few tips:
    - Be as diplomatic as possible. In addition to common courtesy, you want to leave the door open for future career possibilities.
    - Say something positive about the employer. Even if you do not feel positively about the company; leaving a positive impression will not hurt. Focus on your own personal reason for rejecting the offer.
    - Express appreciation for the offer and for their confidence in you.
  - Some basic things to remember regarding salary discussions:
    - Be prepared. The more you know about salary ranges for your career area and desired occupations, the more effective you will be in salary negotiations.
    - Many companies set entry salaries at fixed levels. This is especially true of large company training programs.
    - When you get a salary offer that seems to be acceptable, thank the person making the offer and tell him/her that you will think about it and get back to him/her as soon as possible.
    - Avoid bringing up salary until they express an interest in hiring you.

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## Commonly Asked Questions

The following questions reported by 242 companies that were surveyed by the *Northwestern Lindquist-Endicott Report* by Victor R. Lindquist, published and copyrighted by The Placement Center, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

1. What goals have you set for yourself?
2. Who or what has had the greatest influence on the development of your career interests?

## Commonly Asked Questions (con't)

3. What factors did you consider in choosing your major?

4. Why are you interested in our organization?
5. Tell me about yourself.
6. What two or three things are most important to you in a position?
7. What kind of work do you want to do?
8. Tell me about a project you initiated.
9. What are your expectations of your future employer?
10. What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your ability?
11. How do you solve conflicts?
12. Tell me about how you perceive your strengths. Your weaknesses. How do you evaluate yourself?
13. What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
14. What was the most useful criticism you ever received, and who was it from?
15. Given an example of a problem you have solved and the process you used.
16. Describe the project or situation that best demonstrated your analytical skills.
17. What has been your greatest challenge?
18. Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it.
19. What were the biggest problems you have encountered in college? How have you handled them? What did you learn from them?
20. What are your team-player qualities? Give examples.
21. Describe your leadership style.
22. What interests or concerns you about the position or the company?
23. In a particular leadership role you had, what was the greatest challenge?
24. What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?
25. What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
26. How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
27. Take me through a project where you demonstrated \_\_\_\_\_ skills?
28. How do you think you have changed personally since you started college?
29. Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud and your contribution.
30. How do you motivate people?
31. Why did you choose the extracurricular activities you did? What did you gain? What did you contribute?
32. What types of situations put you under pressure and how do you deal with the pressure?
33. Tell me about a difficult decision you have made.
34. Give an example of a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it.
35. Tell me about a situation when you had to persuade another person to your point of view.
36. What frustrates you the most?
37. Knowing what you know now about your college experience, what would you make the same decisions?

38. What can you contribute to this company?
39. How would you react to having your credibility questioned?
40. What characteristics are most important in a good manager? How have you displayed on of these characteristics?
41. What challenges are you looking for in a position?
42. Are you willing to relocate or travel as part of your career?
43. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
44. Describe a leadership role of yours and tell why you committed your time to it.
45. How are you conducting your job search, and how will you make your decision?
46. What is the most important lesson you have learned in or out of school?
47. Describe a situation where you had to work with someone who was difficult. How was the person difficult, and how did you handle it?
48. We are looking at a lot of great candidates; why are you the best person for this position?
49. How would your friends describe you? Your professors?
50. What else should I know about you?

### **Evaluation Factors Used by Interviewers**

This list consists of interview “turnoffs” supported by interviewers reported by 320 businesses and industrial organizations surveyed by the *Northwestern Lindquist-Endicott Report* by Victor R. Lindquist, published and copyrighted by The Placement Center, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

The following points were in response to the questions “What behavior, response or activity by a job applicant to you as an interviewer is an immediate “turnoff”?”

Negativism	No initiative/unassertive/passive
Arrogance/cockiness	Uncommunicative/nonresponsive
Lack of interest	No career direction/not knowing self
Lack of enthusiasm	Lack of knowledge about the industry
Not listening	Tardiness/not showing up for interview
Lack of questions	Questions about salary/benefits
Unwillingness to relocate	Poor communication skills
Inappropriate attire	Slang/poor grammar
“Know-it-all” attitude	Shallow/inappropriate questions or answers
Egotism/overconfidence	Lack of experience/education/activities/skill
Poor grooming/hygiene	Unrealistic goals, career, and job expectations
Condescending/patronizing	Aggressive/hostile/manipulative behavior
Unprofessional/poor attitude	Lack of intelligence/poor academic record
Lack of self-confidence/defeatist	More interested in what company can do for them
Abrasive/rude/demanding	Evasive/vague responses to specific questions
Lack of professional appearance	Being unprepared for interviews/making excuses
Lack of professionalism and poise	Dishonesty/fabricated answers in interviews/resume
Loud/talks too much/rambles	Qualifications not communicated/no elaboration or examples
Racist/prejudiced/sexist remarks	
Extremely shy individual	Lack of interpersonal skills/poor conversational skills