

interview preparation



Prepare in Advance

Steps to Take

- 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 résumé, writing samples, and any samples of other work related to the position you are pursuing.

The Interview is Arranged... Now What?

- Consult the organization's website for information on the organization, its 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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Interview Preparation is Important!

According to QuintCareers.com, the biggest mistake in interviewing is not being fully prepared. Understand that interviewing is a skill; as with all skills, preparation and practice enhance the quality of that skill. Preparation can make the difference between getting an offer and getting rejected.

Behavioral Interviewing

What is it?

- Focuses on specific situations of previous actions or behavior that may be used to predict future actions and behavior. Used by hiring officials to understand ways in which candidates address very specific professional or other life circumstances.
- Your objective should be to communicate clearly how your past experiences and knowledge may be of clear benefit to the role and the organization. Specific examples of past performance can come from any intern experiences, work experiences, academic experiences and leadership involvement in student or community groups.

Preparing for it

- Identify the key qualities and specific examples tied to those qualities. For example, a specific teaching-related situation where you have demonstrated initiative, problem-solving, innovation, adaptability or teamwork. Use the PAR method for responding to specific questions.
 - **P: Problem or situation** involving that quality that had a positive outcome.
 - **A: Action steps** - What are the specific action steps that you took in that situation to address the challenges to achieve a positive outcome?
 - **R: Results** - Highlight the positive outcomes with the specific students or group you highlight in your example.

What to do During an Interview

Step 1 - 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.
- 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.
- 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 may 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.

Step 2 - Employer Questions

The interviewer will ask questions attempting to evaluate your skills, abilities (leadership, flexibility, problem-solving skills, etc.) 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 we have an active residence hall council."

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What to do During an Interview

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- 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.

Step 3 - 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.

Step 4 - 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/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.



What to do After the Interview

Take Notes - Debriefing

Before your interview becomes a fuzzy memory, take the time to jot down notes about your meeting. Write down both positive and negative aspects of the interview and how you handled them.

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!

Accepting an Offer

Never accept a position offer until you have obtained a clear explanation of your responsibilities. 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.

Declining an Offer

Be as diplomatic as possible. You want to leave the door open for future career possibilities. Express appreciation for the offer and for their confidence in you.

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. Avoid bringing up salary until they express an interest in hiring you.

Preparing for your phone interview

Preparation

- Have your resume, notes on the role and organization, paper and pen at your table or desk
- Use a quiet room with no distractions
- Have list of accomplishments ready to discuss
- If possible, use a landline for a more reliable phone connection, avoiding dropped calls

Practice

- Have someone conduct a practice phone interview with you, asking you 8-10 interview questions
- You will get the feel of interviewing through this medium through practice
- Use pauses effectively to avoid “ums”, “ahs” and other unwanted verbal noise to improve your self presentation

During the phone interview

- Have a glass of water available
- Walk during the interview: conveys confidence and energy
- Speak clearly and intentionally

Following your interview

- Thank them for the interview
- Send a thank you email within 24 hours



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