

Interviewing

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Careful preparation is the key in making a good impression during an interview. You know that preparation and study are necessary in order to pass an academic examination; the same is true for an interview. Preparation and practice make you more confident and help you perform at your best in an interview.

Your chances of getting the job are slim if you don't know what you want and if you don't know something about the organization before you begin the interview. Here are some tips to help you prepare:

INVESTIGATE AND RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER

Why is this important?

- Having done some background research on the company shows that you are truly interested in, and enthusiastic about, interviewing with that company.
- The more you know about the job/company/industry, the better able you will be to determine whether the job and company "fit" your career goals and interests.
- Having an understanding of the company and the job will help you better address questions during the interview.

FACTS TO KNOW

History of the organization
Services or products
Organizational structure
Size of the organization
Prospects for growth
Sales, assets and earnings
Corporate philosophy
Reputation
Standing in the industry
Competitors
Recent developments

HOW TO FIND FACTS ABOUT AN ORGANIZATION

- Visit the organization's web site. Caution: this site only contains information from the company's own perspective. You need to get other perspectives/information as well!
- Use the Employer Research Link under Helpful Web Links on the Career Center website at www.cofc.edu/~career.
- Consult reference directories, available in the Public Library, such as
 - Million Dollar Directory
 - Ward's Business Directory
 - Value Line
 - Standard & Poor's
 - Moody's Manuals
- Read recent newspaper or magazine articles. Do a web search using a major search engine like Yahoo! or Google, using the company name as a keyword; check the Business Periodicals Index, Wall Street Journal, etc.
- Ask the company for their literature, such as annual reports or brochures.
- Talk with contacts inside the organization.

CREATE A PROFILE OF THE POSITION FOR WHICH YOU ARE INTERVIEWING. Look at:

- What qualifications does the position require? What are the duties and responsibilities for the position?
- How do your knowledge, skills and abilities fulfill the requirements for and/or transfer to this position?
- What is the salary range for this type of position? You may have to conduct research in order to find this information.

PREPARE FOR QUESTIONS

- Know why you are interested in the company and in the position for which you are interviewing.
- Identify your experiences, skills and characteristics related to the position.
- Formulate answers to potential questions.
- Practice answering questions out loud. Consider participating in a mock interview at the Career Center.
- Compile a list of questions you will ask the interviewer.

COMPILE YOUR RELEVANT INFORMATION

- You may be required to fill out an application, which may require past addresses, phone numbers, salary history, etc.
- Take extra copies of your resume, your references or reference list, a pen and notepad, and transcripts (if required).
- Take samples of your work or your portfolio (if appropriate).

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INTERVIEW ATTIRE

*You only get one chance to make a good impression!
You want to look professional, confident, and competent. The idea is to look like you belong in the organization and to suggest that you are ready to go to work.*

As a general rule, professional dress requires a well-fitting, dark colored business suit paired with a light colored shirt, simple accessories, polished shoes, and well-groomed hair. For some industries, business casual may be appropriate for an interview.

TIPS FOR MEN:

- A two- or three-button dark (navy, black, gray) suit
- Solid color (white or another neutral color) long-sleeved shirt
- Conservative tie (solid, stripe or small pattern)
- Dark, solid color dress shoes with dark socks that match your suit
- Avoid cologne or aftershave or use very sparingly.
- No suit? Dark dress slacks, a long sleeved white shirt and a tie is the next best outfit.



TIPS FOR WOMEN:

- A conservative, skirted suit in a neutral or dark color is most professional. The skirt should be knee length or just above the knee. Avoid styles that are very tight, too short, or too long. No frills, ruffles, or plunging necklines!
- Conservative pants suits may be acceptable for many employers.
- Solid color blouse or shell under the suit jacket. Avoid sleeveless or spaghetti straps.
- Closed-toe shoes with medium or low heels in a dark or neutral color. No sandals!
- Keep jewelry to a minimum. Wear small earrings, a simple necklace, one ring per hand.
- Hair should be well-groomed and make-up should be conservative. Avoid perfume.
- Carry a small, matching handbag, or put your personal items in your attache case. Avoid having too much "baggage" to deal with.
- Hosiery is a must, even in summer.
- No suit? A black, knee-length skirt and a conservative blouse or sweater set is the next best outfit.

Picture Yourself Interviewing

Call today to schedule a Mock Interview
The Career Center, 843-953-5692

PRACTICE. POLISH. REPEAT.

Receive feedback on your interview skills
from a Career Center staff member, as
well as your own digital CD copy.

Interviewing

INTERVIEW ESSENTIALS

MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

- **Plan** to arrive at least 10 minutes early. Account for possible traffic congestion.
- **Introduce yourself** to the receptionist and indicate whom you are there to see. The interview starts the minute you enter the door and doesn't end until you leave.
- **Pay attention** to the interviewer's name and repeat his/her name when you greet him/her.

YOUR ATTITUDE

- **Show confidence**, interest, assertiveness, and enthusiasm. Do not be arrogant, aggressive, or immature.
- **Be yourself**. Smile. Be friendly (but not "chummy"), not stiff or aloof.
- **Be courteous**, polite, and respectful at all times.
- **Allow** the interviewer to lead the interview.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- **Use proper grammar**. Avoid using "um," "like" and "you know."
- **Think about your answers** before speaking. It's okay to pause and collect your thoughts before answering.
- **Express yourself** clearly and succinctly.
- **Make sure** you answer the question asked. Validate or repeat the question if necessary to make sure you understand what is being asked.
- **Keep** your answers brief and to-the-point.



NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

- **Shake hands firmly** with the interviewer and with anyone else to whom you are introduced.
- **Make eye contact** when speaking to someone.
- **Wait** until you are offered a seat or until the interviewer sits.
- **Be aware of your posture** – stand tall, sit up straight, and lean slightly forward in your chair during the interview.
- **Beware** of talking with your hands too much.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

- **Avoid** sounding as if you have memorized answers to questions – the interview should be a natural flow of conversation. If you sound too "rehearsed" your interview will not be effective.
- **Explain** how you would accomplish a task rather than just saying that you could do it. Use specific examples to exhibit your strengths, skills, and abilities.
- **Admit** a "mental block" if you can't think of an answer.
- **Don't be evasive**. While past failures or problems need not be volunteered, don't try to cover them up. If you do have a "blemish" in your past, simply explain the circumstances without giving excuses or blaming others. Discuss what you have learned from the situation.
- **Never** speak poorly about former supervisors, colleagues, or employers. If you were unhappy, simply explain that it was not a good fit.
- **Don't** discuss personal issues or problems during the interview.
- **Don't** volunteer more information than you are asked for- you might talk yourself out of a job!

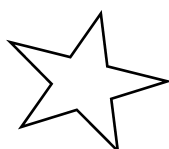
ENDING THE INTERVIEW

- **Indicate** your interest in the position.
- **Summarize**, giving specific examples of your knowledge, skills, and abilities, why you would be a good candidate for the position.

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BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

One of the most common methods of asking questions, **behavioral interviewing** focuses on specific examples of past behavior as a means of predicting future behavior. Questions such as, "Tell me about a time when...." Are typically asked in a behavioral interview. Use the **STAR method** to respond to behavioral questions.



Situation: Discuss a specific situation or problem that you encountered.

Task: Explain the task you had to complete or the ideas you used for resolving the problem.

Action: Tell specific actions which you took, steps you followed, or obstacles you overcame.

Results: Highlight outcomes, goals achieved, accomplishments, etc.

Analytical/Problem Solving

- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation.
- Give an example of when you identified potential problems and resolved the situation.

Communication

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with a person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Give me an example of a time when you had to handle an irate customer.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Creativity/Innovation

- Describe the most significant or creative presentation/idea that you have developed or implemented.
- Give me an example of a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company, class or organization was facing.

Decision Making

- Tell me about a difficult decision you have had to make. How did you approach it? What was the result?
- Describe a situation in which you had to make a decision with out all the information you needed.

Flexibility

- By providing specific example, demonstrate that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and/or work environments.
- Tell me about a time when you had to be tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.

Goal Setting

- Give an example of an important goal that you have set and then tell me how you have reached it.
- Tell me about a goal you did not reach.

Integrity/Honesty

- Tell me about a time when you took an unpopular stance and stood firm on your position.
- Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree.

Interpersonal

- Give me an example of a time you had to work with a difficult person.
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual and how you dealt with it.

Leadership/Initiative

- Describe a leadership situation that you would handle differently if you had to do it over again.
- Tell me about a time when you were in a leadership role and were faced with resistance.

Organization/Time Management

- Give me a specific example of a time when you were unable to complete a project on time.
- Give an example of a recent assignment that required the greatest amount of effort with regard to organization.

Strengths/Weaknesses

- Describe a time when you failed at something and how you responded.
- Tell me about a time when you did not live up to your full potential.

Teamwork

- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team and a member was not doing their share of the work.
- Describe your involvement with a team project.

Questions Interviewers Ask

TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

Personal:

1. Tell me about yourself.
(*Expand on your resume in two minutes or less. Do not discuss personal information.*)
2. What are your hobbies?
3. Why are you interested in our organization?
4. What do you know about our organization?
5. Describe your ideal job.
6. What do you consider to be your strengths/weaknesses?
7. What 2 or 3 accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction and why?
8. Who are your role models? Why?
9. What motivates you most in a job?
10. Have you ever had difficulty in getting along with a former supervisor/co-worker? How did you handle it?
11. What was the most useful criticism you've ever received, and who was it from?
12. Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
13. What have you learned from your mistakes?

Education:

1. Why did you choose your major/college/university?
2. In which campus activities did you participate? What did you learn from these experiences?
3. Which classes did you like best/least? Why?
4. If you were to start your college career over again, what would do differently, and why?
5. What is your grade point average? Does this accurately reflect your ability? Why / why not?

6. Have you held any leadership roles? What is your leadership style?
7. Were you financially responsible for any portion of your college education?

Experience:

1. What job related skills have you developed?
2. Describe your previous work experience. What were your responsibilities? What did you learn?
3. How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
4. Which job did you enjoy most? Least? Why?
5. Have you ever quit a job? Why?
6. How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?
7. In what ways do you think you could make a contribution to this company?

Career Goals/Other:

1. What are your short-term goals? Long-term goals?
2. Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
3. What qualities do you look for in a supervisor?
4. What are your thoughts about relocation? What geographic location do you prefer?
5. Describe your ideal work environment.
6. Why do you think you would be successful in this career?
7. What are your plans for continued education?
8. Why should we hire you?

Handling Inappropriate or Illegal Questions

Illegal questions are those relating to issues of race, color, gender, national origin, age, or religious affiliation. Some inappropriate questions that may lead to legal liability include those pertaining to marital status, medical history, children, or pregnancy. The interviewer may or may not intentionally be asking illegal or inappropriate questions. You have several options as to how you respond if this occurs:

- Address the **concern** expressed by the question, rather than addressing the question itself. For example, should an employer ask if you have children, you might respond by saying, "*If you are asking me if I can travel or work overtime if necessary, I can.*"
- Indicate that you wish to provide necessary information, but you are having difficulty in understanding the relevancy of the question in relation to the requirements of the job. Try to remain professional and tactful while still protecting your rights.
- If you believe that the interviewer is purposefully asking illegal or inappropriate questions, you may choose to end the interview and inform the human resources department of the company or make a complaint with the nearest Equal Employment Opportunity Commission office.

If you are asked inappropriate or illegal questions by a company recruiting at the College of Charleston, be sure to inform a Career Center staff member.

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO ASK

You are expected to ask questions about the position or the company during an interview. These questions should relate to the specific requirements of the job and/or should show you've done research into the organization. Do not ask questions regarding information that was available on the company's website or literature! This will show you haven't done your research!

About the Job

- What are some of the skills and abilities necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within this organization?
- What do you consider to be the most challenging aspects of this job?
- How is performance measured and reviewed?
- What are some objectives you would like to see accomplished in this job?
- Is this a new position or a replacement?
- Why did the last person leave this job?
- What kind of work might I be doing in the first six months of the job?
- What is your method of training and orienting new employees?
- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority for someone who accepts this job?
- When do you expect to make a decision on this position?



About the Department

- How many employees are in this department?
- Who are the other persons with whom I would work in this position?
- With what other key individuals/groups does this person interface?

About the Company

- What are the company's values?
- Could you explain your organizational structure to me?
- Where does this position fit in the organization?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- How would you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- What is the company's policy regarding ongoing training and education so that employees can keep up with their skills or acquire new ones?

About the Future

- What are the company's future growth/expansion plans?
- What are major changes in the industry, and how is the company responding?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?



Deadly Questions to Ask in an Interview



What is the salary for this job?

Do not ask about salary until the interviewer has raised the subject. This may not happen until the second interview or until a job offer is extended. As curious as you may be, you must be patient or risk leaving the impression that you are more interested in money than in being a team player. Also, if you wait until a job offer is extended, you have more negotiating power regarding salary than if discussed at an earlier point while the employer is still considering other candidates for the position.

How much vacation and sick leave will I get?

Asking about these issues makes you seem as if you are asking for time off before you have even started the job. You should be briefed on benefits at the appropriate time. If not, just ask, "What are the benefits associated with this position?" when the salary issue has been raised. (Check the organization's web site for information regarding benefits.)

When will I be promoted?

This question is impossible to answer. Promotion depends on timing (such as growth and turnover) and your performance and cannot be determined in advance of an evaluation of your performance on the job.

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AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- ☑ Ask for a business card at the close of the interview to ensure that you have proper contact information.
- ☑ Thank the interviewer(s) for their time and shake hands firmly.
- ☑ Indicate that you look forward to hearing from them soon and welcome them to contact you if they need any additional information.
- ☑ Send a thank-you letter within 48 hours reiterating your interest in the position.

If you do not hear from the employer within the time frame indicated, make a follow-up phone call to let him/her know you are still interested in the position and to find out if there are additional questions you might address.

SECOND INTERVIEW / SITE VISIT

You may be asked for a second interview after your initial screening interview. If the initial interview was held at a location other than at the company's facility (i.e. the Career Center), you may be asked to visit the company's offices for this subsequent interview. The follow-up interview will allow for a more in-depth conversation with the employer and often with additional members of the organization. An invitation for a follow-up interview suggests that the employer is very interested in considering you for employment.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Be sure to get a good night's rest the night before and recognize that this will be a stressful event.
- You will be expected to expand upon the areas you discussed in your first interview, and you will have more opportunities to ask questions. Be prepared to do so.
- Plan to spend most of one day for this interview.

DURING THE SECOND INTERVIEW/SITE VISIT

- Be professional at all times – from interviews to dinner engagements. These are not social events. Stay away from messy foods and from alcoholic beverages.
- Stay away from ordering the most expensive or least expensive item on the menu if your visit includes a dinner engagement.
- You may be asked to take a test on anything from your basic skills to your personality. Relax, take your time, and do your best.
- You should view the second interview as an opportunity to evaluate the company and decide if this is an organization you want to work for.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- If you are asked for feedback about your experiences in the second interview, be positive and constructive if you are interested in the position.
- After the interview, review and record your recollections. This will be helpful if you are interviewing with a number of companies and want to compare them on several points.
- Write a thank-you letter to each person with whom you spent a portion of the day.

TRAVELING FOR AN INTERVIEW

- Be sure to check your schedule regarding classes, tests, and so forth before confirming a date for a follow-up interview, as prior arrangements may have to be made with professors and for travel. The employer will most likely be willing to work with you in arranging suitable dates for your interview.
- The company contact person should provide you with an itinerary of what will be involved in the second interview/site visit. It is acceptable to request an itinerary, information on how to dress, and items you should provide, such as college transcripts.
- Travel arrangements can be handled in a number of ways. You may be asked to make your own arrangements or the organization may coordinate your travel arrangements.
- If the company is making your travel arrangements, verify what expenses will be prepaid and what expenses will be reimbursed. If the employer is paying for your hotel expenses, be considerate of this, and do not charge personal calls to your room, order pay-for-view movies, etc. If you are to be reimbursed for expenses, keep receipts and document the mileage on your personal car.
- Be sure you have clear directions to your hotel and to the location of your interview. Check on parking options if you are driving.
- Take a major credit card and/or cash to handle unexpected expenses and incidentals.

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THE TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Many employers choose to conduct screening interviews over the telephone, especially when the company is located in a different geographic area than you. The phone interview may be used to determine if a face-to-face interview is justified.

Since you never know when you might receive an unexpected call from an employer, check your voice mail greeting. Is it professional? Remember, first impressions count!

- Keep a copy of your resume, your calendar, and employer research material within easy reach of the phone.
- Have a notepad and pen handy to keep notes.
- Put a “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door.
- Have a glass of water handy.
- Turn off call waiting on your phone!
- Stand up during the interview. You will be more alert, and your response time will be improved.
- Smile! Your composure comes through even when the caller can’t see you.
- Immediately write down the recruiter’s name!
- If a question catches you off guard, ask for a moment to think about it, and then do your best.
- Ask follow up questions: “What are the next steps in the interviewing process?” “What qualities are you seeking in the candidate who fills this position?”
- Remember to say thank you at the end of the interview, and express your interest in the position.
- Send a formal thank-you letter, along with any information the interviewer might have requested.

JOB OFFERS

RECEIVING A JOB OFFER:

When you receive a job offer, **acknowledge the offer by responding either verbally or in writing to the employer**, even if you are not ready to accept or decline the job. Remember to thank the employer for offering you the position, and ask for clarification of the terms of employment if necessary.

If you need to ask for an extension of time in order to consider your decision:

- Express to the employer your strong interest in the existing offer.
- Ask for enough time in order to explore your other options.
- Mutually agree with the employer on a date for your decision.
- Honor your commitment and respond to the employer by the established date.
- Be aware that the employer may or may not grant your request for an extension. However, most employers understand the fact that you may need to consider various options before making a decision of this magnitude.

ACCEPTING A JOB OFFER:

- Don’t accept a job offer until you are completely certain you are committed.
- Respond to the offer in a timely manner.
- Don’t back out (or renege) after accepting a job offer. This is considered to be a breach of ethics.
- Once you have accepted a job offer, notify any other employers with whom you were in discussions about employment to inform them that you are no longer a candidate. Cancel any upcoming interviews in a courteous way, explaining that you have accepted another job offer. **Notify the Career Center** via e-mail or phone that you are employed, and provide the name of the company.

DECLINING A JOB OFFER:

- Respond to the job offer in a timely manner. Be professional and courteous at all times.
- Thank the person extending the offer, and briefly explain why you are rejecting it. A general statement that another offer is a better fit with your career goals and interests, without going into specifics, would suffice.

Receiving a Job Offer

SUCCESSFUL SALARY NEGOTIATIONS



REASONS TO NEGOTIATE SALARY

1. When you know the pay range for the position is less than the industry average
2. When you know that the cost of living is higher in the area where the job is and the salary does not reflect that
3. When you have been made multiple offers with similar salary and benefits packages
4. When you know that your skills, experience and education are worth more than the offered amount

HAVE THE FACTS / DO YOUR HOMEWORK

- **Find out** what your skills and level of experience are worth in the job market.
- **Know what the job is worth** by studying salary surveys and researching what similar jobs pay.
- Consider benefits as well as salary. Benefits packages can be worth up to one-third of your total compensation package.
- **Investigate cost of living adjustments** to salary based on employment location.

WHEN TO NEGOTIATE

- **Wait** to begin salary negotiations until the end of the interview process – after the employer has decided to hire you.
- If/when asked what your salary requirements are by a potential employer during an interview, indicate a **RANGE**, not a dollar amount. This range should be slightly higher than the low end of your range.

HOW TO NEGOTIATE

- **Once the employer has named the salary, if you wish to negotiate, be prepared to make a counteroffer.** If the offer is lower than you expected, you can indicate that it is lower than you expected based on your research. Be prepared to specify where you obtained your information! Then counter offer with your research response and desired range. They will respond with what they are able, or not able, to offer. Sometimes this may involve getting back to you.
- **Be realistic!** Don't be arrogant or ask for a salary that is higher than the top of the salary range for the position, especially if you are a new graduate without skills/experience relating to the job.
- **Don't use personal problems or needs in negotiations.** This will hurt, rather than help, your chances.
- **Salary is not the only area to negotiate.** If the employer cannot negotiate salary, realize that you may have other options. These include: bonuses, retirement or pension plans, stock options, company car/expense accounts, relocation/moving expenses, and so forth. The position and the company will dictate what is offered and what is negotiable.
- **Know when to say when.** If you feel that the employer is becoming frustrated with your proposals or states that this is all they can do for you, stop and evaluate what is on the table. You do not want to give the impression that you are impatient or greedy. When the company comes back with their final offer, be prepared to evaluate the offer and make a decision.

HANDLING REJECTION

Unfortunately, not all interviews result in a job offer. *(If there were 50 candidates and 1 job, that means 49 people got rejection letters!)* Competition for jobs is intense with large, well-qualified applicant pools for specific positions. Even if you aren't the most qualified applicant, you can compensate for that fact by being well-prepared, by practicing your interview skills, and by exhibiting a professional demeanor. *However, in some instances, this still will not result in a job.*

Rejections are a normal part of the process, and you should not be discouraged when this happens. If you allow a rejection to discourage you or to damage your confidence, this may have a negative impact on your performance in your next interview, which could lead to another rejection. Try instead to learn from each interview in order to be better at the next one.