

# Interview Preparation

## Research

Research the company and learn as much as you can about its reputation, products, services, technology, size, locations, philosophy, and culture.

- Products, Processes, Equipment** – What technology/equipment is used? What products are made or what services are provided?
- Position, Opportunity at Hand** – How do I fit the position I am applying for? What are the primary responsibilities?
- Major Business** – Is it part of a larger company? Is it in a growing industry? Who are the company's direct competitors? Who are their customers?
- Regulatory Involvement** – Is it regulated by the government? How does that affect their operations?
- Financial History** – Is this a company that is doing well?
- Hiring Decision Maker** – Who are the people I should try to meet? What is the correct pronunciation of their names? What are their titles, divisions and areas of responsibility?

## Research Analysis and Implementation

- Based on your research, tailor the content of your answers to the position and organization or company for which you are interviewing. Highlight skills and accomplishments in “stories” that best align with the qualities most sought by the potential employer. Prepare your own questions about the company to ask during the interview. Consider asking questions that will allow you to gather information about the following areas:
  - **Responsibilities** – What are the main issues that need immediate attention?
  - **Resources** – What interdepartmental or corporate level of support is available to help accomplish the department's goals?
  - **Authority** – What are the reporting relationships of this position?
  - **Performance Measurements** – How is performance measured against the goals of the department and/or organization?
  - **Corporate Culture** – Is the company environment formal or informal, structured or flexible, centralized or decentralized?
- If possible, plan a meeting with one of your instructors or your School Chair to gain advice on which projects, books, or areas of your program they recommend you highlight in the interview based on the type of company and position for which you are applying.
- Clarify your professional short term and long term goals. Be able to articulate them clearly.
- Carefully review your resume and be sure that you can speak to each item listed
- Prepare, practice and tailor how you will respond to the request “Tell Me About Yourself.” Discuss and rehearse your answer with your Career Services staff.
- Print several copies (five is a good number) of your resume and references on resume quality paper.

## Typical Interview Questions

About your **qualifications**:

- What qualifications do you have that relate to this position?
- What can you do for the employer that someone else may not be able to do?
- What new skills or capabilities have you developed recently?
- What is an example from a previous job, classroom exercise, or student professional experience where you've shown initiative?
- What have been your greatest accomplishments recently?

About your **career goals**:

- What is your 3 – 5 year plan?
- How do you judge success? How will you achieve success?
- Why do you want to work for the employer?

About your **education**:

- How do you think your education has prepared you for this position?
- What were your favorite classes/activities at school?
- Why did you choose your major/program of study?
- Do you plan to continue your education?

About your **work experience**:

- What have you learned from your past positions?
- What are the reasons for your success and/ or failure in past positions?
- If you are changing careers, what led you to make this decision?
- Why did you leave your last position, or why are you looking to leave your current position?
- How would your current/prior manager describe your work?
- What has been your biggest mistake/failure? How did you correct it? What did you learn from it?

## Personal Preparation

- Clothing** – Are you dressed appropriately for an interview and for the place and type of work?
- Grooming** – Are your clothes pressed, shoes polished, nails and hair clean? Tattoos and piercings covered? Light makeup and jewelry? Are your teeth clean and your breath fresh? Do not smoke directly before the interview or chew gum during the interview.
- A good night's sleep** – Are you rested and alert? Don't drink alcohol the night before the interview. Be sure to eat a healthy breakfast.
- Attitude** – Are you prepared to be optimistic, smiling, and positive? Be friendly, but not casual.

## Logistics

- Did you drive to the interview location at a similar time of day to check traffic and parking? Are you set to arrive 10-15 minutes early?
- Did you bring cash, including change, in case it is unexpectedly needed for parking nearby? Did you bring an umbrella, if rain is likely?
- Do you have a fully charged cell phone with you? Is it set to mute/vibrate?
- Do you have the name and phone number of the person with whom you are interviewing in case something unexpected happens and you need to contact them before the interview? Take your Career Services staff member phone number as well so they can help, if needed.
- Do you have your prepared portfolio with you? Ensure it includes copies of resumes, reference list, notepad, and pen/pencil.

## The Interview

Conduct yourself with optimism and enthusiasm from the moment you arrive on the company property. Remember the names of receptionists, assistants and others for follow-up purposes. Be courteous and personable.

Keep in mind that the basic goal of the interviewer is to determine the following three things about you:

1. **Can you do the job?** Do you have the required abilities, training, and education?
2. **Will you do the job?** Do you have the required motivation, enthusiasm, drive, goals, and interests?
3. **Are you cooperative?** What is your personal style, ability to get along with others, and probable chemistry with the existing team?

The following traits and attributes are those that many employers will be looking for in a business and personal profile:

**Analytical Skills:** Engages in critical thinking and has experience weighing the pros and cons. Refrains from immediately accepting the first solution to a problem. Weighs the short and long-term benefits of a solution against all possible options.

**Chemistry:** The company is looking for someone who will work well as a member of their existing team. They will prefer someone collaborative, even-keeled, positive, and confident without self-importance. They will be assessing your ability to survive and thrive in their workplace and environment.

**Communication Skills:** The ability to speak and write effectively to people at all levels in a company is important.

**Confidence:** Not a braggart. Poised, friendly, honest and open to all employees.

**Dedication:** Commits the time and effort to see a project through to completion, on deadline.

**Determination:** Someone who is persistent when a problem or situation gets rough.

**Drive:** Demonstrates a desire to get things done. Goal-oriented.

**Economical:** Is aware of the importance of finding solutions that both resolve the problem and are cost-effective.

**Efficiency:** Always alert for opportunities to effectively allocate time, effort, resources and money.

**Honesty/Integrity/Ethics:** Takes responsibility for actions, both good and bad. Always makes decisions in the best interest of the company, never on a whim or personal preferences.

**Listening Skills:** Listening and understanding, as opposed to waiting for your turn to speak.

**Motivation:** Enthusiasm and a willingness to ask questions. A company realizes that a motivated person is more likely to accept added challenges.

**Opportunities:** Demonstrates a commitment to identifying and pursuing opportunities to contribute.

**Pride:** Takes pride in a job well done; willing to go the "extra mile" to ensure the job is done to the best of your abilities. Pays attention to details.

**Procedures:** Understands the importance of following company procedures. Does not take short cuts or otherwise circumvent established policy and standards.

**Reliability:** Able to be counted upon to be present and to accomplish assigned objectives. Hold yourself accountable for your areas of responsibility.

## Conducting the Interview

- Before going into detail about your background, ensure that you have as much information about the position as possible so that you can tailor your answers to fit the opportunity.
- As the requirements of the job are discussed with you, meet them point-by-point with your own qualifications.
- Listen carefully to the questions and make sure you understand what is being asked before you answer. Ask for clarification if you need it.
- Postpone salary discussions and benefits questions (e.g., time off, bonus, sick leave) until after an offer is made.
- If asked to meet other people in the company, determine their relationship to the position (along with their names, titles, and responsibilities). Don't be afraid to ask a few polite questions when introduced to learn this information. Ask for a business card.
- Keep the interview as interactive as possible. It should be a conversation, and not dominated by you or the interviewer. Be sure to communicate your interest in the position and why you are qualified to be selected for it, as often as possible during the course of the interview.
- Ask about the next steps in the interview process, and emphasize your desire to proceed as a candidate.

## Concluding the Interview

- Highlight your interest in and value to the position and organization by summarizing the meeting and using a variation of your opening *Tell Me About Yourself* statement.
- If you want the position, you must ask for it! Don't leave the interviewer wondering if you are truly interested or would even entertain an offer. Something as simple as: "After all of the information you've shared with me today, I am certain that I want to join your team..."
- Before concluding the interview, be sure that all of your questions have been answered and ascertain what the next steps will be.
- Arrange a specific date and time for your next action with them. If the next step isn't clear, ask the interviewer: "What is the next step in the hiring process?" or "When may I expect to hear from you regarding my status?"

## Post Interview

- Immediately after the interview, once you've left the premises, make notes about the questions you were asked and how you answered them. Record what information you gathered about the position and company, especially their needs and expectations for the person filling the position.

Use the information you gathered in the previous step to send thank you and follow up letters or emails within 24 hours of the interview. Coordinate with your Career Services team for assistance with content.

## Tell Me About Yourself

Your response to this question will set the tone for the rest of your interview. Do not leave it up to chance. Prepare and practice a brief statement about how your qualifications make you a good fit for the position. Do not include personal information; keep it focused on your schooling and professional experience as it relates to the position.

*Consider the constructing your answer around the example outline below:*

**Example:** I am a (role/profession/program) \_\_\_\_\_ with expertise in (key capabilities and functions) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My strengths include (professional characteristics and abilities)

\_\_\_\_\_

Particular accomplishments or distinctions relevant to the position you have open are:

\_\_\_\_\_

I have worked for/with (types of organizations and industries)

\_\_\_\_\_

I am very (excited/grateful)\_\_\_ to have the opportunity to sit down with you today to discuss how my qualifications can enhance your (team/department/company)\_\_\_\_\_.

***Practice, Practice, Practice!***

Work with your Career Services team if you need assistance constructing or practicing your answer.

Just as you would tailor your resume to each different opportunity, you should practice tailoring your answer to "Tell me about yourself" as well.

# Questions Asked By Employers

## Personal

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your hobbies?
3. Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
4. Describe your ideal job.
5. What can you offer us?
6. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
7. Can you name some weaknesses?
8. Define success/failure.
9. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
10. Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
11. Who are your role models? Why?
12. How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
13. What motivates you most in a job?
14. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/co-worker and how did you handle it?
15. Have you ever spoken before a group of people? How large?
16. Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
17. What do you know about our organization/products/services?
18. Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
19. Do you plan to return to school for further education?

## Education

1. Why did you choose your major?
2. Why did you choose to attend your college or university?
3. Do you think you received a good education? In what ways?
4. In which campus activities did you participate?
5. Which classes in your major did you like the best? Least? Why?
6. Which elective classes did you like best? Least? Why?
7. If you were to start over, what would you change about your education?
8. Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?
9. Were you financially responsible for any portion of your college education?

## Experience

1. What job-related skills have you developed?
2. Did you work while going to school? In what positions?
3. What did you learn from these work experiences?

4. What did you enjoy most about your last employment? Least?
5. Have you ever quit a job? Why?
6. Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
7. Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
8. Have you ever done any volunteer work? What kind?
9. How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?

## Career Goals

1. Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
2. What kind of boss do you prefer?
3. Would you be successful working with a team?
4. Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
5. What other types of positions are you considering?
6. How do you feel about working in a structured environment?
7. Are you able to work on several assignments at once?
8. How do you feel about working overtime?
9. How do you feel about travel?
10. How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?
11. Are you willing to work flextime?

## Leadership

1. Give an example of your ability to build motivations in your co-workers, classmates, and even in a volunteer committee.
2. What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from? Describe how you handled it. What was the outcome?
3. Have you ever been a member of a group where two members did not work well together? What did you do to get them to do so?

## Motivation

1. Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
2. Tell me about an important goal that you set in the past. Were you successful? Why?
3. Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.
4. How would you define "success" for someone in your chosen career?

## Planning and Organization

1. What have you done in order to be effective with your organization and planning?

2. How do you schedule your time? Set priorities? How do you handle doing twenty things at once?
3. What do you do when your time schedule or project plan is upset by unforeseen circumstances? Give an example.
4. Describe how you develop a project team's goals and project plan?

### Decision-making

1. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
2. What was your most difficult decision in the last 6 months? What made it difficult?
3. What kind of decisions do you make rapidly? What kind takes more time? Give examples.

### Communication

1. Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.
2. Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation which you had to complete.
3. Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person, even when that individual may not have personally liked you.
4. Have you had to "sell" an idea to your coworkers, classmates or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?

### Interpersonal Skills

1. Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively "read" another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their needs and values.
2. What have you done in past situations to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
3. Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.
4. Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual that you've ever had to work with, and how you managed to work with them.

### Initiative

1. Give me an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
2. Give me examples of projects/tasks you started on your own.
3. Give some instances in which you anticipated problems and were able to influence a new direction.

### Teamwork

1. Describe the types of teams you've been involved with. What were your roles?
2. Describe a team experience you found rewarding.

3. Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What would you have done to prevent this?

### Behavioral

1. What would your last boss say about you if called for a reference?
2. Do you set goals for yourself?
3. How did your last boss get the most out of you?
4. Tell me about a time when you had to work under tremendous pressure and stress.
5. What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
6. How would someone else describe your management style?
7. Why do you want to work here?
8. Tell me about a work experience you had that didn't turn out as expected.
9. What was the last thing you worked on that really challenged or excited you?
10. What has been your greatest accomplishment?
11. How long would it take you to make a contribution to our firm?
12. How have you benefited from your disappointments?
13. Why should I hire you?
14. Looking back at your last job, how do you think your performance could have improved?
15. Tell me about a boss you had that you didn't like.
16. What interests you most about this job?
17. What can you do for us that someone else can't do?
18. Assuming you came to work for our company, what do you think your last boss would say on your last day?
19. How do you respond to tough situations?
20. Tell me about a time when you challenged a policy.
21. What would be your biggest challenge the first 30 days on the job here?
22. What would your manager say is your biggest shortcoming?