



Interview Success

CBU Career Services

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Interviews are often associated with nervousness and sweaty palms. Preparation and practice will help alleviate some of the nervousness you feel as you prepare for the interview and help boost your confidence so that you make a positive impression on the employer. This packet includes information to help you prepare and practice.

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1. EMPLOYER RESEARCH

The employer will be observing and evaluating you during the interview. One thing they will be evaluating is your knowledge of their company. You can demonstrate your knowledge and add value to the interview by emphasizing education, experience and skills relevant to the job description and company.

What to look for?

- Recruiting Profile/Company Culture
- Position Description
- Financial Information
- Key Personnel
- History/Mission/Goals
- Products/Services
- Marketing Strategy
- Key Clients
- Major Competitors

Where to find it?

- Company/Organization Websites
- Career Services Library
- LinkedIn
- On-line Career Research Tools
- Local Libraries
- Annual Reports/Press Reports
- Dunn & Bradstreet's Million Dollar Directory
- Standard & Poor's Corporation Records

2. BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS & STAR TECHNIQUE

Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that a person's past performance is the best predictor of their future performance. Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, a behavioral interviewer will ask how you did behave. You will be asked to provide a specific example of a past situation or task to demonstrate the way you performed. By focusing on the applicant's actions and behaviors rather than subjective impressions that can sometimes be misleading, interviewers can make more accurate hiring decisions.

Behavioral interviews differ from traditional interviews in several ways:

- More structured
- The interviewer is likely to probe and ask follow-up questions
- Most interviewers will be taking lots of notes
- The interviewer will ask you to provide details (do not generalize about several events)

*A list of sample behavioral interview questions is provided in section # 3 of this packet.

STAR Technique

Use the STAR Technique to formulate answers to many interview questions, particularly behavior-based questions.

S: Situation-----What occurred?

T: Task-----What was your role?

A: Action-----How did you handle it?

R: Result-----What was the outcome?

Example:

Situation

Recently, I was part of a group project in my Organizational Communications class. We had an assignment to design an effective public relations campaign for a fictitious company.

Task

We chose to market a bank opening a new office in a small community. We had to come up with a marketing plan and media kit designed to introduce the company to its new community and to solicit new bank customers.

Action

As the project team leader, I set up an appointment with the Director of Marketing at XYZ Bank and got her insight on the project. After the opening, I came up with a creative marketing plan, which was enthusiastically received by the other group members. I then assigned each group member a particular task, based on his or her area of expertise. For example, one member of our group was responsible for designing the bank's logo and another member was responsible for writing a press release. I monitored the group's progress to make sure we were meeting our deadlines and also put together a strong oral presentation to make to the class.

Result

The project was lots of fun and allowed me to develop the management skills necessary to lead a very diverse group of 6 people. The most rewarding part was that our group received the highest marks in the class and the professor currently uses our project materials as an example to his classes.

3. COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

Traditional Interview Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Why did you select your college or university?
- What led you to choose your major?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Are you willing to relocate? Travel?
- What are your career goals?

Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a difference of opinion with a co-worker, customer or supervisor. How do you feel you showed respect?
- Describe the way you handled a specific problem involving a person with differing values, ideas and beliefs in your current/previous job.
- Give me an example of a time when you did not meet a deadline. How did you handle it?
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation/idea that you developed/implemented.
- Tell me about a tough decision you made. What steps, thought processes and considerations did you take to make that decision?
- What have you done in your present/previous job that goes beyond what was required?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to approach things your way.
- Tell me about a course, work experience or extracurricular activity where you had to work closely with others. How did it go? How did you overcome any difficulties?
- What are 3 effective leadership qualities you think are important? How have you demonstrated these qualities in your past/current position?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to address an angry customer. What was the problem and what was the outcome? How would you assess your role in defusing the situation?

4. COMMON QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

- What goals would you like for the person in this position to accomplish within the first 3 months?
- What type of training program/orientation does a new employee receive?
- What are some typical first year assignments?
- How would you describe the work environment? Company culture?
- What are the immediate challenges and objectives facing the individual in this position?
- What qualities are you looking for in the candidate that fills this position?
- Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?
- What is the typical career path of someone in this position?
- What are the next steps in your search process?
- What is the typical time frame for your company to get back to a candidate?

5. DRESS FOR SUCCESS

One of the best ways to make a good impression is to present a professional appearance. Your appearance should enhance your presentation, not overwhelm it. A conservative business suit is your best bet!

Men and Women:

- Conservative two-piece matching business suit
- Long-sleeved button-down shirt/blouse
- Well-groomed hairstyle (pull long hair back from face)
- No cologne or perfume
- Clean, polished conservative shoes
- Empty purse/pockets of cellular phones and other items that might distract. Refrain from carrying extra items into the interview. A portfolio containing extra copies of your resume, transcript and notepaper is preferred.

Men:

- Clean shaven or neatly trimmed beards and mustaches
- Necktie should have a conservative pattern and end mid-belt
- Socks should be a dark color, match the suit and cover the calf
- Clean trimmed fingernails

Women:

- Knee-length skirt suits are considered traditional, but pant suits are acceptable
- Low-heeled, closed toe dress shoes are most appropriate
- Hosiery at or near skin color (and no runs!)
- Minimal makeup
- No colored fingernail polish

6. FOLLOW-UP/THANK YOU LETTERS

Don't forget to send a thank you letter within 24 hours after the interview. You can send it via email or regular mail. Use your best judgment or ask a Career Counselor for advice if you are unsure of which method to choose. At a minimum, the letter should thank the interviewer for their time and consideration. However, it may also include additional information or reiterate your interest in the company/position.

* Career Services has a sample thank you letter if you need more information.

Follow-up may be necessary even after the thank you letter. If you have not heard from the interviewer/employer in 5-10 business days you may want to take the initiative to touch base with them and get a better idea of their timeline or process. Keep in mind that you don't want to be pushy or come across as a pest. Once again, use your best judgment or ask a Career Counselor for advice when deciding when to follow-up and what method is most appropriate (phone, email or letter).

7. MOCK INTERVIEWS

Don't make the mistake of scheduling your most important interview before you participate in a practice (mock) interview at Career Services. Mock interviews are designed to replicate the type of interview that you may expect from a recruiter. Good interviewing skills are learned, and practice is the key to success.

How to schedule a mock interview:

- Come by Career Services or call us at 901-321-3330 to set up an interview time. If this is a class requirement, please schedule the mock interview as early in the semester as possible.
- When making the appointment, please provide us with a job title or graduate program (example: Marketing Intern at IBM; or Medical School Interview).

The day of your mock interview:

- Please arrive early and dress for a formal interview. Bring a copy of your resume and a company/job description or graduate program description for the interviewer.
- If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call Career Services to cancel or reschedule.