



Succeeding in the Interview

THE BASICS

Congratulations! You have landed an interview...so, now what? Your goal is to show the employer that you have the necessary skills, qualifications, and competencies to be hired for the job at hand. Employers are also trying to determine if you will be a good “fit” with company culture. The interview process may be short – one interview with the decision maker, or long – several interviews with multiple parties. Either way, you need to be prepared for the road ahead.

INSIDE THIS PACKET

Before the Interview

1. Know Yourself
2. Research the Company
3. Practice
4. Acquire Professional Attire

During the Interview

1. Non-Verbal Communication
2. Responding to Interview Questions
3. Close the Interview with Confidence

After the Interview

1. Evaluate your Experience
2. Thank-You Letter

Resources

1. Phone and Video Interviews
2. Common Interview Questions
3. Alternative Interview Questions

DO	DON'T
<p>Be Authentic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be strategic, but don't lie • Pause and think before answering • Be thoughtful, not scripted 	<p>Be Unprofessional</p> <p><i>Instead:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive on time • Send a thank you afterwards • Dress professionally
<p>Sell Yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared to tell stories to showcase your skills and accomplishments 	<p>Be Unprepared</p> <p><i>Instead:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your research • Practice common interview questions
<p>Be Enthusiastic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions • Show that you really want the position 	<p>Be Vague</p> <p><i>Instead:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantify when possible • Tell detailed stories
<p>Be Concise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer each question in two minutes or less 	<p>Be Negative</p> <p><i>Instead:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak positively about previous experiences

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

You may be wondering; how can I make a great impression? What can I do to convince this employer that I really am the best candidate for the job?

There are 4 basic steps that will help you **Prepare for the Interview**:

1. Know Yourself
2. Research the Company
3. Practice - Opening, Closing, and Responding to Common Questions
4. Acquire Interview Attire

#1. Know Yourself

By this time, you will have developed your résumé and other job search materials. In the process, you will have cultivated a list of your strengths, skills, and accomplishments, and have hopefully gained a new appreciation for all you have to offer an employer!

While creating your résumé, did you inventory your . . .

- work experience (both paid and unpaid),
- educational achievements,
- accomplishments, *and*
- transferable (aka employability) skills?

As you were assembling the above, did you also identify your personality traits and work values? Did you assess the value of your educational pursuits? If you haven't, now is the time to do so. Be thinking about what you have to offer the employer – what skills have you gained during your college career - through projects, work experience, job shadowing, etc.

#2. Research the Company and Industry

Many job seekers come to the interview knowing little or nothing about the company. That's a big mistake! Impress employers by being able to talk knowledgeably about their company -- the products or services, recent accomplishments, challenges, mission, goals, culture, salary and benefits. You can find this information by looking at the company website, reading news articles, talking to current or former employees, and by using websites like Glassdoor. As you learn about the company, analyze your own experiences and abilities. Ask yourself some questions:

- How do I see myself fitting in here?
- What background do I have that will be valuable to this company?
- What contributions will I be able to make?

Being able to connect your background and abilities to the company's needs will dramatically increase your opportunities to make a great first impression. In addition, you will be able to ask perceptive questions during the interview.

Compare Your Skills & Qualifications to the Job Requirements

Understanding your skills and qualifications, and how they relate to the needs of the company and the requirements of the job, will help you "sell" yourself, both on paper and in person. Review the job posting. What knowledge, skills, and abilities does the job require? What education/training is required? Develop a side-by-side chart to compare what the employer is seeking and what skills and qualifications you can offer. This will help you to see your areas of strength as well as areas where you may be lacking.

#3. Practice

Review lists of common interview questions, jot down responses, then practice in front of a mirror, with a friend, or using Big Interview. After you've practiced a few times, schedule a mock interview with an advisor in the Academic Advising & Career Development office. We can help you polish your interview skills.

Questions usually start out pretty general. Once the employer gets to know a few basics, the questions become more specific, asking about your education, your experience, and your abilities. Turn to **Resource 2 - Common Interview Questions**, at the end of this packet. This resource lists common questions and reasons employers ask them. It also includes sample "Effective" and "Ineffective" responses. Toward the end of the interview you, as an applicant, will usually be given an opportunity to ask questions, too. Always have several questions prepared; this shows your sincere interest in the position, as well as your understanding of the interview process. When you are comfortable with these general questions, research online to find questions relevant to the types of jobs for which you will be interviewing.

#4. Acquire Professional Interview Attire

One of the most common reasons people lose out on job opportunities is inappropriate dress. Don't let this happen to you. I know, you've just spent 4 years (or more) in college and you don't have money to buy a quality suit. On the other hand, you've just spent 4 years (or more) in college and you don't want to jeopardize your chance at getting a good job by neglecting to make one final investment ... buying a good quality interview suit. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it does need to look nice and fit well!

Read the guidelines below, then begin planning your interview attire.

Women

- **Suit:** Neutral colors, such as navy blue, charcoal gray, or black; long-sleeved jacket with knee-length skirt; solid-colors vs. patterns.
- **Blouse:** White or pastel shades. Button downs in crisp cotton or matte silks are good choices.
- **Shoes:** Close-toed leather pumps in black or a color that complements your suit. No more than a one- or two-inch heel. If you are interviewing at a very conservative company, it may be wise to wear panty hose as well.
- **Jewelry and Perfume:** Simple post or small hoop earrings (no more than one earring per ear), one ring per hand, one bracelet. No nose, tongue, eyebrow or any other "rings" worn in facial piercings. Very light perfume; better yet, no perfume at all.

- **Makeup:** Simple and conservative. Avoid use of bright nail polish.
- **Hair:** Styled away from your face. Don't overdo scented hairspray.

Men

- **Suit:** Neutral colors, such as charcoal gray, navy blue, or black. Look for suits made of 100% "worsted" wool.
- **Shirt:** Solid color. White, long-sleeved is best for first interview. Be sure it is ironed.
- **Belt and Tie:** Wear a black leather belt and a good-quality tie with a simple stripe or repeating pattern. No character or "story ties."
- **Shoes:** Leather, polished, and matched to clothing (black shoes can be worn with navy blue or charcoal gray suit). Socks should be dark and mid-calf length so no shin is visible when sitting.
- **Jewelry and Cologne:** No ear, nose, tongue or other facial piercings. One (class or wedding) ring; one analog watch, if any. Use cologne in moderation, if at all.
- **Hair:** Get a haircut a week (not a day) before the interview.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

#1 Make a Positive Impression with Your Non-Verbal Communication

Your non-verbal communication says a lot about you. Showing confidence and responding appropriately can definitely move you along in the interview process. Follow these tips:

- Arrive on time (10 - 15 minutes early is a good goal: earlier than that makes everyone uncomfortable; much later doesn't give you time to acclimate.)
- Turn off your phone, iPod, etc., before entering the office. Greet all office personnel pleasantly and professionally. People at the front desk may not be officially interviewing you, but they are often asked for their opinion. If you have a few minutes, browse through company literature while you wait.
- Greet the employer with a **SMILE**:
 - Shake hands and Smile
 - Make eye contact
 - Introduce yourself
 - Learn and use the interviewer's name
 - Engage in small talk (stick with positive topics; show you are sociable and likeable)
- Watch your posture. Sit up straight and lean slightly toward the interviewer. This helps you appear interested and engaged, whereas leaning back makes you seem too relaxed. Place your feet on the floor.
- Use hands and arms to gesture. There is a fine line between being too stiff with no gestures, and letting your hands fly around uncontrollably. Try to be natural.
- Maintain eye contact for a few seconds at a time (avoid staring) as you interact with the interviewer(s). Smile and nod at appropriate times.
- Control your voice and speak in a 'normal' conversational tone. Avoid talking too loudly or too softly.
- Avoid verbal fillers, e.g., *um, like, you know*. They detract from your professionalism.
- Match the pace of the interviewer(s). If they speak rapidly and are animated, reflect a similar tempo in your responses; if they are deliberate and calm, try to adapt your style to match that pace, too.
- Respect the interviewer's space. Don't place anything on the desk.

#2 Respond Effectively to Questions

Employers want to know three essential things when they interview a candidate: **A) Can you do the job? B) Will you do the job? C) Will you fit into the company culture?** Integrate the **Transferable Skills** (*skills that are valuable in almost any work setting*) listed in the sidebar to support your responses.

- A. Can you do the job?** As you researched the organization and the requirements of the job, you – hopefully – became confident that you are qualified for the job. In the interview, you can expand on examples of success you cited on your résumé. Your past performance is the best predictor of your future performance. Remember to use the **STAR** technique to show evidence of your skills:
- **Situation** – Describe the situation you were in.
 - **Task** – Explain what task you needed to accomplish. Give detail to help the interviewer understand.

- **Action** – What did you do to complete the task? Even if it was a group effort, highlight your contributions.
- **Results** – What happened? How did the situation end and what did you accomplish?

B. Will you do the job? Employers want to know if you are motivated enough to succeed in the job. They will, through their questioning, try to find out . . .

- why you are interested in this type of work,
- what excites you about the job, *and*
- why you want to work for their company.

Demonstrate your knowledge and interest in the position with thorough and enthusiastic responses. Match your experiences and qualifications to the company’s needs and ask good questions.

C. Will you fit into the company culture? People want to work with people they feel comfortable around... people who have a similar work ethic and similar work values. To show you are a good fit, illustrate your work ethic and your history as a team player. Select references who know your work habits and can relate your contributions to the culture of the organization. This is another time your research pays off. Through company literature, web content, and remarks by employees you know, assess the culture as it relates to your work style. Get a ‘feel’ for the office while you are there, then evaluate whether it would be a place you would like to work. You are, in a way, interviewing the company, too.

Refer again to **Resource 2 - Common Interview Questions**, at the back of this packet. Sketch out your responses with the above information in mind.

#3 Close the Interview

Almost as important as making a good first impression is leaving a positive last impression. As the interview comes to a close, take cues from the employer and be prepared to end it with a confident closing.

Steps to a Confident Closing:

1. Thank the employer for his/her time and interest in you as a candidate.
2. Shake hands and use the person’s name.
3. End with a statement expressing your sincere interest in the job, the company, or the school.

Practice your closing with a friend or family member before heading off to your next interview. Practice doesn’t always make perfect, but it sure does help!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

For many people, an interview ends when they walk out the door. They go home and wait for the phone to ring. For many reasons, this is not the place to stop!

#1 Evaluate the Experience

Immediately after the interview, jot down your thoughts. If you are offered the job, or have multiple offers, this will help you decide if you want to accept the offer.

- What were my impressions?
- What questions do I have now?
- Did I collect business cards or other literature? If so, what can I learn from it?
- What points do I wish I had made during the interview, but didn’t?
- Were there any questions I had difficulty answering? – If so, make note of the question as a similar question may come up at a future interview.

#2 Send a Thank-You Letter

This should be done within 24 hours of the interview. You will set yourself apart from a large percentage of your competition by taking this one extra step, if you do so in a timely manner.

- A personal note / letter sent by mail is preferred.
- An email – if all other correspondence has been by email – is acceptable.

Street Address
City, State, Zip

Date

Person's Name
Company Name
Company Address
City, State, Zip

Dear (Mr./Ms./Mrs. Person's Name):

Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the _____ position yesterday. I appreciated your hospitality and enjoyed meeting you and the members of your staff.

The interview confirmed my positive impression of *(name of company)* and reinforced my strong interest in working for you. I was particularly happy to learn *(name something discussed in the interview)*. My prior experience in *(type of experience)*, plus my training in *(name your relevant education / training)*, would enable me to become a strong contributing member of your team.

Please let me know if there is any additional information I can provide that will assist you in your decision making. I look forward to hearing from you in the next week or so.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Your Name
Phone Number
Email Address

Final Notes:

Though interviewing can be a stressful and intimidating experience, thoroughly preparing and practicing will give you the confidence you need to make a great impression. As with anything, the more you do it, the easier it will become. If the first few don't go that well, don't give up. Learn from your experiences, practice some more and try again. Soon you will be hearing the words you're waiting for ... "We'd like to offer you the job!"

RESOURCE 1 – Types of Interviews

Interview processes vary from company to company. Through a series of meetings and questions, the interviewers try to ascertain which applicant is the best 'fit' for their company and the position. As an applicant, you may speak with many different people: human resource representatives, departmental managers, CEOs, even potential co-workers. Sometimes only one person will interview you; sometimes it will be two or more. Many interviews are face-to-face at the company site, but sometimes businesses use the **Telephone** or some type of **Video Interview**, either as part of the screening process, or to cut down on time and/or travel expenses.

PHONE INTERVIEW	VIDEO INTERVIEW
<p style="text-align: center;">Plan Ahead</p> <p>When scheduling the phone interview, be sure to agree upon a date and time when you will have access to a quiet location where you can concentrate on the call and minimize distractions. Turn off 'call-waiting' or other features on your phone that might cause interruptions or distractions.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Familiarize Yourself with the Technology</p> <p>You may have a webcam built into your computer. If not, you will need to find another computer or electronic device. Practice ahead of time with the technology, even if it seems easy. You want to minimize technical difficulties that might arise once the interview is in progress.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Prepare Materials</p> <p>Have a copy of your résumé and cover letter, a calendar, a pen, and a notepad in front of you. Also consider having the job posting that you responded to, as well as brief notes about ways you match the qualifications required. That way, if you get flustered, you have reminders right in front of you!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Establish Eye Contact</p> <p>Speak directly into the camera instead of watching yourself on the screen. You want to convey the same level of confidence and enthusiasm as you would if you were meeting face-to-face.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Listen Carefully</p> <p>With no visual cues to follow, phone interviews pose unique concerns. Avoid interrupting the interviewer. Patiently wait and make sure the interviewer has asked the full question before you respond. If your phone cuts out, or background noise prohibits you from hearing the full question or comment, ask the interviewer to repeat. It's better to ask to hear the question again than to respond inappropriately.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you are in a location with a strong signal. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Minimize Distractions</p> <p>Avoid background noise and interruptions. Place papers (résumé, etc.) so you can access them without rattling them and turn off phones and other electronic devices. Lock the door if possible or post a sign letting others know that your interview is in process. Avoid tapping on the desk, clicking your pen, and making other distracting noises. Remember, they can see you, just as you can see them, so smile, use eye contact, and give a great impression.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure pets, kids, roommates, etc., are not walking into the room while your interview is in progress!
<p style="text-align: center;">Project Confidence</p> <p>Wear nice clothes and sit up straight at a desk or table. (Slouching on the couch in your sweatpants will prevent you from feeling or sounding prepared and professional!) Take a deep breath before picking up the phone (or turning on the camera) and speak clearly. Smile and gesture just as if you were meeting in person.</p>	

RESOURCE 2 - Common Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself.

This is an 'ice breaker' -- sometimes considered the most important question in the interview -- that can help the interviewer get to know about you and your abilities. Prepare a response that concisely (30-60 seconds) tells about your background and skills as they relate to the position for which you are applying.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
Well, there's not much to tell, I guess. I'm a student at UNK and I think I will graduate next year. I grew up in Holdrege and have two brothers and one sister and I played a lot of different sports in high school.	My name is ____ and I am a junior at UNK majoring in Family Studies with a minor in Spanish. Through my coursework and some of the extracurricular activities I've participated in, such as TOPS Soccer and Buddy Bowling, I have found my passion for working with people with disabilities. I was excited to see your job posting for direct support professionals, as I have a real desire to help people reach their goals and become active participants in the community.

What are your strengths?

Use the STAR Technique to give a detailed response that gives evidence of the strength(s) you cite: Situation, Task, Action, Results. Also be sure to apply it to the position you are applying for.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
I'm very organized and I like working with other people.	I am a well-organized person. For example, in addition to being a [Situation] full-time student, I also work part-time and am the President of our Family Studies Student Association. [Task] To keep track of all of my responsibilities, [Action] I use a color-coded calendar and synchronize my electronic calendars each day, which keeps me up to date. [Results] I've gotten good results from this system, as I have not missed any meetings, been late to class or to work, and have always had my assignments done on time. [Apply to position] I will use those same time management skills in my work here, as I know this can be a hectic work environment where I will need to juggle many duties simultaneously.

What is your biggest weakness?

Never state a weakness without turning it into a strength. Let the employer know how you have worked, or are working, to overcome the weakness.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
Umm, my biggest weakness would be, like, my shyness. I'm really uncomfortable meeting new people. It's, you know, intimidating sometimes. *Avoid the use of "verbal fillers."	I am a rather reserved person, but I have been working to overcome that. In the beginning I set very specific goals, such as "meet one new person this week," or "ask a question in class." After a semester of this behavior modification, I have become more outgoing and more confident in expressing myself.

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

Employers want to know that they are making a good investment – it's very expensive to hire and train personnel. Though they realize that a lot can happen in 5 years, they do want to have some assurance that you plan to work for them for a period of time. Keep your response job related.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
I hope to be married and have a house, and maybe have a child by then. Because my fiance' is from Omaha, we'll probably move back to that area of the state. Take this opportunity for a final 'sell.' Reiterate your interest in the position and leave the interviewer with a positive impression.	In five years, I plan to have graduated from college and have moved from a part-time position in this agency to a full-time job with more responsibility. I plan to build my career in human services and hope that I will be able to make some great contributions to programming in this agency within the next five years.

What have you learned from your participation in extracurricular activities?

Employers want to know how your extra activities have helped you become a well-rounded person with some leadership abilities, so cite transferable and leadership skills you have developed.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
Well, I've learned to have a lot of fun! And, I guess I've met quite a few people, too.	The extracurricular activities I've participated in, such as the Family Studies student group, have helped me become better at managing my time and organizing events. For our fundraiser last year, for example, I led the marketing committee. We designed fliers, wrote public service announcements, and set up a table to sell raffle tickets at two home basketball games. It took about 35 hours over a few weeks, so I got good at prioritizing and managing my coursework so that I didn't jeopardize my academic performance in any of my classes.

Why do you want to work for this company?

Employers expect candidates to have a good idea of the products / services the company provides and who their target audience is. Research the company so you can speak knowledgeably about the company and how you can contribute.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
I heard you offer really good employee benefits and allow flexible scheduling.	In my research about companies that provide human services, I found that I most closely align with your mission and your goals. I am a firm believer in helping people help themselves and empowering them to reach their full potential. When I saw your motto on your literature – “A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out” – I knew that this would be a place I would want to work.

What are your salary expectations?

This can be a tricky question. You don't want to be the first to cite a number – too low and you've possibly cheated yourself out of some income and benefits; too high and you may have aced yourself out of further consideration. * The topic of salary doesn't really need to be discussed until you are offered a position, but occasionally employers bring it up, anyway.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
You might as well know right now that I won't work for anything less than \$50,000 per year.	<p><i>There are several ways you might respond; options may include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you usually pay someone in this position with my experience?• The salary is not my first consideration. Finding a job that fits my skills and my passion is most important to me.• Based on my research, I found that Direct Support Professionals in this area generally start with salaries between \$28,000 and \$33,000 per year. I would hope to begin somewhere in the middle of that range.

Do you have any questions for me?

This is an opportunity to reinforce your interest and to show you have done your research. There are a lot of different questions you may ask; just be sure to avoid questions that have already been covered or that are easily answered by looking at the company website.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
No, not really. I think we, you know, covered everything.	Yes, I do have a few questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the key challenges and/or responsibilities in this position?• How would you describe the ideal candidate?• Could you describe the orientation and training program?• Is there room for professional growth in this company?• When will you be making a hiring decision? (You don't have to ask all the questions on your list, but having several thoughtful questions is key!)

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Take this opportunity for a final 'sell.' Reiterate your interest in the position and leave the interviewer with a positive impression.

Ineffective Response	Effective Response
No, I don't think so....	Yes, I would like to restate my interest in the job, and remind you that I have the skills required, as well as the desire to begin a career in the human services field. My organizational skills, along with my ability to work well with a wide variety of people will help me succeed in this position.

RESOURCE 3 - Alternative Interview Questions

Employers generally start an interview with some of the **Common Interview Questions** referenced earlier. These are fairly traditional questions that delve into information stated on your résumé and some basic skills and experiences. Below are several other types of questions you may be asked during the interview process.

Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral Interview Questions are developed with the premise that past performance may predict future performance. Employers will ask you to describe actual situations in which you have been involved, to gain an understanding of how you will respond to future similar situations.

Examples:

- Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult customer or co-worker.
- Describe an experience in which you showed creativity (or initiative ... or teamwork, etc.)
- How have you responded when you realized that you were not going to reach a goal you had set?
- Tell me about a time you had to adjust to a classmate's working style in order to complete a project.
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem. What did you do? What was the outcome? What do you wish you had done differently?
- Give 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 (or vice versa). How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a situation in which you had to make a decision without all the information you needed. How did you handle it? Were you happy with the outcome?

Remember: Use the **STAR** to develop examples.

- Describe the **Situation**
- Explain what **Task** you needed to accomplish
- What **Action** did you take?
- What **Results**, did you get?

Case Interview Questions

These types of questions are commonly used within the fields of management, consulting or banking, but they can be included in other fields as well. You may be given information about a real business issue / problem, then be asked to develop a solution on the spot using your analytical and problem-solving abilities. During this process, it's ok to 'think out loud' and ask questions that help you gather relevant information.

Examples:

- You are asked to perform a cost analysis for your client, a toy manufacturer. Explain the methodology you would use to ascertain the competition's cost.
- Your analysis of a client's problem leads you to solution A. However, your client favors solution B. You are convinced that A is the most effective plan. What will you do?
- You're consulting with a large pharmacy with stores in multiple states. This company has improved sales but experienced a decrease in revenue. As a result, it is contemplating store closings. How would you respond?

Off-the-Wall Questions

Occasionally employers like to surprise job applicants to see how they think. They want to challenge you, test your creativity or sense of humor, and/or see how you respond to stress.

For oddball interview questions, it's not always about getting the right answers; it's about how you tackle a challenging problem. When faced with tough questions you aren't expecting, take a deep breath, smile, then talk through your thinking process, letting the interviewer see how you get to an answer. You don't have to be brilliant or witty; just be yourself and give an honest response. If worse comes to worst, ask if you can come back to that question later. You may lose a few thinking-on-your-feet points, but you'll gain points for handling a difficult situation with poise.

Above all, take comfort in the fact that there is rarely a wrong answer to these offbeat questions, however, if you can turn your answer into something job-related, that's a bonus.

Examples:

- If you could be any fictional character, whom would you be and why?
- Calculate the angle of two clock pointers when the time is 11:50.
- If a movie was made about your life, who would you like to see play the leading role, as you?
- If you could be a superhero, what would your superpowers be?
- If someone wrote a biography about you, what would the title be?
- You are a head chef at a restaurant and your team has been selected to be on *Iron Chef*. How do you prepare your team for the competition and how do you leverage the competition for your restaurant?
- If you had six months with no obligations or financial restraints, what would you do with your time?