

Interviewing Tips

The following are tips offered to provide general guidance. For specific assistance interviewing or for a practice interview, meet with a Career Counselor.

Before the Interview

Research the company:

Become familiar with the company/employer with who you are seeking employment and use this information to sell yourself and demonstrate your fit/value in the interview. Utilize LinkedIn, company websites, or company connections.

Know what you have to offer:

Do not simply memorize answers to endless interview questions. Rather, think about the qualities you want the employer to know about you before you leave the interview. By determining how you will convey these points and framing them as a story you can tell, you will be more memorable and be able to answer almost any question that is asked in a job interview. See the *STAR Method* handout for help in organizing responses.

Employers will ask questions to determine and explore your:

- **Career interests and preparation:** What path has lead you to them?
- **Skills and qualifications:** What evidence can you provide that you will be able to do the job?
- **Awareness of strengths and weaknesses:** Can you utilize your strengths and address your weaknesses?
- **Past work experiences:** How do you like to work? What motivates you and has contributed to your successes? What do you do when results do not turn out as you planned?
- **Interpersonal fit and skill:** How do you communicate and what are your preferences when working with others? How have you addressed conflict in the past?
- **Fit for company:** How do all of the above apply to the work at this company and/or with this employer?

Practice:

Practice with a career counselor and/or other experienced (and successful) interviewers. It can also be helpful to record yourself when practicing interview question so that you can see for yourself what you look like and sound like when interviewing.

Have questions that you want to ask:

Using your research about the company and knowledge about your preferences, prepare questions you wish to ask during the interview that will impact your decision to accept/decline a potential offer. Use these questions to demonstrate your interest in working for the company, your knowledge of the employer, and to determine how well you would fit in the organization.

Identify references:

Know who you will use as references and ask them well in advance of applying for positions if they are willing to provide you with a strong reference. Provide each reference with a copy of your resume and let them know the positions for which you are applying.

Ask about the interview process:

When scheduling the interview, ask about the interview process so you know what to expect. For onsite interviews, know exactly where you are going and who you will be meeting when you arrive.

Know how you would like to present yourself:

Your professional appearance matters. When applying for jobs, it can be helpful to have professional attire prepared and ready to go.

- **Professional attire:** Dressing conservatively is often safest, especially when you are unsure of a company's work environment/culture. Generally, it is recommended that you wear neutral colors (navy, gray, black). Suit pants, skirts, and dresses should be neatly tailored and dress shirts and blouses should be ironed. Ties should be tied to hang at the tip of your belt buckle. Shoes should be polished and jewelry should not be distracting.
- **Grooming:** Hair should be trimmed or pulled away from the face, and nails should be neat. Be sparing with fragrances as some people are very sensitive to colognes and perfumes.

The Interview

What to take with you:

Bring extra resumes and portfolio (notepad and pen). You can write the questions you wish to ask the employers on your notepad and reference them at the end of the interview.

Arriving:

Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early. Allow enough time to take care of last minute details such as addressing parking, adjusting your clothing, combing your hair, etc.

Conducting yourself throughout the interview:

Be personable as well as professional. You should be polite and respectful with everyone you meet. Do not chew gum, smoke, swear, or use slang. Be aware of your body language and posture, and maintain appropriate eye contact during the interview. Feel free to ask for clarification before answering a question and do take some time to formulate your answers before you speak. Answer all questions honestly, but in the best, most positive light. Provide plenty of examples and tell a story in your responses.

When discussing former employers/colleagues:

There is no need to provide identifying information about former employers/colleagues when discussing your past experiences. Do not speak ill of former employers.

Interview closure:

Indicate your interest in the position and always ask about next steps in the interview process so that you know how/when you will be notified about a decision. Ask for business cards of those you interview with throughout the interview process. Remember to shake hands and thank interviewers at the end of the interview.

After the Interview

Follow-up:

Send a thank you note/email within 2 days of the interview, reiterating your interest in and fit for the position/company. Thank the interviewers for their time and opportunity. *Also see Thank You Letter Tips handout for more detail.* If you do not hear from the interviewers in the time frame that they indicated, feel free to contact them to check in. Do not ask for a decision but simply emphasize you are still interested.

Considering an Offer and Salary Negotiation Tips

Resources:

Salary.com; salaryexpert.com; homefair.com; NACE Salary Calculator; onetonline.org; informational interviewing

Defer the salary question:

Avoid discussing salary until an offer has been extended. Instead focus on fit and skill during the interview. When discussing your salary expectations, generally avoid using a single figure. Instead, state a range (e.g., mid 50's to high 50's). Use the employer's top figure and extend the range 5 to 15%.

When an offer has been extended:

Practice what you will say when an offer is made! You will have three options – stall, accept, or decline. Consider other benefits in addition to salary like moving expenses, medical insurance, continuing education and professional development resources, stock options, child care, bonuses, wellness programs, etc.

Counter Offer:

Once an offer is extended, the employer is emotionally invested in you. While some employers do not negotiate with entry-level candidates, most report being open to the possibility. An easy way to start the conversation would be to say, "Thank you for the offer. I am very excited about working for you. However, I was wondering if this offer is open for negotiation." If the employer says yes, then you can follow-up with your salary expectations. Your research will come in handy! For example, you could say, "Would it be possible to come in at _____?"