BUSINESS CAREER SERVICES

INTERVIEW GUIDE

YOUR GUIDE TO ALL THINGS INTERVIEW-RELATED

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INTRODUCTION

You have made it through the initial screening process and have been selected for an interview. The time and place are set. But there is a problem... you’ve never had an interview! What do you do? The interview is an important step in your job search. It makes sense to prepare. You need to know yourself, to be yourself (your best professional self), and to know the company.

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BUSINESSYOUR CAREERHIRING SERVICES CONNECTION
PREPARATION

The best remedy for nervousness is preparation. Not only will preparing increase your confidence during the interview, it will also give you an advantage in the eyes of the recruiter. Some guidelines to follow:

- Be able to inform the interviewer on what you learned from each of your past experiences (work and academics) and show how it can benefit the company if you receive the position.
- What skills do you have that relate to the position and set you apart?
- How did you develop those skills?
- What experiences do you have that relate (even remotely) to your field?
- What are your personal values and how do they relate to your work values?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your career goals?

Many recruiters will probe your past behavior in numerous situations by asking behavior based questions (refer to page 6). The theory behind this type of interview is, “past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.”

Begin by recalling 5-10 experiences in which you have exhibited your strongest skills. These examples can come from positions held, academics, volunteer work, and sports. The best way to remember these events is to write about them. Then practice giving a one to two minute version of the story. Deliver your answers using the S.T.A.R. format.

S Situation
- What was the situation/circumstances?

T Task
- Who was involved?

A Action
- How did you handle the situation?
- What did you do/say?

R Result
- What was the outcome?
- How did the person respond?

RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION

Your knowledge of the organization will demonstrate your interest. It will also help you decide if it is the right company for you. You want to find out about the location of the corporate headquarters, the number and location of plants/stores/outlets, the type of training programs, the promotional path, relocation policies and a typical career path in your field. An excellent place to begin is the organization’s website. Other resources might include business directories, periodicals, professional journals, and associations.

Questions to Research:

- What are the goals of the organization?
- How strong is the potential for growth?
- How does it compare to others in this industry?
- What has been the annual growth in sales for the past five years?
- What are the products produced/sold or services offered?
- How does this company compare to its competitors?
- What is the organizational structure?
- What developments (news stories) have occurred recently?
PREPARATION (continued)

EXCELLENCE IN APPEARANCE

What you wear and how you wear it will make a strong first impression on the recruiter. Visit the job site or refer to the company’s website to get a visual picture of what the professionals in the industry are wearing. PROFESSIONAL and CONSERVATIVE are the words to remember.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>MEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The suit you wear should have a matching skirt (which falls just below the knee) or matching pants. Colors such as black, brown and gray are best.</td>
<td>Wear a dark suit such as gray or black. Your choice of tie should add to your appearance. A tie is an item in which you might want to invest a little more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A conservative shirt should be worn. Choose one that is simple in style, and avoid low cut or tight fitting. Solid white or light colors are recommended</td>
<td>A solid white shirt, simple striped shirt or another solid color is recommended. The shirt should be long-sleeved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear black or brown shoes that match the suit. A simple low to medium heel is best. Try to avoid shoes with open toes.</td>
<td>A plain toe, tie shoe is the best investment and safest choice. A leather sole is preferable. Select over-the-calf (not short) socks that match the color of your pants with minimal or no pattern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in a professional looking coat.</td>
<td>Invest in a professional looking coat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimize your accessories. Limit the jewelry and cologne to an amount that will not distract from the interview. Make-up should not be overly done.</td>
<td>Minimize your accessories. A dark leather, one-inch belt is a good bet. Take out earrings, get a haircut and clean your finger nails. Minimize creative facial hair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT TO BRING TO THE INTERVIEW

- Enthusiasm and a good attitude
- Extra copies of your resume and transcript (official & unofficial/AccessPlus)
- A professional pen and notepad in a padfolio or folder
- Key questions you want to be sure to ask
- Your reference list (printed on paper that matches your resume)
- Dates of employment and social security number (for filling out an application)
- A portfolio or appropriate project documentation

*When it is necessary for you to miss classes because of interview trips, be sure to notify your instructors prior to leaving.

TRAVELING TO THE INTERVIEW

In most cases, the company will make air travel arrangements. Be prepared to charge your ticket (using a credit card), if the company doesn’t pre-pay for it. Check in at the airline counter 90 minutes prior to the scheduled departure. Your baggage will be checked through to your final destination. If you have a close connection to make, consider carrying your baggage with you (if this is not possible, make sure that you have any information necessary for your interview). Dress appropriately for interviewing when traveling (you may not have time to change clothes or freshen up upon arrival). Contact an airline representative immediately if your baggage is delayed. Plainly mark your baggage with your address, inside and out.
TRAVELING TO THE INTERVIEW (continued)

ADDITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS
When formulating travel plans for the interview trip, be certain to obtain the following information:
• Will someone meet you at the airport, or should you go directly to the hotel or the company office?
• What is the best mode of transportation (limousine, taxi, bus, train) for you to use?
• Has a hotel/motel reservation been made for you?
• Is the reservation in your name?
• What is the name and address of the hotel?

TIMETABLE
The second interview generally consumes a whole day—sometimes more. It may include pre-employment testing, such as paper and pencil tests or on-the-job situation scenarios in order to assess your decision-making abilities. The various interviews during the day are a test of your knowledge, poise, stamina and enthusiasm! Typically, you will be interviewed by various supervisors, managers and officials with a break for lunch and perhaps a tour. Try to obtain a schedule which states who will be interviewing you and when each interview is to take place.

EXPENSES
Typically, the employer expects to pay for all legitimate expenses incurred by you in connection with a site visit. “Legitimate expenses” are defined as those which are necessary to get you there and back, covering the basic items of transportation, food and lodging. If you are uncertain as to who is expected to pay for interviewing expenses, do not hesitate to ask the employer.

1. Seek reimbursement only for the actual expenses of your trip. Do not include entertainment or personal expenditures. Should you visit other firms on the same trip you should prorate your expenses among them. Reimbursement policies vary. Some employers return an applicant’s funds the same day, while others take several weeks to mail a check. Each candidate should have funds on hand for recruiting expenses.

2. Get receipts for hotel and travel costs. They are normally required before reimbursement can be made.

3. With the employer’s authorization, select the most convenient means of transportation. If you drive a car, show your complete route and round trip mileage. Include airport limousine service, buses, trains and taxis.

4. Be conservative about meal expenditures. How you spend an employer’s funds on an interview trip is a good indicator of how you might spend those funds as an employee. Costs should cover meals with tax, and should be listed on a daily basis. Some employers set no limits but rely on your good judgment. Although geographic location will cause figures to vary, these maximum expenditures serve as a general guideline (note: tips may or may not be reimbursable):
   • Breakfast $8.00
   • Lunch $12.00
   • Dinner $20.00

5. The following items are NOT considered normal business expenses:
   • Personal entertainment and tours, cigarettes, magazines, etc.
   • Valet expenses
   • Expenses for persons other than the individual invited, except when the company authorizes expenses for a spouse
   • Hotels at points other than the city being visited, except as may be required by the transportation schedule
   • Charges for transportation reservations that were not cancelled
   • Travel insurance
TRAVELING TO THE INTERVIEW (continued)

DINING OUT

Many questions arise when it comes to the subject of an interview meal. The main point to remember is that employers mostly want to see how you handle yourself in public. So, with this in mind, here are a few pointers:

• Order an alcoholic drink only if you are of age, you want to, and all others have done so. Ordering more than one drink is ill advised. This is not the time to find out that nerves and drinks do not mix. It is perfectly acceptable not to order an alcoholic drink.
• Do not order as if this were the first time you had eaten in the past week. If you are too nervous to eat, order something light.
• Be careful about expense. Do not order the most expensive item on the menu. Keep it on the conservative side by choosing something in mid-range. A hamburger is not appropriate if the others in your party are ordering steak.
• Avoid foods that may cause unpleasant breath.
• Avoid “hard to handle” foods. Such as crab legs, fried chicken, ribs, spaghetti, lasagna (or other entrees with tomato sauce as it splatters easily), or peas.
• Discuss neutral topics such as sports, TV, hobbies, and food. Steer clear from topics such as politics, religion and moral issues.
• Use this time to find out about the community, climate, and cultural and leisure aspects. If recent graduates have joined you for the meal, ask them about their jobs.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

It is important to anticipate questions that interviewers will ask you, especially about your education, work experience, extracurricular activities and the kind of job you are seeking. It is of value to prepare for the interviewing process by practicing answers to sample interview questions. Have a friend act as an interviewer and ask you questions. A video recorder and/or a mirror are also helpful tools in refining your interviewing skills.

Mock Interviews are excellent opportunities for improving your interviewing skills. Sign-up for a mock interview with a company representative during Mock Interview Day or check with Business Career Services to set up a mock interview.

• Tell me about yourself.
• What courses did you like best? The least?
• What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in your field?
• What do you like about our company?
• Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
• What interests you about our product or service?
• How has your college experience prepared you for a career?
• What have you learned from your mistakes?

BEHAVIORAL-BASED INTERVIEW

The most common interview style is the use of the Behavioral-Based Interview or Situational Interview. The premise of this type of interview is that “past actions are the best indicators of future behavior.” Specific questions are developed that would find out whether the job applicant has specific skills that are relevant to the position. In this type of interview use the S.T.A.R. approach when responding to questions.
Situation: I had a group project in my XYZ 123 class that included a written report and presentation. The day of the presentation, one of my group members was absent without any notice. Stress levels were high amongst those present, and we were unprepared to deliver the portion of our report initially assigned to the missing group member.

Task: Our assignment was to present a comprehensive analysis of XYZ Company’s financial performance over the past year. Each member of the group had been responsible for writing their part of the presentation; however, we did not practice together prior to the presentation date.

Action: We were allowed a few minutes to regroup before our presentation after notifying our professor of our dilemma. Instead of panicking, I knew we needed to come up with a way to cover the information we were missing. I volunteered to present the section of our report assigned to the missing member because I had been in charge of creating our PowerPoint, and had handled our report’s information from the start.

Result: Our presentation may not have gone as smoothly as we planned; however, our professor recognized we handled it as best as we could and still awarded us an above average grade.

ANSWERING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

- Interviewers are not allowed to ask about your marital status, whether you have children, disabilities, arrests, etc. What should you do if you are asked an illegal question? Politely ask the interviewer why the question is relevant. “How might this information be relevant for this position?” This shows that you understand your rights and realize the recruiter’s query was inappropriate.
- The questions, “Will you need any special accommodations to do this job?” or “Is there anything that would prevent you from being able to do this job?” are legal. If an accommodation is needed you are not required to discuss this until after the job offer has been extended.
- You may try to answer the difficult question by focusing on what issue you think the interviewer is trying to address. For example, if the recruiter asks if you have any children, the question he or she may be asking is whether you will be able to perform your job or will you be needing time off to take care of other family matters. Assure her/him that you have been able to manage family concerns in the past and do not anticipate any problems in the future. Even an inappropriate question can be used to help sell yourself.
THE INTERVIEW (continued)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR INTERVIEWER

Job interviews allow both the employer and the candidate to evaluate each other so each party may make a better employment decision. When you are asked if you have any questions, never say “no.” Questions demonstrate your interest in the company. They also help you decide if you will fit into the company. Ask questions that are not answered in your company research. Avoid asking about compensation and benefits until an offer has been extended.

What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
What do you (the interviewer) like best about your job/company?
Can you describe a typical day in this role?
Can you describe the team/project work?
Can you explain the training program?
What qualities would your ideal candidate possess?

Always end by asking: What is the next step in the process?

SECOND ROUND INTERVIEW TIPS

There are two important factors that the company will use in evaluating you: your ability to fit in with the company’s culture, and the quality and depth of the questions you ask. Just as the prospective employer wants to learn a great deal about you during the interview trip, you should also gain as much information as possible during this short time period. Try to develop the right level of questions for each specific person you interview with that day (HR, top management, etc.) It’s a good idea to always have some questions prepared while remaining open to questions that come up spontaneously during your interviews. Here are a few examples:

- What markets does the company anticipate developing?
- What new product/service/client is the company actively pursuing?
- How do market trends affect company growth and progress?

FOLLOW UP: An offer of employment is rarely given at the time of the second interview. Each person you interviewed with should receive a thank you e-mail within 24-48 hours of your visit. Be specific, but brief in expressing your thanks and continued interest in the organization. Before you leave the office, find out what the next step is and their timetable for making a decision.
PHONE INTERVIEWS

BASICS OF A PHONE INTERVIEW

• The phone interview is a company’s first step to screen candidates for a position. In the phone interview, the employer will see if you meet the basic qualifications, compare your experiences with your resume, explain the position to you, and gauge your understanding of the company. There will also be time for you to ask questions about the company.

• Most phone interviews are scheduled in advance. If the interviewer calls at an unexpected time, you may ask to schedule the interview for a later time. When you are job or internship seeking and you receive an unexpected call or a call from an unknown number, it is suggested that you allow the call to go to voicemail if you are not in a position to have a professional conversation. This is better than conducting an unprepared, impromptu interview.

• Generally, phone interviews last between 15 and 45 minutes. In this time, employers are listening for examples of professionalism, enthusiasm for the position, knowledge of the field, good communication skills, thoughtful and concise questions, and more in-depth information about you. NEVER put an interviewer on hold!

BENEFITS OF THE PHONE INTERVIEW:

• For the employer, a phone interview is a cost-effective way to get to know a candidate. It is also an opportunity to “weed out” candidates who are not qualified for the position.

• For a candidate, it is a chance to learn about a company without having to travel to its location. A phone interview also gives a candidate time to focus on the experiences and qualifications they have listed on their resume.

BARRIERS OF THE PHONE INTERVIEW:

It can be difficult to communicate effectively in a phone interview. Typically, the total impact of a message breaks down to:

• 7% verbal message (words)
• 38% vocal (pitch, tone, volume, etc.)
• 55% body language (movements, stance, posture, etc.)

Because there is no visual help in a phone interview, parts of your message may be lost. The body language component is removed from the phone interview, so you must make up for this by smiling, watching your tone and volume, eliminating verbal pauses from your language (um, like, uh, or trailing off), and maintaining enthusiasm throughout the interview.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Before the Interview:

• Create a professional voicemail and remove any ring backs from your settings
• Put yourself in a situation to avoid interruptions
• Dress professionally
• Research the company and treat the interview like a final exam
• Have a copy of your resume, transcript, cover letter and job description at hand

During the Interview:

• Avoid background noise (no computer, talking, television, radio, etc.)
• Articulate, using all ‘ing’s and t’s (going/gonna, Saturday/Saturday)
• Smile – this will make you sound more pleasant and sincere
• Stand up and use gestures to help convey your message

Finish a phone interview by conveying your interest in the position and thanking each individual who participated in the interview. Don’t forget to ask the timeframe in which you will be hearing back from them. You should email a thank you letter to each individual within 24-48 hours.
VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Video interviewing is a convenient and cost-effective alternative to the traditional in-person interview. However, there are format-specific elements interviewees need to understand and consider as they prepare for a video interview (taken from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) website:

- **Understand the technology and be comfortable with it** - Don’t sign up for a video interview until you’re comfortable with the process. You should know what you can and can’t do with the audio and video controls, what your image looks like, and where to look once the interview begins. Being adept with technology shows your credibility as an “online professional.”
- **Consider image and the interview environment** - Dress professionally as a video interview is still an interview. Is the background of the interview area consistent with the image you want to portray to recruiters? Remove or silence all distractions, such as cell phone ringers, e-mail alerts on the computer, music, pets, roommates, etc.
- **Test all settings and connections beforehand** - Make sure the settings are optimized and all connections are working prior to the interview to avoid any issues during the interview.
- **Be prepared for a system hiccup** - Have a Plan B ready in case the technology fails during a video interview. For example, have your cell phone ready to use in case the connection is unacceptable or drops. Being prepared in such a manner and making a smooth transition to another method in light of unexpected problems can impress an employer.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

ASSESSING THE INTERVIEW

Immediately following the interview, write down everything you need to remember, such as: the name of the interviewer(s), the date you expect to hear from the company, questions you were not able to answer or questions you did not answer with focus. Develop a clear, concise, and pointed response to the question so you will be ready next time.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER EVERY INTERVIEW

Making a good impression on a potential employer continues even after the interview is complete. A follow-up thank you letter e-mailed within 24-48 hours of the interview will leave an excellent impression. It will also help the interviewer remember you and give you the opportunity to include relevant information you may not have mentioned in the interview. After interviewing up to 50 people in three days, your thank-you letter may give you an advantage in the mind of the recruiter. Not everybody sends thank-you letters, and yours may be the only one the recruiter receives. For examples of thank you letter format, see The Letter Writing Guide on our website.

RECORD THE DATA

Use a system of recording your job search information, especially after every interview. Use a computer data base, or set up a card file. This is an example of information to record:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Date Sent/Contacted</th>
<th>Resume</th>
<th>Cover Letter</th>
<th>Follow-Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caterpillar</td>
<td>Marketing Intern</td>
<td>Joe Smith</td>
<td>9/15/14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Call on 9/21/14 to check status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANTICIPATE REJECTION AND PREPARE FOR THE NEXT INTERVIEW

Don’t take rejection personally in the job search process. Remember the goal of the interview is to determine a fit for both you and the company. A good benchmark is to have a job within six months of graduation. Take everything you have learned from the interview to help you prepare for the next one. It is important to gear up and get excited about your next one. Always try to think of better ways to present yourself.
RECEIVING THE OFFER

Congratulations, you got it—an offer of employment! First of all, do not rush back with an answer. Thank the company for the offer and find out when they need an answer. Utilize that time to consider your options and the following criteria.

Make sure you understand all of the terms of the offer and subsequent employment in detail.

- **The job** – Does it appeal to you?
- **Opportunity for advancement** – How long can you expect to remain in your job before given more responsibility?
- **Salary** – Is it enough to live comfortably? (If the salary is low, are the benefits high?) Check out a salary calculator to help determine how salaries compare in different locations.
- **Benefits** – What types of benefits are you allotted? (health insurance, life insurance, dental insurance, company car, expense account?)
- **Location** – Do you like the area? If not, will the other items make up for it?
- **Community** – Is there a chance for involvement, culture, leisure?
- Do not, under any circumstances, accept an offer which you have no intention of honoring.
- Most of the time you should resist the urge to accept an offer just for the sake of having a job.
- Talk with your Career Coordinator about your options.

Please notify Business Career Services (1320 Gerdin Business Building) of your acceptance and fill out a salary report form in the office or online. See the Letter Writing Guide for accepting or rejecting a job offer.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

PURPOSE OF THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Informational interviewing is a method of networking designed to produce information about a particular career. An informational interview can help you to determine a career path, learn about entering a career, gauge a company, and build your professional networking contacts. An informational interview is not a job interview, however, it allows you to build your network and may open up future job opportunities.

REASONS TO CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS:

- Gain information on your career field and the skills necessary to succeed
- Make contacts with managers, supervisors, and colleagues
- Gain information on positions that are not being advertised
- Learn about the realities of the job, as well as the needs of employers
- Gain confidence in talking with people, which may result in lower stress in a formal interview setting
- Identify your personal strengths and weaknesses in terms of the expectations of a specific job or company

GUIDELINES FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

The first step in conducting informational interviews is to identify one or more careers about which you would like to learn. You should consider your own values, skills, interests, and experiences to identify a more specific area of interest. Read any information that you can find in journals, newspapers, magazines, or newsletters regarding the companies or field in which you are interested.

The second step in informational interviewing is to identify people with whom to speak. Family, friends, peers, co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. can help you make contact with people of interest. Most business leaders are willing to talk with students in order to help them develop their career goals. Business Career Services can help connect you with alumni working in your field of choice. The most effective method to set up an informational interview is via telephone or e-mail. Interviews should be conducted in person, if possible.
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS (continued)

After you have identified one or more professionals to speak with, it is essential to do your homework. Research the company, as well as the position of the person with whom you will be speaking. The more you know, the better the questions you’ll be able to ask and the more you will get out of the interview.

It is also important that you practice proper informational interviewing etiquette. You should never ask for a job during an informational interview. If the employer tells you about a relevant position, ask about the proper procedures for applying. If you apply for the position, inform your interviewee via your thank you note. It is also inappropriate to ask the interviewee about their current or past salaries.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

• Dress for success! Treat an informational interview as you would a formal job interview. By dressing the part, an employer will take you seriously and will be more likely to connect you with open positions or other professional contacts.
• Ask intelligent, informed questions and maintain positive body language throughout the interview. Take notes that can allow you to research more or explore the field.
• Bring your resume to the interview. If you feel comfortable at the end of the conversation, ask the interviewee to critique your resume or offer to leave it with them. This can allow the professional an opportunity to see your skills and abilities without pressuring them to hire you.
• Ask for referrals! After speaking with an employer, ask for suggestions for other individuals or companies that you might contact.
• Before you leave, ask for a business card and write a thank you e-mail within 48 hours.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

There are many questions to ask in an interview. Below are some common questions with which to familiarize yourself. For more ideas, visit the Business Career Services office.

• What is your job like?
• What is a typical day like?
• What are your responsibilities/job duties?
• How do you use your time?
• What decisions do you have to make?
• Why did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
• How did you obtain your job?
• How can a student gain the experience necessary to be successful in this position?
• Why did you decide to work for this company?
• What do you like most about this company?
• How would you describe the company’s culture and people?
• What abilities do you think contribute the most to success in your job?
• These are my personal strengths (skills, personality traits, values, etc). Where would they fit in this field?