



## Preparing for the Interview

If you have an interview, then you have already persuaded the employer that you could be the right candidate. Your task now is to strengthen that impression. You have several goals:

- Convince the employer that you are a professional person who fits with the organization.
- Show that you took the time to research the organization and the specific position;
- Prove you're qualified for the job by talking comfortably about your past experience.

The interview also allows you to learn more about the job and organization so you can decide if you want to work there.

The interviewing process can take many forms. You might be interviewed by a group of interviewers, as part of a panel of interviewees, or both. Employers often use short, 10-30 minute interviews in person or over the phone to quickly screen a large number of applicants. It's not unusual to go through a series of interviews, sometimes all in a single day including interviews over lunch or dinner, before receiving a final decision. Rarely, employers conduct "stress interviews" (interviews in an intentionally stressful environment) to see how applicants respond. Regardless of the particular form of interview, your preparation will be the same.

### **Research**

First, research yourself: be ready to tell a complete, detailed, and relevant story about each of your good qualities and past accomplishments. For example, expect to be asked about your communication abilities. Have an example ready about a time you communicated well with good results. Have a number of stories drawn from more than one experience and be ready to match them to the demands of the job you're applying for. Every interview answer should send the message, "Because I did X, I will be able to do Y for you." Some people find it helpful to use the PAR acronym: problem, action, result. Talk about the problem, say what action you took to solve it, and then describe the result.

Second, research the company. You'll understand where the interviewer is coming from because you'll know how the company views itself and how it's doing at the moment. Research also prepares you for the inevitable final stage of the interview, when you are expected to ask a few questions about the organization. Your questions about the company can take the form, "I know this much about X from my research, but can you tell me more?"

### **Practice**

Your qualifications seem clear enough in your head, but can you really talk about them? Meet with a career advisor for a mock interview. We'll pretend to be the organization, ask you questions, and give you feedback.

Alternately, take time to sit down with a friend and practice. Use the list of common interview questions below. Your friend can press you for an example if you're being too vague.

### **The interview itself**

- Arrive 10 minutes early. Bring directions to the interview site, the names and titles of your interviewers, extra copies of your resume, reference sheets, a portfolio if you have one, a pen or pencil, and something to write on. Keep these neatly in a manila envelope or (if you have one) a leather folder or briefcase.
- Dress very conservatively in a suit; wear few accessories and no fragrance.
- Greet the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake.
- Sit up straight and maintain good eye contact.
- Be aware of your nonverbal communication (hand movements, fidgeting).
- Show enthusiasm.

- Avoid non-words (“uhm”), filler words (“like,” “you know”), and repetitive phrases.
- Once you've answered the question, stop talking. Silence is fine.
- Always, without exception, be positive—about yourself, your past coworkers and bosses, and everything else.
- Do not talk about compensation unless the interviewer brings it up.

### **Common interview questions**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you know about us?
- Why are you interested in working here?
- What strengths do you offer?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
- What role do you typically assume on a team?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- Why should we hire you?
- Do your grades reflect your abilities?
- Describe your ideal supervisor.
- Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult individual.

### **Sample questions to ask employers**

- Why is this position open now?
- Would you describe a typical day's activities?
- What personal characteristics are important for success in this position?
- To whom would I report?
- What are some of the organization's short-term goals? Long-term goals?
- What challenges does the organization face?
- What do you like about working for the organization?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?