

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

An interview that ends in a job offer is not the result of luck, but of careful preparation.

SKILLS IDENTIFICATION

Prior to an interview, it is important to:

- Research your **desired career** field to determine the skills necessary for that field. Glassdoor.com, O*net, and the Occupational Handbook are all available on the Career Services website at www.widener.edu/careers to help you with your research.
- Research the **position** you are applying for—know the required skills, knowledge, and abilities by reading the position description, performing informational interviews, and completing background research.

EMPLOYER RESEARCH

Researching the employer prior to the interview is imperative. Gather as much information as possibly about the organization/position. Review:

- Glassdoor and other resources available on the Career Design and Development website at www.widener.edu/careers
- the employer's website
- competitors' websites
- LinkedIn.com
- Hoover's*
- ABI Inform*
- Lexis Nexis*

**available through the Widener Library*

Know what you are researching. Here are a few things to research:

- the principals in the organization
- current news about the organization
- the mission statement, vision statement, and goals
- annual report and any financial documents available
- other open career opportunities
- competitive information
- products or services

Print out important information, make notes on it, highlight important data, store it in a manila folder, and take this with you to the interview. Read over it if you have a wait before the interview. Refer to it in your responses. Also, if you know anyone who works at the organization, call him/her to ask questions about the culture, current issues, management style, and advice for success.

TYPICAL PARTS OF THE INTERVIEW

- I. Introduction
 - a. Firm handshake – IMPORTANT!
 - b. Eye contact, smile, tall and confident stance
- II. Interviewer gives information about the company/position
- III. Interviewer asks you questions with you interjecting questions—a conversation, not an interrogation
- IV. Interviewer asks if you have questions or any final remarks (see below on questions to ask)
- V. Closing
 - a. Thank the interviewer for the opportunity and reiterate your interest in the position, possibly giving a few summary examples or new-found reasons why you are an excellent candidate
 - b. Request a business card from all people you meet during process

BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS

- Your resume
- Strengths/weaknesses
- Interest in company/position
- Proudest accomplishment
- Words to describe yourself
- Time you failed
- Teamwork experience
- Previous experience
- Leadership positions
- How you can add to the organization
- Your 5-year plan/graduate school
- Relocation

10 THINGS TO BRING TO AN INTERVIEW

1. Copies of your resume (printed on resume paper)
2. List of references, complements resume
3. Padfolio (leather-bound folder with pad inside)
4. Briefcase or a purse (women), not both
5. Portfolio of your work, if appropriate
6. Directions and contact information
7. Paper and 2 pens
8. Money for parking and tolls
9. Breath mints
10. Handkerchief or tissues

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- Try on suit; make sure it fits perfectly
- Research employer
- Know your message/selling points
- Do a mock interview
- Prepare answers to potential questions
- Prepare questions to ask

WHAT TO WEAR

- Proper, well-fitting suit
 - Cleaned and ironed clothes
 - Subtle accessories
- Faint or no cologne/aftershave
- Appropriately colored socks/hosiery
- Shined shoes
- Men: clean shaven face
- Women: bare or subtly painted nails
- Women: neutral make-up
- Women: appropriate undergarments

INTERVIEW DO

- Offer a firm handshake with direct eye contact and a smile.
- Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early. If you arrive earlier than that, stay in your car or walk the block; arriving too early is just as rude as arriving late.
- Turn off your phone; don't put it on silent or vibrate.
- Accept water, if offered. You will talk a lot and become thirsty. Cokes and other soft drinks may make you burp; coffee and hot tea will turn cold.
- Stand up when meeting someone. Wait for them to sit first, unless directed to sit down.
- Sit where you have straight and comfortable eye contact. You may adjust your chair.
- Use good body language. Sit up tall and confidently. Be open and comfortable, just not too casual.
- Back up your answers with real-life examples. Tell stories. Avoid general comments.
- Be honest.
- Be yourself. Be your best self.
- Speak up. Be articulate. Speak slowly.
- Speak positively. No one wants to work with whiners, blamers, or trouble-makers.
- Smile – people want to work with people they like.
- Reaffirm your interest in the position.
- Practice, practice, practice!

INTERVIEW DON'T

- Bring your mother or anyone else to the interview.
- Be late!
- Talk, text, or play games on your cell phone or other electronic devices while waiting for your interview.
- Make excuses or blame others.
- Speak ill of former supervisors or colleagues.
- Give the impression that you are only interested in an organization because of its geographic location.
- Give the impression that you are only interested in salary.
- Act desperate for the job.
- Lie or exaggerate.
- Use slang, bad grammar, or curse words.
- Chew gum.
- Smoke in the clothes you will wear to the interview.
- Fidget, twirl hair, foot tap, or exhibit other nervous habits.

INTERVIEW MISTAKES

In a recent survey, hiring managers were asked to name the most common and damaging interview mistakes a candidate can make. Here are the top 6:

1. Dressing inappropriately (51%)
2. Badmouthing a former boss (49%)
3. Appearing disinterested (48%)
4. Being arrogant (44%)
5. Giving insufficient answers (30%)
6. Not asking good questions (29%)

Another survey concluded that the top 2 reasons that candidates don't get the job are:

1. They don't research the company and position prior to the interview.
2. They don't follow up after the interview.

FOLLOW UP

Your first follow up is your thank you note (see below), but that is not enough. Make a phone call or send an email the day after the interviewee stated they would make a decision. Be upbeat and polite. Say something similar to, "Good afternoon, this is Alexandra DiBenedeto. I interviewed last week for the case manager's position. I was wondering how the search process is coming along, because I'm very interested in the position and hope I'm your top candidate." Even if you get their voice mail, leave this message, plus your phone number.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Fewer than 20 percent of interviewees write a thank you note after an interview. If you want to have an interviewer consider you a second time, what better way is there than to write a thank you note? Write a different one to each person who interviewed you—they may compare notes. Send the notes within 24 hours. Refer to the Career Service's handout on thank you notes for more help.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- How did you learn about our organization?
- What are your long-term goals? Short-term goals?
- What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- How would a former employee or professor describe you?
- What are you most proud of?
- Why did you choose to study at Widener?
- Are your grades a good representation of the quality of work you would do here?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Tell me about a time when you failed.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with someone who was difficult.
- Tell me about a time when you used good judgment to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you were a leader.
- Tell me about a time your ethics were challenged.
- Tell me about a time when you had to be persuasive.
- Tell me about a time you were involved in conflict mediation.
- Have you ever worked on a team with someone who wasn't pulling their load? What happened?
- Tell me about a time you had to manage a crisis.
- What did you like best about your previous position? Least?
- Do you prefer to work independently or as part of a team? Why?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- Why are you interested in this field of work?
- How would you describe your perfect job? Supervisor?
- What kinds of people bother you?
- What is your experience with diversity?
- Why should we hire you?

THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

“Tell me about yourself.”

Almost every interview will include this question, often to start the interview. Prepare well by recognizing that this question is code for “Why should we hire you?” Do not tell your life story. Position your answer to address your interest in the position and how your experiences, skills and education have prepared you to be a qualified candidate.

“What is your greatest weakness?”

This can be one of the most difficult interview questions; however, it can also be one of your most powerful questions. Choose a skill that is not essential to the job and will not deter the employer from wanting to hire you. After discussing your weakness, talk about how you have conquered or are conquering it. Mention what you have learned and are doing to overcome this weakness. Always end on a positive note. Do not use “I’m a perfectionist.” “I have a hard time saying no.” or an example that is an obvious strength used as a weakness. These are overused.

“Describe a time when you failed.”

The key to answering this question is to be honest. It’s okay to admit that you have made mistakes. However, how you tell your answer is the part that is important. State what you learned from the situation and what you would or did do differently the next time. Of course, don’t use an example that would cause the employer to question your ethics, character, or work ethic.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AN INTERVIEWER

It is imperative to ask questions at the end of the interview. Be sure to come with about seven questions in mind with the intention of asking about four. The interviewer will likely answer some of your questions during the conversation.

- How long have you been employed here?
- What do you enjoy the most about working here?
- What are the top three goals you want to see me complete in my first six months?
- How do you define success for this position?
- Is this a new position or would I be replacing someone?
- What traits will make the candidate you choose be most successful?
- What kind of training would there be?
- What career advancement tracks are there for this position?
- What are you looking for in the person who will fill this job?
- Where are the greatest challenges and opportunities with this position?
- What is a typical day on the job like?
- What other departments will I be collaborating with? How is the relationship between the departments/parties currently?
- What opportunities are there for professional development?
- Ask questions relating to the research that you did about the organization.
- What is the timeline for hiring this position? Next step? Start date?

QUESTIONS NOT TO ASK

It is important to make sure that you are emphasizing your interest in the POSITION. Not the benefits, salary, location, or other aspects. Here is a list of questions to avoid:

- When may I take my first vacation?
- Will I have to work overtime? If so, how will I get compensated?
- What is the company's policy on using the Internet?
- How many sick days will I get?
- How quickly can I get promoted?
- How often do we get breaks?

PHONE INTERVIEWS

The telephone interview deserves just as much respect and preparation as a face-to-face interview. When talking on the phone, you are at a disadvantage of body language, facial expressions, and a physical appearance. You will need to add more energy and personality, articulate more clearly, and appear quite interested.

- Dress for the interview. You don't have to put on a suit, but get out of your sweats and PJs. How you dress will affect your attitude.
- Stand up; you will breathe from your diaphragm and speak more powerfully.
- Hold the interview in front of a mirror to watch your posture, facial, expressions, and gestures. Emit enthusiasm and positivity to pass over the phone.
- Smile! It sounds corny, but people can hear you smiling. There's a natural lift to your voice when you smile.
- Have your resume available for reference.
- Keep other important information next to you: employer research folder, a notepad and pen to take notes, your calendar to schedule the next interview, and a list of points or specific achievements you would like to mention.
- Remove all distractions. Be in a quiet, calm environment. Turn off call waiting, stereos, and televisions.
- Use a land line, if possible. The Career Services has two interview rooms with land lines that you may schedule for phone interviews, if you would like.
- When the employer introduces him/herself, write down his/her name and use it in your responses. Don't overuse it, but make the call personal.
- Listen carefully and do not rush. Try to remain relaxed, speaking exactly as you would in an interviewer's office.
- At the conclusion of the interview, express your appreciation for the opportunity and ask about the next step in the process.
- Follow up with a thank you note/email.