

The Career Centre

How to Prepare for an Interview

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

- Know the company's products and/or services.
- Look through their entire website (and those of their parent organizations if applicable).
- Look into what associations they belong to or if they have recently been in the news.
- Learn about the person (people) interviewing you, including their title(s) and how to pronounce their name(s).
- Read everything you can find about the position and the field. Talk to people who do similar jobs at other companies.
- Review your skills and accomplishments.
- You **MUST** practice before an interview. Think about the types of questions they will ask you and practice your answers. Think about the information you want them to know about you and how you will present that in the interview.
- Practice sample interview questions with friends or family.
- Book a mock interview with the Career Centre.

DRESS AND ACT THE PART

- The standard approach is to dress one level more formal than you will when you get the job (for example, if a company is business casual, you should dress business formal).
- When applying for a corporate job, think conservative and dress in traditional colours.
- If applying for a non-corporate position, you may express your personality more through your clothing. Check out what the employees wear, and base your decisions on your observations. For example, an interview at a TV station that gears itself to young people will want to see more forward thinking style on its employees.
- Carry a nice portfolio or brief case to keep your references, résumé and a notepad in.
- Ensure your clothes are neat, clean and pressed. Polish your shoes. (First impressions from your appearance are important.)
- Do not overuse make-up, perfume or jewelry, as they can be distracting.
- Do not chew gum or smoke.
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to the interview. Know the route and where you will park, so there are no last minute panics. You should always be at least 15 minutes early.

FIELD QUESTIONS WITH EASE

- Sell yourself as a problem solver. Situational questions are designed to see how you work and if you are continuously learning. Talk about your skills, not just your experience.
- Remember that you cannot predict all questions. Do not panic if they ask one you were not prepared for. If you have been reviewing your skills, you will be able to answer with confidence. Also, remember that there are multiple right answers. They want to see your ability to think on your feet.
- Use the STAR approach (see next page).
- Have questions of your own (see attached list for suggestions).
- End the interview thanking them for their time and expressing your continued interest in the position. Some great closing lines may be: "I am very interested in the position. What are the next steps to take?" or "Here is my reference list. I look forward to hearing from you after you have had a chance to contact them." or "I am looking forward to hearing from you. May I ask when you will be making a decision about the position?"

FOLLOW UP

- Send a thank you letter that day (to everyone on the interview panel).
- Make a follow up phone call approximately one week after your interview, or around the time they said they would be making their decision. Do not be pushy, but remind them of your genuine interest in the position.
- If you do not get the position, ask for feedback as to why and how you could improve for next time.

THE STAR APPROACH

Situation

Describe the situation in a concise and informative manner. The problem or situation could be from an education, employment, sport or volunteer situation.

Task

Explain your role. Were you working on your own? Were you a supervisor? Working as a member of a team? What did you need to do in order to resolve the problem?

Action

What was the action you undertook? What **skills** did you use to resolve the situation? Did you use any skills you had learned during your training? Things you learned from school?

Result

What was the result? Was everyone happy? Did it result in any changes? Were there any further conflicts? What was the feedback from supervisors and colleagues on how you handled the situation? What did you learn from the situation? Would you do anything differently if faced with a similar situation again?

SKILLS EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR WHEN THEY HIRE NEW GRADS

- Effectively communicates (clearly explains skills both orally and in writing)
- Demonstrates an ability to think critically (points out potential problems, expands issues by asking questions)
- Demonstrates problem solving skills (realizes consequences, finds alternative solutions and makes decision)
- Demonstrates an ability to make decisions or take initiative (does things without constantly being told)
- Demonstrates leadership skills (can influence others, develops ideas, and delegates responsibilities)
- Takes advantage of opportunities to contribute ideas and information (offers ideas, opinions, solutions when asked)
- Gets along well with others (demonstrates a positive working relationship with fellow workers)
- Shows an ability to gain the confidence of others (others seek opinion from individual)
- When preparing for an interview, you should think of examples of past activities and accomplishments that illustrate each of these skills

TOP TEN TIPS TO ACING THE INTERVIEW

1. Always be polite and cheerful to anyone you meet, including the receptionist who greets you.
2. Enter and leave the interview with a firm handshake.
3. Make eye contact throughout the interview. If it is a panel interview, engage all members of the panel.
4. Smile. Show you are going to be a friendly member of their team. Smile and nod your head to emphasize points and to finish answers.
5. If they offer you a drink, take one. It will help to have a glass of water in front of you in case you are very nervous, or if you need a quick pause to think about the answer to a question.
6. Sit up straight and try not to fidget. Good posture shows interest and professionalism.
7. Speak up, but never interrupt. Be enthusiastic, without being pushy.
8. Laugh and be relaxed. They want to hire someone with a good personality, so feel free to laugh if appropriate.
9. Breathe. Being aware of your breath focuses your mind and calms you down.
10. Thank them for their time and for meeting with you.

TOP 30 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about yourself.
2. How has your college experience prepared you for a career in _____?
3. What will it take to attain your goals, and what steps have you taken toward attaining them?
4. How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as a member of a team?
5. Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor or instructor? How did you resolve the conflict?
6. Tell me about a major problem you recently handled. Were you successful in resolving it?
7. Would you say that you can easily deal with high-pressure situations?
8. What quality or attribute do you feel will most contribute to your career success?
9. What personal weakness has caused you the greatest difficulty in school or on the job?
10. Describe the characteristics of a successful manager.
11. Tell me what you know about our company. Why did you decide to seek a position in this company?
12. Would it be a problem for you to relocate? To what extent would you be willing to travel for the job?
13. Tell me about the salary range you are seeking.
14. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way?
15. Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
16. By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
17. Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
18. Describe a time when you had to use your written communication skills to get an important point across.
19. Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
20. Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
21. Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
22. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
23. Give me 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).
24. Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head." Describe a situation where you had to request help on a project.
25. Tell me about a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague?
26. Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
27. Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle that situation? How did that make you feel?
28. Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What would you do differently?
29. Describe some projects or ideas that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
30. Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

1. Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
2. What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
3. What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
4. In your opinion, what is the best part of working at this company?
5. How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
6. Can you describe the company's management style?
7. What are the company's values?
8. What is the organization's policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
9. What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
10. Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
11. Are there opportunities to take seminars, classes, etc to learn more and grow within the role and the company?
12. How is this department perceived within the organization?