



STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

During a recent survey, employers attending a Bellevue University Career Fair cited “poor interviewing skills” as the #1 failing of students looking for employer.

Your resume and cover letter have one underlying goal—to get you an interview. After you get the interview, you must be prepared to take full advantage of this face-to-face opportunity to show why you are the best candidate for the job. This is never an easy task, but careful thought and preparation can reduce the anxiety and stress to a manageable level and thus enable you to present yourself and your qualifications in the best possible light.

This handout contains helpful tips and suggestions to get you started. A list of typical interview questions is also included. Be sure to review these and take time to practice your responses before your interview.

For additional guidance or assistance, contact the Career Services at (402) 557-7423, (800) 756-7920 ext. 7423 or careerservices@bellevue.edu.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

The purpose of the interview is, of course, to assess your skills, qualifications and personal style as well as determine if there is a good fit with organizational culture, business needs and job requirements of the position you are seeking. It is up to you to make sure the interviewer sees you in the best possible light and to show why you are the best candidate for the position.

Sometimes employers will conduct what's called a *Pre-Employment Screening Interview*. These interviews are usually shorter than regular interviews and are often completed over the phone. The purpose of the pre-employment screening interview is to determine if applicants possess the minimum requirements of the job and to obtain an applicant's salary requirements.

For both kinds of interviews, research and careful preparation will really pay off. The more you know about the company and the position, the more you will be able to show how you can make a significant contribution. At the same time, the more confident you are about who you are and evidence you have of what you have to offer, the more effective you will be in showing how your particular combination of skills and experience matches the requirements and expectations of the position and the company. The following guidelines will help you prepare for your interview.

- **Research the company and the position you are seeking.** This will help you determine which of your skills and qualifications you want to emphasize during the interview. It will also help you explain why you are interested in working for this particular organization.
- **Review the job description** and make sure you are familiar with the job qualifications and requirements.
- **Review your resume and cover letter** so you are completely familiar with what you have told them about yourself.
- **Decide what points (key strengths or accomplishments) you want to cover** so you will be able to include those points in responding to whatever questions you are asked.
- **Know yourself and your experiences well enough to handle any question that is asked.** The more you understand yourself and your qualifications, the easier it will be to convey self-confidence and demonstrate your ability to "think on your feet."
- **Conduct Information Interviews** with current and former employees of the company with which you're interviewing . . . especially those in your network. Write down any insights they provide and other pieces of information that might be handy to know during an interview.

- **Review possible questions and REHEARSE your responses.** Use the requirements, duties, responsibilities, and qualifications listed on the job description to create a list of potential interview questions. Write out your answers to these questions.
- **Be ready for unconventional questions** that have no right or wrong answers. Questions such as “If you were a pizza delivery person, how might you benefit from scissors?” “If you were on an island and could only bring three things, what would you bring?” “What do you think about while you’re driving” are designed to challenge your thought processes and provide the employer with insight regarding the way you solve problems and think outside of the box.
- **Prepare three to five questions that you want to ask.** Such questions should help to convey your motivation and interest, while giving you needed information and perhaps another opportunity to show how you can be of value to the company.
- **Practice your interview** via the Bellevue University online platform: InterviewStream. Practice in front of a mirror. Review and evaluate yourself. Ask a friend or spouse to role play, and listen to their suggestions. The idea is not to memorize your responses, but to become as comfortable as possible in talking about yourself and your accomplishments.
- **Familiarize yourself with the various types of interviews**, such as pre-employment screening interviews, video interviews, group interviews, simulation interviews. Be prepared for each.
 - During a pre-employment screening interview, make sure you are in a quiet location with no background noises or distractions. Have a copy of your resume and the job description in front of you. Know your salary requirements—meaning a specific number or range. Keep your calendar handy in case you need to schedule the date of the next interview.
- **Locate the company a day or two before the interview** so you know where it is and where to park. If you are not familiar with the area, do a "travel run." In this way, you'll reduce the chances of unanticipated traffic or parking hassles on the day of your interview.
- **Prepare a list of references to take with you to the interview.** Be sure to include titles, addresses and phone numbers and use the same format and paper as your resume and cover letter.
- **Have work history information ready** in case you are asked to fill out an application. Be sure you have employment dates, names of supervisors, salary information, etc.
- **If appropriate, prepare a packet of work samples** that you can leave with the interviewer if asked.
- **Be sure you bring a copy of your resume** so you can refer to it if needed during the interview. It is also OK to take any other notes or worksheets with you to "jog your memory" and help you to respond to questions during the interview.

- **Finally, know when to stop preparing** and give yourself time to relax, both physically and mentally, before going to the interview.

DRESSING FOR THE INTERVIEW

First impressions are critical to the success of your interview. The moment you meet, the interviewer begins forming an opinion of you. This initial impression is based almost exclusively on your personal appearance and how well you are dressed. While being the "best dressed" candidate may not get you the job, inappropriate dress could very well rule you out before you even have a chance to speak.

This doesn't mean that you must invest in extremely expensive clothing. What it does mean is that you should pay careful attention to the clothing you do select, and make sure it conveys the appropriate image of you as a knowledgeable, skilled professional who can make a significant contribution to the company. Dressing appropriately has another advantage as well. When you're dressed professionally, you'll feel more like a professional. Feeling like a professional adds to your confidence and will help you make a good impression. As you prepare for your interview, then, keep the following guidelines in mind regarding your dress and personal appearance.

- **Dress conservatively**, unless you are applying for a position where creativity and the unusual are expected. You want to be remembered for what you say, not what you wear.
- **Dress to your advantage** by wearing clothing that is comfortable and puts you in the most favorable light. Don't wear clothes that will detract from you as a person, but avoid an overly packaged "dress for success" look.
- **Dress for the interviewer, the company, and the position you are seeking.** Even when you are interviewing for a position where you will be wearing fairly casual clothes on the job, choose business-like, professional clothing that reflects the importance you place on the interview.
- **Seek the advice of someone whose judgment you trust** if you are uncertain or lack confidence in your own judgment.
- **Pay careful attention to your overall appearance.** Practice good personal hygiene. Be sure your clothes are clean and neatly pressed and that your shoes are shined. Avoid heavy or excessive jewelry. If you wear cologne or perfume, be sure it is a light and inoffensive fragrance, and use sparingly.
- **Finally, don't forget to wear a smile.** Smiling is contagious, will make you feel more relaxed and helps to get the interview off to a good start.

SELLING YOURSELF DURING THE INTERVIEW

If you have "done your homework" and followed the other suggestions in this handout, you should be relaxed, confident and well-prepared for your interview. Now, it's time to review some tips and suggestions that will help you during the interview itself.

- **Be early by at least 5 - 10 minutes.** Use this time to regain your composure and to observe the work environment.
- **Remember to smile and greet the interviewer confidently.** It's best to follow the interviewer's lead as far as a handshake, use of first name, etc.
- **Be natural, cordial and polite,** even if the interviewer reacts negatively or criticizes a response. The interviewer may be evaluating how you handle stress.
- **Maintain a positive, confident attitude and a high level of enthusiasm** throughout the interview. Remember, you are there to sell yourself. If you don't have confidence in your own abilities, you won't get the interviewer to believe you have what it takes to succeed.
- **Keep the interviewer's attention** by varying the tone, volume and tempo of your speech. Establish and maintain good eye contact, but act naturally. Treat the interview as a conversation and act accordingly.
- **Treat every question as important.** Always assume there is a purpose to every question and give a careful and thoughtful response to each one.
- **Listen carefully to the question.** If you don't understand or are not sure what the interviewer is looking for, ask for clarification or additional information.
- **Refer to your resume or notes** to help you respond to questions. It is perfectly acceptable to ask for a moment to collect your thoughts and formulate your response to a difficult question.
- **Emphasize the positive but be honest and truthful.** Exaggerating and embellishing the truth will usually come back to haunt you.
- **Never criticize or talk badly about a former employer or supervisor.** If there were difficulties, accept your share of the responsibility and put the experience in a positive light.
- **Be as specific as possible** when formulating your responses. Use concrete examples that demonstrate your proficiency or illustrate how your skills have helped you succeed in school or another job.
- **Have 3 - 5 questions to ask the interviewer** that reflect the research you have done and show your interest in the company.
- **Watch your nonverbal communications.** Pay attention to your posture, and don't let yourself become too relaxed, even if the interview is going very well. Hand gestures are OK if used naturally, but be sure they are not detracting from what you are saying.



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- **Always keep the focus on what you can do for the company.** The interviewer is most concerned with your ability to do the job and benefit the company, not with the company's ability to help you gain experience. If you are changing careers or have little direct work experience, it is particularly important to show how the skills you have developed in another setting are transferable to their organization.
- **Be prepared to respond to some questions that are inappropriate or illegal.** All questions should be job-related, but some interviewers may not be aware of what they can legally ask. If you feel uncomfortable with a question and feel that your answer could hurt your chances, trust your feelings. Decline to answer in a firm, but tactful, non-threatening way. Then go on with the interview as if nothing negative had occurred.
- **Wait for the interviewer to bring up salary or benefits.** Generally, salary is not discussed until the last interview. However, once it is mentioned, it is OK to ask questions. Let the interviewer make you an offer before you give any indication of what you are expecting. If pressed for a figure, ask what the range is for the position before responding. If you have a definite minimum that you will accept, it's okay to state this, but be aware that you may eliminate yourself from consideration by doing so. Remember, you should consider the total range of benefits offered in addition to the actual salary when considering an offer. Benefits such as health and life insurance, retirement plans, etc., vary considerably from one company to another and can add as much as 30% to 40% to the total compensation package.
- **Before the interview ends, be sure you have the name and title of the interviewer.** The best way to accomplish this and assure that you have the proper spelling is to ask for a business card.
- **As soon as possible after the interview, jot down notes** on what was discussed—your impressions, what comes next, etc. While you think you will remember everything about each interview, it's easy to forget key points after going through several interviews or a period of time has elapsed.
- **Be sure to send a thank-you note within one day after your interview** to express your appreciation and reaffirm your interest in the position.



**QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED DURING A JOB INTERVIEW
(and should be prepared to answer)**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Describe the major functions of your current job. How did you go about learning those functions?
3. How have your past work/educational experiences prepared you for this position?
4. What would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment(s) over the past year? Why?
5. How would your current supervisor/professors describe you?
6. Why do you want to work for this company?
7. What are your strengths? Your weaknesses?
8. If you could have made one suggestion to your boss at your last job, what would it have been?
9. What work/educational experiences have been most valuable to you and why?
10. How do you plan and prepare for the day/week? What do you do when something unexpected comes up?
11. Why do you want to leave your current job?/Why did you leave your last job?
12. How did you go about choosing your major? What factors did you consider? Are you satisfied with your choice?
13. What types of situations put you under pressure, and what do you do to deal with that pressure?
14. What can you contribute to this company?
15. Are you willing to relocate or travel as part of your job?
16. When do you feel really charged up at work? When do you feel burned out?
17. What particular part of your job/college courses did you enjoy most? Least?
18. Describe the type of work environment/supervision you need to be most successful on the job.
19. We are looking at several very good candidates. why are you the best person for the job?
20. What decisions are easiest for you to make? The most difficult?
21. How would you describe your supervisory/leadership style?
22. Where do you expect to be in five years? What are your long-range career goals?
23. Why did you go to (the college you attended)?
24. What type of student were you?
25. Describe the best/worst boss you ever had.
26. What interests you about our products/services?
27. Did you ever change your major? Why?

28. What personal characteristics do you have that would be of particular value to us/in this position?
29. How do you handle stress?
30. Would you rather be in charge of a project or a member of a team?
31. How did you prepare for this interview?
32. How do you feel about your career progress to date?
33. Are you interviewing with any other companies?
34. What would you do if your boss told you to do something immediately, and your boss' boss asked you to work on a special project that also needed immediate attention?
35. Have you ever been passed over for a promotion? What did you do?
36. How do you think your work should be judged/evaluated?
37. How many hours a day/a week do you think a person should spend on the job?
38. What have you done about your own career/professional development over the past two or three years?
39. How do you go about judging or evaluating your own work? How do you know when you have done a good job?
40. What questions do you have for me?
41. Is there anything else I should know about you?
42. Why should I hire you?

BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe a creative/innovative idea that you produced which led to a significant contribution to the success of an activity or project.
2. Tell me about a suggestion you made to improve the way job processes/operations worked? What was the result?
3. Give me a specific example of a time when you did not meet a deadline. How did you handle the subsequent situation?
4. Tell me about a time when you have dealt with a difficult person-what happened, how did you handle it, and what was the outcome? Is there anything you would do differently?
5. Tell me about a project you initiated. What was it? How did you go about it? What was the outcome?
6. Tell me about your experience working with a variety of different people.
7. Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
8. Describe a situation where you had to give a presentation to a group. What was the purpose of your presentation? How did you prepare? What was the outcome? How did you know you accomplished your objective?

9. Tell me about a time when you were particularly effective in building relationships with others.
10. Tell me about a situation where you demonstrated good communication skills.
11. Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
12. Tell me about a time when you were particularly effective in building relationships with others.
13. Tell me about a time when something you tried to accomplish failed. How did you handle the situation?
14. Tell me about a situation in which you were required to analyze and solve a complex problem.
15. Describe a complex problem you have solved/haven't solved.
16. Tell me about a time when you used creativity to solve a problem.
17. Give me an example of a time when you were not a productive team member.
18. Describe for me your typical participation in a team setting.
19. Tell me about a recent team experience you had that was fulfilling.
20. Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
21. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
22. Discuss a time when you had to deal with major change. How did you respond to this situation? How did you prepare for the change?
23. Tell me about a time when you thought "out of the box" to come up with a creative solution to a problem. Was your solution effective? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK

1. How would you describe the ideal candidate for this position?
2. What are the department's current major projects/priorities? What is planned for the future?
3. Is this a newly created position or would I be replacing someone? (If replacement) Why did that person leave this position?
4. What are the most significant challenges for this position over the next year?
5. How has this position changed over the last few years? Do you anticipate changes in this position in the future?
6. How does the company evaluate work performance? What standards would be used to evaluate performance in this position?
7. *Add a question that shows you've done research on the company. For example: "I saw on Omaha.com that the organization is increasing westbound intermodal routes. How will that increase impact this position's responsibility for ensuring truck-competitiveness?"*