

Interviewing can be intimidating and the biggest challenge of the job search process. There is no way to predict exactly what will happen during the interview process; however, there are several things you can do to prepare and make the most out of the opportunity to land your dream job!

INTERVIEW TYPES

Depending on human resources policies and procedures, employers may use a variety of different interviewing methods for job vacancies. This may be confusing if you have several interviews at different companies and each uses a different process. A couple types of interviews you may encounter include:

SCREENING INTERVIEW: The primary goal of a screening interview is to narrow the pool of candidates for a position based on the necessary qualifications to be successful in the position. This type of interview is typically done in 30 minutes or less via phone, teleconference, at a career fair booth, or during on-campus interviews. Recruiters or HR Specialists typically want to discover the basics about you and why you are interested in a position at their companies. Although the interview is short, it still requires preparation to “sell” your knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics effectively.

SELECTION INTERVIEWS: This interview type typically occurs on-site to allow an in-depth interview. The interview incorporates more than one person and may vary in length from a few hours to 1-2 business day(s). Sometimes a meal may be included so be sure to freshen up on proper meal etiquette. Your interview starts from the time you arrive on-site or get picked up at the airport and does not end until you are on your way back home. Always be courteous and pleasant to everyone you encounter no matter what their position is at the company.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Preparation is key to perfect an interview. Preparation not only includes practicing your responses to common interview questions but also figuring out the details of the day.

- Begin by researching the company online. What makes them different from other companies? What are they proud of? What is their company image? Why would you want to work for the company?
- Review the job description to better understand the role. Print it off to take with you to the interview.
- If you have a list of interviewers ahead of time, try to read their biographies or learn more about what they do to prepare specific questions for each person.
- Prepare a list of questions for the interviewers. They will ask if you have any questions for them and you do not want to say “no”. Avoid asking about salary or benefits at the time of the first interview.
- Pack several clean copies of your résumé on résumé (linen or cotton) paper. See Career Services for printing on résumé paper.
- Take a folder, notepad, or padfolio with you to the interview in case you want to take notes.
- Write down the name of your contact person and that person’s phone number just in case something comes up.
- Map out directions to the interview location. Practice driving there if you could be short on time. Prior to the interview, ask where you should park.

PRACTICE INTERVIEWING

Career Services offers mock interviews for those who would like to practice their interviewing skills. Students have the option of recording the interview using a webcam and keeping a copy of their mock interview to review their mannerisms and tone of voice as well as their initial answers. You will be asked both common questions as well as those related to the type of job you are applying for to make it as realistic as possible. Bring the job description and your résumé with you to your mock interview. You are welcome to practice on your own to find what works best for you to land your dream job. We encourage you to write out answers to practice interview questions to form ideal responses. Do not memorize these answers, however, to avoid them sounding scripted and insincere.

Be mindful of your body language and tone. Do not use monotonous tones, make eye contact with all interviewers, and avoid crossing your arms. Introduce yourself with a firm handshake and smile to present a positive first impression. You may need to practice speaking effectively while smiling if this does not come natural to you. Practice your 30-second commercial/elevator speech, and answer questions in front of a mirror.

DRESS FOR A POSITIVE FIRST IMPRESSION

Pick out a business professional or business formal outfit such as a tailored suit or pressed pants/skirt with a collared, button-down shirt. Depending on the industry and interview location, something less formal may be appropriate, but remember to look your best. While business casual (khaki, jeans, sweaters, etc.) is acceptable in some workplaces, it is unacceptable for an interview. Accessorize appropriately and keep things simple; do not look like you are ready for a night out on the town and avoid strong perfumes/colognes. Consider your physical appearance when interviewing for a job. This may include a clean-shaven face to meet industry requirements, long sleeve shirts to cover body art, as well as wearing a basic-colored suit and tie or skirt/slacks and blazer. Be sure you wear comfortable, closed-toed shoes in case an extensive walking tour is involved. It is better to be over-dressed than under-dressed for this occasion; therefore, you may want to research the company to find professional photos of employees for outfit inspiration.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Every interview may begin with the question, “Tell me a little bit about yourself”. This is a great opportunity to use the 30-second commercial/elevator speech you practiced. Answer all questions thoroughly and ask for clarification when you are unsure of the question. You will need to provide elaborate, yet concise examples from your résumé. Provide examples from previous employment, learning experiences, campus involvement, class projects, and volunteer work. Examples of common interview questions include:

- Why did you decide to major in _____? **Do not say “for the money” or “my friend told me it was a good career.”**
- Why are you interested in this position and industry?
- Where do you see yourself within the next five years? **Avoid personal goals (family, children, etc.) and focus on career goals**
- What are a few of your strengths and weaknesses? **Have at least three of each in mind and provide examples. Elaborate on how you can improve your weaknesses because this represents taking initiative for professional development.**
- Why do you want to work here/go to school here? What sets you apart from other candidates?

There may be a few **behavioral interview questions**, in which employers are looking for you to provide examples of workplace/work ethic scenarios to predict job performance. These questions will begin with “Tell me about a time when...”, “Imagine that you are...”, and “Give me an example of a time when...” When forming a response, you will want to use the **STAR (situation, task, action, response)** technique*. You will describe the situation or task that you did, what actions you took, and the results that you achieved*. Examples of behavioral interview questions include:

- Tell me about a time when you worked with someone that was different than you.
- Tell me about a time when you faced a stressful situation and how you responded.
- Give me an example of a task that you tried to accomplish but failed.
- Imagine that you are busy with multiple tasks with strict deadlines, but a client walks in that needs thorough assistance that puts you behind schedule. What would you do?
- Give me an example of a time when you took the initiative and took the lead on a project.
- Describe your capability to adapt to situations that may arise on short notice.

INTERVIEW DAY

Arrive 10-15 minutes early and treat everyone you interact with respectfully. Make eye contact, smile, and greet everyone with a firm handshake. Go to the restroom and check your appearance, chew a breath mint, and take a few deep breaths to calm your nerves. Review your career documents while you wait.

Be genuine. Employers want to get to know you and your knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. Try to focus on the responses you prepared without sounding rehearsed. Allow the conversation to flow and be prepared for a few moments of awkward silence while the employers take notes of your responses to refer to when reviewing candidates. Ask questions and listen actively to learn more about the company and the position. Remember, you are interviewing them, as well. Collect business cards from everyone you meet or write down their names for follow-up.

Once the interview is complete, ask what the timeline is for follow-up. Do **NOT** bring up salary negotiations or benefits during the interview. Be sure to ask at least three to five questions to ask the employers. Never say no to asking questions. A few sample questions include:

- Can you describe a typical day for a person in this position?
- Why did you choose to work for this company?
- What are the advancement opportunities in this position?
- What are the next steps in the interview process?
- What are the first projects this position will be working on?
- How would you describe your management style? **Only ask this if you are visiting with the supervisor of this position.**

Lastly, take some time to reflect on what went well and what you can improve upon for future interviews. Do not beat yourself up if it does not go perfectly. Each interview is a learning experience. Getting a call for an interview is a compliment in itself!

NECESSARY FOLLOW-UP

THANK YOU LETTERS

Always send a thank you letter addressed to the employers with whom you met during the interview process. Thank you letters can be emails or handwritten notes but should be composed using proper headings and letter format. They should be sent within 24 hours of the interview. If you choose to mail a handwritten thank you letter, make sure it is on a professional looking note card. See Career Services for a 'Thank You' card. In this letter, you want to express your gratitude for the opportunity, reiterate your interest in the position, and restate something interesting that you learned from each person. Use this as an opportunity to highlight your skills one last time. Also, if there is something you did not have the opportunity to talk about during the interview this is a good time to share it.

Example

Thank you for the opportunity to visit with you during the interview on Tuesday for the ICU registered nurse position. I was excited about the position previously but became more excited when you mentioned that I could float on the NICU floor. As you may recall, I have 15 years of experience in healthcare with 5 years of experience as an LPN. I look forward to hearing back from you on June 10 per our conversation during the interview. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have additional questions. I can be reached via phone at 417-123-4567. Thank you again for considering me for the position!

*Sincerely,
Grizz Bear*

POST-INTERVIEW PHONE CALL (WHEN NECESSARY)

Are you feeling nervous that you have not heard from the employer by the date mentioned during your interview? Don't fret! If you are told you will be contacted by next week and you don't hear anything, give the employer a few more days. You never know what has happened at the company that may have held things up. After this period, it is appropriate to follow up once via email or phone. Remember to smile when speaking to enhance your tone. Politely state your name, the position you applied for, your interview date, and request to know where they are in their decision-making regarding that position.

Example

"Hi, Jackie! This is Grizz Bear, and I am following up about the ICU registered nurse position I interviewed for at the clinic on Tuesday, June 3. I was told by the search committee that I would hear a hiring decision by June 10. I have not received any information since the date of the interview, and I was hoping you could give me an idea of where you are in the decision-making process. I would like to express my continued interest in the nursing position, and I look forward to hearing back from you! Thank you!"

Be sure to leave your primary phone number if you reach their voicemail. Make sure that your voicemail box greeting is professional and allows space for the employer to leave you a message.

Good luck with your interview! You will do great!

* Source: Austin, E. W., & Pinkleton, B. E. (2015). *Strategic Public Relations Management: Planning and Managing Effective Communication Campaigns* (third). Routledge.