Interviewing

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Effective Interviewing Basics

What does interviewing accomplish?

Generally, employers need to know three things about you:

1. Are you capable of doing the job? Do you the necessary skills and experiences or can you be readily trained?

2. Are you motivated to do the job? Will you take the trouble to do the job well, ask for guidance when appropriate and make the necessary effort to meet tight deadlines?

3. Are you a person the employer wants to work with? Will you be a team player and adapt easily to company culture? Will you be cheerful or a complainer? Will you give or grab credit?

Overcoming nervousness

Remember the 3 Ps:

- **Prepare** (research the employer and assess yourself, get proper attire, etc.)

- **Positive thinking**

- **Practice!!** (mock interviews with friends or Career Services, flashcards, mirror or tape recorder)

Energy Edge: What can separate you from others? Vitality and vigor!

- Employers want you to prove to them during a 30-minute interview that, if you are hired, you will work tirelessly, achieve goals and connect well with others.

- Even if you don't have a naturally enthusiastic personality, you can verbally and visually relate how you have attacked assigned projects. Think about something you are passionate about or found very enjoyable. How would you relate that to someone? Use the same tone, gestures, etc. in the interview.

- Remember that for an interviewer, it's hard to be interested in your experience if <u>you</u> don't seem interested!

Business Attire Tips for Interviews and Beyond

Not sure what to wear to business formal events, such as an interview? Here's a basic guide to building your wardrobe.

For Women

Suits

- Choose a solid colored suit in a conservative style. Navy, black and dark gray are best for most industries.
- For versatility, consider buying a suit that has a jacket with both matching pants and skirt or dress.
- Pants are becoming more acceptable. Consider wearing a skirt suit for an interview, however, in conservative professions or if you're not sure pants are appropriate.
- Jackets may be single or double breasted; short or long. Choose a style that looks best on your body type. Avoid flashy buttons or trim.
- Knee-length skirts are most appropriate. Skirt should be no higher than 2" above the knee. Test fit by sitting down.

Stockings

- Always wear pantyhose. Choose nude colors.
- Avoid ultra-sheer.
- Make sure there are no runs in your stockings and carry an extra pair in your briefcase in case of emergency.

Tops

- Tailored blouses in solid colors are best.
- Look for fabrics that resist wrinkling and staining. Washable fabrics may be best.
- Don't wear sleeveless blouses and dresses.
- A silk or fine-gauge wool sweater shell can replace a blouse.

Shoes

- Basic pumps (no higher than 2" – 2½" heels)
- Black, navy or neutral colors for shoes
- Make sure leather shoes are well-polished.
- Always look for comfort when purchasing shoes and practice walking ahead of time.

Accessories

- Limit jewelry to two pieces at most.
- Scarves are an inexpensive way to change an outfit's look.
- Carry a neat bag, preferably a briefcase, that matches your shoes. Avoid having multiple bags (e.g. purse, briefcase, etc.). Don't carry your backpack.

For Men

Suits

- Conservative single-breasted, two- or three-button jacket
- The jacket can be with or without a vent, but avoid two-vent jackets.
- Choose dark, solid colors (dark gray, charcoal or navy) in a tightly woven fabric. In some industries, olive, pin-stripes, or glen plaid may work. Avoid flashy or showy fabrics.
- Pants should be pleated and cuffed.
- Make sure your suit is altered to fit properly -- sleeves should break just below your wrist.
- Have your suit pressed to keep it looking crisp.

Ties

- Purchase at least two good quality silk ties. Once you have the job, expand to seven or eight.
- Colors should work back into your suit or work well with the shirt. A simple pattern is best for interviews.
- The tie should end at your belt line.
- Use a double Windsor knot to minimize a bulky appearance.

Socks

- Match your socks to your suit, shirt or tie.
- Solid colors are better. Black or navy is best.
- Socks should be high enough so no skin is visible when you sit down and cross your legs.

Shirts

- Purchase at least two good quality dress shirts for interviewing. Once you have the job, expand to seven or eight.
- White or light blue wrinkle-free cotton is a good choice for shirts.
- Never purchase polyester or polyester blend shirts.
- Collars should be stiff but comfortable (too loose looks unprofessional; too tight, you'll feel like you're choking).
- If buying a shirt with a pointed collar be sure that it has collar stays or can be buttoned down.

Shoes

- Have one pair of basic black or brown shoes.
- Always keep your shoes polished and well-maintained.
- Wingtip shoes are more conservative. Lug or platform soles are not as professional. Ground down soles are out!
- Make comfort a priority.

Accessories

- Belts should match shoes.
- If you wear suspenders, don't wear a belt.
- Limit jewelry to watch and wedding ring.
- Carry a neat, matching briefcase or padfolio. Avoid backpacks.

PREPARE: Ultimate Interviewing Resources

Chance favors the prepared mind. – Louis Pasteur

P **Position yourself**

- Perform well in your current endeavor (for students, this can reflect in your GPA!)
- Take on extra-curricular activities to build experiences/accomplishments, build confidence

R **Realize your motivation**

- Why are you seeking a new opportunity?
- What are you looking for in the new opportunity?

E **Evaluate the opportunity**

- What are the required skill sets and competencies to do this job?
- Do you have the transferable skills?

P **Prepare for the experience**

- Identify and utilize your resources (mentors, supervisors, counselors, professors)

A **A.C.T.**

- A – Adapt your situation to the audience
- C – Capture your role in the situation
- T – Tie in your results

R **Respond**

- Send thank-you notes after an interview
- Seek feedback

E **Evaluate your performance**

- Conduct a self evaluation and adjust your plan accordingly

Shine like a S.T.A.R in your interview!

Competency-based or behavioral interviewing seeks to hear about your actual past experiences (based on the theory that your past actions are good indicators of your future actions). When responding to competency-based interview questions (e.g. "Tell me about a time when…), be a S.T.A.R.

S
T

What was the **situation** or **task**?

- Set the situation; give brief background.
- Speak to your audience in terms they can relate to (i.e. don't speak in technical terms that aren't familiar to audience).

A

What **action** did you take?

- Speak in terms of "I" and not "we."
- Sell yourself for this position, not your team.
- Note your contributions.

R

What were your **results?**

- DO NOT FORGET THE RESULTS – show how you "closed the deal."
- Define the outcome of your role in this situation
- Don't be a tragedy "actor"; focus responses on positive results!
- If the outcome wasn't as positive as you'd wanted, describe what you learned and would do differently.

Skill to do comes of doing. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sample Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about a time when you had to solve a difficult problem. (*problem solving*)
- Describe a situation when you had a positive influence on attitudes and behaviors of others. (*motivation*)
- Give an example of a situation in which you knew there were more tasks than you had time to perform. (*organizational skills*)
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make an important decision. (*decision making*)
- What has been the biggest goal you've achieved in recent years and how did you achieve it? (*goal setting*)
- Tell me about a time when you were in conflict with a colleague or classmate because you had trouble seeing eye to eye. (assertiveness/*interaction*)
- Tell me about the most frustrating time you've had relating a concept to someone. (*communication*)
- Tell me about a time when your ability to listen helped you communicate better. (*communication*)
- Give an example of a time when you were disappointed in your behavior. (*self awareness*)
- Define "success."
- How would your past employers describe you?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? (*commitment to organization, goal setting*)
- Tell me about a time when you worked on a project for work or school and one member of the group wasn't pulling his/her weight. (*teamwork, leadership*)
- Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures. (*problem solving*)
- Give me an example of a time when you were inventive and offered fresh insight about a situation. (*creativity*)
- Describe a time when you were faced with ambiguity of expectations (at work or in class). What was the situation and how did you deal with it? (*tolerating ambiguity*)
- Do you have any questions for me?

Understanding and Responding to Interview Questions

Warm-up: Where you're from, university year/major, motivation for applying for position

Answering questions:

- Give concise but thorough responses
- Use **STAR** (situation/task, action, resolution) for behavioral ("Describe a time…") questions.
- Identify skill area being assessed by question; show your knowledge of and ability to perform skill by concisely describing components of skill (using your specific examples).

Problem Solving/Decision making steps:

1. Identify/describe problem
2. Gather feedback/identify possible solutions/outcomes
3. Weigh costs and benefits of each solution/outcome
4. Choose solution/make decision
5. Evaluate solution/decision

Goal setting steps:

1. Set goals
2. Identify measurable steps toward reaching goal and timeline
3. Evaluate progress

Teamwork/pulling weight:

1. Identify issue.
2. Ask to speak to individual privately.
3. Politely confront individual/Identify problem. (You've noticed person has not completed agreed upon tasks or hasn't attended meeting, etc. You are concerned because it affects you and the group. You value the input/skills of the individual.)
4. Ask for an explanation. Ask if you can help in anyway.
5. Ask for the individual to meet expectations.
6. Thank individual for the opportunity to speak honestly.

5-year goals:

1. Interested in assessing your commitment to company/field.
2. Interested in assessing your commitment to professional development/personal growth.
3. Responses can include continuing education in field, moving into managerial/leadership positions and advancement into next logical step in organization.

Assertiveness/conflict resolution:

1. Identify problem and players.
2. Ask to speak privately to individual(s).
3. Confront behavior. Describe how you are affected ("I" statements). Explain why the behavior is a problem.
4. Request behavior changes.
5. Follow-up to rebuild the relationship.

Organizational skills:

1. Identify tasks (e.g. make to-do lists).
2. Prioritize tasks (ask supervisor, consider deadlines and whether tasks build on each other).
3. Work efficiently (delegate, avoid duplication, multi-task).
4. Avoid procrastination.

Common Illegal Questions and Their Legal Counterparts

Inquiry Area	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
National Origin/ Citizenship	Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your "native tongue"?	Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read, speak or write fluently? *(This question is okay, as long as this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.)*
Age	How old are you? When did you graduate from State University? What is your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
Marital/ Family Status	What's your marital status? Who do you live with? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your child care arrangements?	Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Travel is an important part of the job. Would you be willing and able to travel as needed by the job? *(This question is okay, as long as ALL applicants for the job are asked it.)* This job requires overtime occasionally. Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? *(Again, this question is okay as long as ALL applicants for the job are asked it.)*
Affiliations	To what clubs or social organizations do you belong?	List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job?
Personal	How tall are you? How much do you weigh?	Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job? *(Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of the job.)*
Disabilities	Do you have any disabilities? Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list and give dates. What was the date of your last physical exam? How's your family's health? When did you lose your eyesight? How?	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodations? *(This question is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.)* As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. *(Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on the exam results.* Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related function?
Arrest Record	Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of _____? *The crime should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.*
Military	If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

Questions to Ask During an Interview

Keep your questions about the company itself short and general, and don't ask for information that is readily available to the public. Your questions should reveal all the research you have already done, and should be directed to the types of information you are not likely to get elsewhere. They should also include issues you are sincerely curious about.

Useful sample questions are listed below. Use only those pertinent to your situation or develop ones which will increase your understanding of the employer, the personnel, the job, and future opportunities.

COMPANY GOALS

- Does the company contemplate introducing new products or expanding marketing operations?
- Are branches in other locations planned?
- Are headquarters likely to be relocated?
- How is the present economic situation affecting your organization?

THE JOB OPENING

- Please describe the details of a typical day for this position.
- What characteristics are you most likely to find in people in this position?
- What have been the major accomplishments in the department/division during the past year? What is the largest single challenge facing the staff now?
- What is the most challenging aspect of the work?
- Is this job newly created? If not, has its function changed greatly in the last few years? How did this position become vacant?
- Does it offer good promotional possibilities? (You will have to make this determination yourself to some extent, but it helps to know if others have moved up from the spot.)
- Is its scope limited to one department, or does it interact with others? (If it is a good vantage point from which to learn the overall operation, the chances of moving up are increased considerably.)
- Will it require you to travel? How much? Will you need a car?
- How many people staff the department in which you would work?
- To whom would you report? (Who will be your immediate and executive supervisors?)

OTHER COMPANY POLICIES AFFECTING YOUR DEVELOPMENT

- What kinds of professional development opportunities exist?
- Is there a formal training program? Continuing education with tuition reimbursement? In-house seminars? A formal or informal mentoring system?

SALARY AND EMPLOYEE (FRINGE) BENEFITS

- Keep these questions for late in the interview, or better yet, not until a firm offer is made. It's best to have the interviewer initiate discussion on salary range and benefits.
- Benefits are competitive, sometimes negotiable, and may become deciding factors in your decision-making. Once you have a firm offer you will want to ask the recruiter for specific information on the benefits package.

Adapted from Getting Hired by Edward J. Rodgers, Corporate Vice President and Director of Personnel, N.W. Ayers - Copyright 1982, Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Interview Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Strive for natural dialogue with the interviewer, but allow the interviewer to set the tone and the pace of the dialogue.
- Respond as completely and concisely as possible. Don't ramble!
- Be prepared to discuss your career plans if asked.
- Emphasize how your skills and abilities would benefit the department.
- Use positive words in your responses. Instead of "problem," for instance, say "challenge" or "opportunity."
- Be a good listener. Listen closely to questions and answer them thoughtfully.
- Ask probing questions of the interviewer. This reveals your thoughtfulness, listening skills, and research.
- Express a desire to improve, when addressing your weaknesses. Let the interviewer know what things you have done or are doing to address weaknesses.
- Provide examples of your skills and abilities.
- Stop and collect your thoughts before attempting to answer if you get caught off-guard with a question during the interview. Pausing is acceptable.
- Be sensitive to the interviewer's right to control the interview, and do your part to ensure a well-balanced, two-way exchange of information.
- Be factual, honest, and brief when sharing information with the interviewer.
- Thank the interviewer(s) at the end of the interview.

Don't:

- Don't be late!
- Don't be unprofessional (behavior/ body language or appearance).
- Don't neglect to do your homework about the organization.
- Don't fail to show enthusiasm, personality and sincerity of interest.
- Don't use negative terms or phrases in your responses or volunteer negative information to the interviewer; however, should such information come to light during questioning, don't dodge the issue or make excuses.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer or take control of the conversation.
- Don't give the impression you view the job as merely a stepping stone for your career advancement.
- Don't condemn past employers or co-workers.
- Don't neglect to explain why you are right for the position.
- Don't be unable to articulate your goals (short and long term).
- Don't neglect to ask questions at the end of the interview. Make sure they are not so basic they can be answered by checking the employer's website.
- Don't fail to send a thank-you note afterward to your interviewer(s)!

Pre-Interview Tips

Attire
Dress professionally – first impressions set the tone for the whole meeting. Professional dress for men and women means a suit in a conservative color (e.g. navy, black, charcoal). Women can wear skirt-suits or pants-suits but should wear stockings with either. Men and women should have clean, polished dress shoes. Women's dress shoes should have closed toes and closed heels. Both men and women should be clean and well-groomed. Hair should be out of the face, only wear minimal jewelry and conservative make-up and don't over-perfume/cologne (especially since you'll probably be in a small room and someone could have allergies). Body piercings and tattoos may not match the culture of the organization to which you're applying. Don't bring anything to the interview except possibly a copy of your resume in a leather portfolio.

Body Language

***Handshake*:** Use a firm, but not bone-crushing, grip where the webbing between your thumb and index finger meets the other person's and shake once.
Eye contact: Maintain good eye contact with periodic breaks. Don't stare directly at the interviewer at all times, but also don't avert your eyes the entire time. When looking away, don't look down.
Posture and gestures: Sit up straight, leaning slightly forward to show interest. You can cross your legs but don't cross your arms. Use some hand gestures so as not to look too stiff, but don't flail. Don't touch your face/hair, etc. Practice in front of a mirror or with friends so that you can look relaxed and natural – not too stiff but not too sloppy.

Research!
Most interviews are blown by NOT doing your homework on the organization. Sixty minutes of research/reading can help tremendously and give you an edge over the competition. Thoroughly review the company website and any other material you can find. If you don't know much about the organization, they won't care much about you.

The Delivery
Energy, enthusiasm and a strong, confident voice will go a long way in the interview. Don't be timid, but don't be brash either. Employers want to know that you really, really want to work for their organization. Watch out for too many fillers like "um," "like," "you know," etc. Again, practice helps, especially when recorded or in front of a friend. Don't forget to smile! Your voice sounds more positive when you do.

Whenever possible, in answering questions, give a specific example of how you've done it in the past. Employers want assurance you'll be able to do the job. Keep in mind that the ideal worker is productive, gets results, and has a success-oriented, "can do" attitude. He or she is eager to learn, and is flexible and adaptable. Match those traits with some key answers and you are surely going to get the employer's attention.

Answering Tough Questions

Behavioral interview questions: Most interviewers today use at least some behavioral or situational questions that will require you to give specific examples of your experience, such as "tell about a time in which you…." To prepare for such questions, you should think about your own experiences (academic, work/internship, volunteer, organizations) and try to think of examples that best demonstrate the skills you think the employer will require. A good guide is the job description, where relevant skills are often spelled out. Other transferable skills that you can bet most employers care about include organizational, analytical, research, writing, presentation, language, computer, interpersonal, sales, customer service, problem solving, leadership, teamwork, etc. As you brainstorm, write down the name of the experience, the organization, and then some bulleted statements describing what you did, what you accomplished, some of the obstacles you faced, what skills you developed and with whom you interacted. Remember the STAR technique when answering behavioral questions: describe the Situation or Task, the Action you took and don't forget the Result.

Transferable skills: Remember, you are being hired initially to be trained to do what they want you to do, so you don't need to know everything up front. What they will want to know about is whether you have the potential to learn quickly, will be a good team player, can work without constant supervision, will show some initiative, have a strong work ethic and are a person with strong values/ethics. If you get a chance, let them know something about each of these things in the interview. Take every opportunity to sell yourself.

Asking your own questions: Ask one or two questions at the end of the interview. It's another chance to show that you've done your research about the organization. Make sure the questions aren't ones you can answer simply by looking at the organization's web site. When in doubt, you can ask about the interviewer's personal experience (e.g. What do you like about working for [company]? What qualities are you looking for in a colleague?).

Follow-up
Make sure to request a business card from your interviewers before you leave the interview. If they don't have a card, have them write their information down on something for you. Then write and send a thank you note within 24 hours of the interview. A hand-written card or typed thank-you letter is appropriate. Be sure to reiterate your interest and relevant skills, especially if you learned about additional information during the interview that convinces you you're a strong candidate. Sending a thank-you note can make or break you in an interview! Don't slack on this one!!

In conclusion: Be yourself. Don't try just to be the person for whom you think they are looking. Doing so may get you the job, but in the long run, you might be unhappy with the company because the job has been designed for someone who is not the real you.

Ace the interview:

5 secrets to getting hired

From CareerBuilder.com

To ace the interview you need to know how the interviewer thinks. In his book "Knock 'em Dead: The Ultimate Job Seeker's Guide," author and job-hunting guru Martin Yate examines the interview from the employer's perspective and shares the five secrets to getting hired.

Secret 1: Ability and suitability:

The first secret is to show the interviewer you have both ability and suitability. Every working professional has a combination of skills that broadly define those two aspects.

For example, a good computer programmer working in a bank has both technical and professional skills; that is, the ability to program a computer as well as knowledge of how to get things done in the banking industry and the capacity to work well with bankers.

Yate suggests you itemize your technical and professional skills as they parallel the requirements of the job. Then recall an incident to illustrate each of those skills. If applying for a job in an industry with which you're familiar, consider highlighting your industry sensibilities by describing how you've successfully collaborated and accomplished goals with other industry professionals.

Secret 2: Willingness:

The second secret is not to flip out if your interviewer asks if you're willing to make coffee or take out the trash -- especially if you're looking for a job in a small office.

More and more potential employers are using these questions to gauge whether you are the kind of person who is prepared to do whatever it takes to help the team.

Think of a time when you went the extra mile and how your doing so helped the company. Then rehearse the story until you can tell it in 90 seconds.

Secret 3: Manageability and teamwork:

Avoiding a nightmare employee is a major concern for managers who develop, over time, a remarkable sixth sense when it comes to spotting and weeding out mavericks and prima donnas.

Being "manageable" and a team player means that you can work independently as well as with others and can take direction and criticism. Also crucial is the ability to work and get along with a diverse workforce in terms of sex, age, religion, race, politics, abilities/disabilities or national origin.

Make sure you demonstrate with words and actions that you are someone who gets along well with people and has no problem tolerating differing opinions or beliefs. Don't bring up religious, political or racial matters during the job interview.

Secret 4: Professional behavior:

Yate says there are universally admired behavioral traits common to successful people in all fields: Drive, motivation, communication skills, team chemistry, energy, determination, confidence, reliability, integrity, pride, dedication, analytical skills, listening skills, goal-orientation, efficiency, economy, ability to follow procedures.

Yate suggests you pick several of the traits that apply to you and that you can back up with stories from your work history. The idea is to create a mental movie of an event, which is much more powerful than simply stating your strong points.

Secret 5: Everyone hires for the same job:

All companies are looking for problem solvers. So think of your profession in terms of its problem-solving responsibilities. Then, identify a list of related problems you have solved for your past employers.

Come up with specific examples for as many different success stories as you can think of. Then, ask what the first projects you as an employee would be involved in if hired. From there, you can select the most relevant problem-solving examples to share. When reciting these examples use the following formula:

- State the problem
- Isolate relevant background information
- List your key qualities
- Recall the solution
- Determine what the solution was worth

Remember, stories help interviewers visualize you solving their problems -- as a paid member of the team.
Keep these secrets in mind when preparing for your next interview. Approaching the interview from the employer's perspective and demonstrating your strengths through stories will cast you in a great light and make it hard for the interviewer to forget you.

Telephone Interviews

Why employers conduct telephone interviews

Employers use telephone interviews to identify and recruit candidates for employment. There are three basic types of telephone calls that you get from employers at this stage. One of the keys to success is to be able to identify quickly what type you are going to be participating in.

1. *Information Gathering Interviews* – An employer may ask to speak to you over the phone in order to assess your interest in the company. This often occurs if you are referred through a personal contact, referral, or someone you met at a career fair. This kind of call should be treated as seriously as an in-depth interview. It is a good way for you, as the potential employee, to see if you are a good fit for the company and their objectives.

2. *Screening Call* – Many companies use telephone calls as an initial screening mechanism in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. Screening interviews are quick – usually 30 minutes – and usually conducted by someone from Human Resources

3. *In-Depth Telephone Interview* – In this case, the telephone is being used as a way to minimize the expenses involved in traveling for the interviewer and/or the interviewee. Depending on the type of organization with which you are interviewing, you may be interviewed by a hiring committee, where you will be broadcast over a speakerphone.

Since you are unlikely to win the job from a telephone interview, your goal is to secure an in-person interview with the person who has the authority to hire. Approach the call with that attitude.

Pros and cons of telephone interviews for candidates

Telephone Interviews have one advantage over the other types of interviews – you can have your preparation materials in front of you as the interview is taking place. These include not only your resume, but also a "cheat sheet" of compelling story topics that you would like to introduce. It can also include a "cheat sheet" about the employer, including specific critical points describing the employer and their products.

Have your materials open and available when you are preparing for a phone interview.

It is important that your phone interview sound well-organized and thoughtful, but not rehearsed. Only write down important points on paper, but do not write down entire paragraphs or sentences and read them when you are conversing with an employer. It is very easy for someone to tell if you are reading, and they may test how quickly you can think on your feet.

Telephone interviews can be challenging because it is more difficult to gain rapport with the interviewer because you cannot see the interviewer's non-verbal reactions and cues. Conversely, the interviewer cannot see your enthusiastic expressions or professional appearance. This places all the weight on your phone manners, clarity of speech, voice tone and the content of your answers.

Be prepared

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for a regular interview. Do your homework on the company. Compile a list of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as a list of answers to typical interview questions. Also, practice! Talking on the telephone isn't as easy as it seems. Have a friend or Career Services' staff member conduct a mock interview and tape record it so you can see how you sound over the phone. You'll be able to hear your "likes" and "ums" and "uhs" and "okays," and you can practice reducing them from your conversational speech. Also rehearse answers to those typical questions you'll be asked.

Make the following physical preparations for the scheduled phone interview:

- Select a quiet, private room with a phone in good working condition.
- Clear the room of distractions. Evict the roommates and the pets. Close the door and hang a do-not-disturb sign. Turn off the stereo, TV and any additional land or mobile phones. Turn off call-waiting on the phone you will be using.
- Prepare comfort items, such as tissues and a glass of water.
- Keep your resume in clear view, on the top of your desk, or tape it to the wall near the phone, so it's at your fingertips when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of questions about the job and the organization, as well as the job posting and an outline of the research you did on the organization.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking, as well as your calendar and a calculator.
- Dress professionally, as it can help you feel professional and therefore more formal and confident.

During the phone interview

- Do not smoke, chew gum, eat or drink. If you have to take a quick sip of water, cover the speaker.
- Breathe deeply and relax.
- Smile. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.
- Speak slowly, directly into the phone, and enunciate clearly. Consider standing up to help project your voice.
- Use the person's title (Dr., Mr. or Ms.) and their last name. Only use a first name if they ask you to. Write down the full names and titles of each call participant.
- Let the caller do most of the talking. Be courteous and try not to speak over the interviewer. If you do, apologize and let the interviewer continue. Since you lack the visual cues of body language to assess whether you've said enough, mark the end of your response with a question, such as "Would you like more details of my experience as an intern with XYZ Company?"
- Take your time – it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts. Use the technique of repeating or re-phrasing questions. It tells the caller that you listened carefully, and gives you time to think about your answer. If you need a moment to think, say so. Silence during a telephone conversation is dead air time.
- Support your statements with detailed examples of accomplishments when possible. It is easy for someone to get distracted on a phone call, so paint a vivid picture to keep the interviewer interested.
- Avoid fillers like ah, er, hum. This habit is especially noticeable on the telephone. This takes practice. So practice.
- Take notes when appropriate. Don't type on a computer, as it can be heard and sounds like you're not paying attention.
- If you think of a question or comment while the interviewer is speaking, jot a note on your talking points list, so you remember it later.
- During the interview, if the interviewer inadvertently answers a question from your prepared list, cross it off. If you forget and ask it, it will seem as if you were not listening.
- Use your talking points list of specific skills and accomplishments; cross them off as you work them into the conversation. At the end, if you have some uncrossed items, you might say something like, "I thought you might be interested to know I led a major conversion project, quite similar to what you are planning. I managed a $2.5 million budget and completed it 45 days early, saving over $48,000."

Compensation issues come at the end of the interviewing cycle, never at the telephone stage. If you are asked about salary expectations, you can truthfully say you don't know enough about the job to state a salary figure.

Re-affirm your qualifications; express your interest in the job and the company. Say you would appreciate the opportunity to talk about the job further in person.

Before you hang up

- Let the employer end the interview.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity.
- Get the correct spelling of your interview's name and contact information for follow-up.
- Before ending the call, be sure you know the next step in the process, and offer to provide any additional information needed.
- Remember you need a strong and confident closing. Reiterate how you can make a contribution.
- Don't hang up until the interviewer has hung up.

If you perform well on the telephone, you'll probably be invited to interview with a hiring manager on site.

The unexpected call

While you're actively job searching, it's important to be prepared for a phone interview on a moment's notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk. More than one student has mistaken an initial call from an employer for a telemarketer and lived to regret it later.

It is 9:15 am; you're in bed and the telephone rings. The best strategy for handling the unexpected call is to determine whether it is a call or an interview. Calls are primarily informational, while interviews include job-related questions.

If it is an interview, decide quickly if this is a good time to talk. If it isn't, simply ask if you can arrange a mutually convenient time to conduct the interview.

Apply your best interviewing skills (even if you are dressed in your pajamas).

After the interview

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
- Follow up promptly (within 24 hours) with a thank you note, which reiterates your interest in the job. If you don't do so, you have just invalidated all your other efforts!

My Interview Checklist

- ❑ **Research the job opening**
  Request a job description from the company
  Talk with inside contacts

- ❑ **Research the company**
  Review the company's purpose and products
  Review annual reports and newsletters
  Request information from the company's Public Relations Department
  Visit the web site

- ❑ **Research yourself**
  List the traits and skills needed for the job
  Consider your own experiences, skills, strengths and abilities
  Identify relevant activities and work experiences

- ❑ **Formulate answers to possible questions**
  Develop possible questions based on job description
  Pick up practice questions from Career Services
  Review the STAR method
  Cite a **S**ituation and **T**ask in relation to the **A**ction you took and the **R**esults

- ❑ **Prepare your own list of questions for the employer**

- ❑ **Things to remember to take to the interview**
  An extra copy of your resume
  A typed list of references
  A portfolio of examples of your work
  Letters of recommendation
  Questions to ask during the interview
  A pad of paper for taking notes

- ❑ **Remember to dress appropriately**
  Clothes should reflect the type of work for which you are applying
  For a professional position, wear a suit

- ❑ **Remember to relax before the interview**
  Focus on positive skills and strengths
  The purpose of the interview is an exchange of information, not an inquisition

- ❑ **Plan to arrive 10 - 15 minutes early**

- ❑ **Obtain a business card from your interviewer**
  Send a thank you note immediately after the interview
  Add the contact information to your network

The Interview Follow-Up Letter

After an interview, write a brief follow-up letter. Few people interviewed take the time to send such a note, so you can be certain it will be noticed, and employers say a thank-you letter may make or break you. Use the letter to reinforce your value to the company/organization, correct any misunderstandings, and to add forgotten points. Don't forget to reiterate that you are still interested in the position. Consider using the same heading as on your resume and cover letter to create the branded look of personalized letterhead.

Your Address

Name
Title
Company or Agency
Full Address

Date

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./etc. _____:

Remind the interviewer of the position for which you were interviewed, as well as the date and place of the interview. It is always courteous to express your appreciation.

Confirm your interest in the opening and in the organization. Highlight your qualifications and slant them toward the various points that the interviewer considered important for the job. If you have done anything since the interview which demonstrates your interest in the position, such as talks with alumni, faculty, other people, or research in the library, etc., be sure to mention it.

Include any information not previously presented to supplement your resume, application letter, and the interview. You may have completed a term paper or a research project, or perhaps you have received some kind of recognition. If travel, location, or a similar subject was stressed during the interview, be sure to confirm your willingness to comply with these conditions.

If appropriate, close with a suggestion for further action, such as a desire to have additional interviews at a mutually agreeable place and time.

Closing,

(signature)

full name, typed

Sample Interview Thank-You Letter

Lisa Johansen
75 Terrace Court
Austin, TX 78731
(512) 477-8234

Ms. Patricia Holland, Editor
Texas Monthly
3451 Oltorf Street
Austin, TX 78728

April 22, 2008

Dear Ms. Holland:

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday to discuss internship positions with *Texas Monthly* magazine. After learning more about your organization through our discussion, I am even more excited about the possibility of an internship. My strong communication and organizational skills can be well utilized in the various departments in which I would have the opportunity to work. The special project concerning the Wildflower Research Center sounds especially appealing as I am a wildflower aficionado. I know I would learn a considerable amount about magazine publishing, which is the field I intend to enter upon graduation next year.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please consider me a genuinely enthusiastic and competent candidate for an internship position. Thank you for your time and assistance. Have a nice day.

Sincerely,

Lisa Johansen