

Interviewing can be stressful, exciting, and overwhelming. However, preparing AHEAD of time will make all the difference when the moment comes that an employer calls you for that interview. Interviewing is a skill, and therefore, takes practice. Research shows that within the first four to nine minutes of an interview, recruiters decide whether or not they will seriously consider you for the position.

The following topics are addressed in this guide:

- Interview Preparation
- Dressing for an Interview
- Researching an Employer
- Behavioral Based Interviewing
- Commonly Asked Interview Questions
- Thank you email for after interview

## Interview Preparation:

### Dress for your industry

Your appearance is an important factor in creating a first impression. You need to research the company and industry to know what attire is appropriate. Many work environments are still business professional, which means SUIT ATTIRE, typically. Dark suits are preferred. However, it can be confusing to decide what to wear with many industries adopting a casual environment. If in doubt contact the Career Services Center for advice. Should you be invited to dress in business casual attire, keep in mind that first impressions last a lifetime, and subconsciously, you are often judged by them. Therefore, be sure to maintain a neat appearance at all times including attention to your nails, hair, facial hair, use of strong perfume/cologne. Casual dress style depends largely on the industry, so if in doubt, ask about the dress policy before the interview.

### What to Carry

A briefcase or leather portfolio is a recommended accessory that will communicate a professional image.

### Extra Copies of Your Resume

Bring multiple copies of your resume and familiarize yourself with everything on it. Remember that the interviewer can ask you about anything on your resume, so be sure to provide honest information about yourself at all times.

### Design Portfolio

If you are interviewing for a design opportunity you will need to bring a physical portfolio with some physical pieces of work. Also, have a link to your digital portfolio easily accessible. Be sure to review your work so you are fully prepared to discuss all pieces.

### References

It is wise to have a reference page with you with at least three professional references listed with their name, relationship to you, title, and contact information. Always be sure to get permission from your references before using them and ask if they are willing to serve as a *positive* reference.

### Punctuality

Be sure to arrive at least 10 minutes early. Sometimes you are required to fill out forms before the interview, so arriving early can be to your benefit. Additionally, this gives the interviewer an indication of your possible future behavior. In the event of an emergency, notify the employer within 24 hours of the scheduled interview, if you need to cancel the appointment. It is always

wise to bring the phone number of the interviewer with you in the event of traffic or unforeseen delays.

### **Research**

Preparation cuts down on your amount of uncertainty and will boost your confidence; therefore, before the interview, make sure that you have researched the company using the company's web site, the career library, newspapers and research tools like Plunkett Research and [www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com). Another way to obtain information on the company is through its annual reports or LinkedIn. Use this information to formulate questions that will show the recruiter that you are up-to-date and interested in the organization. See the Research a Company section below for more details.

### **Body Language**

Be confident, and show enthusiasm and interest for the position. Greet each person you meet with a firm handshake at and end of the interview with that same firm handshake. Be sure to maintain eye contact with all the interviewers, not just the person who asks the question. Sit up straight, but be relaxed with your arms and hands above the table. If you are not seated at a table, place your hands on your portfolio in front of you. Do not place anything on the interviewer's desk unless given permission to do so. Try not to fidget, and keep your hands away from your face and hair. Do not chew gum or smoke!

### **Communication**

The interviewer wants to know that you can do the job; marketing yourself effectively is the key to a successful interview. Present organized answers with specific examples to support them. Be clear and concise and always concentrate on your qualifications. Focus on the positive at all times and avoid using slang or jargon. Be sure to listen carefully and answer the question that is being asked. Do not be afraid to pause and ask for time to better reflect on the question. If you are not sure of what the interviewer is asking, it is perfectly acceptable to ask for clarification. Finally, be honest and assertive - let the interviewer know you are the right person for the job!

## **Researching a company:**

Researching a company will enable you to better target your job search correspondence – your resume and your cover letter – so that these documents stand out to recruiters within the organization. On average, hiring managers see at least 70 resumes per online job posting, so it is important to showcase that you have done your homework on their specific organization.

Gathering information and data about a company before applying for a position can prove to be quite useful when you obtain an interview. During this phase, you will be able to demonstrate your knowledge and motivation for working for the organization, enticing an employer to hire you.

There are specific things that are helpful to know about an employer and these pieces of information include:

- Duties of the position for which you are applying;
- Products and services that they offer
- Target markets and competitors
- Mission and values of the organization;

- Available opportunities for advancement;
- Long-term income potential within the organization;
- Other locations of the company;
- Direction of the organization (where do they see themselves going in the short-term, long-term?);
- Organizational hierarchy, CEO's name and his or her impact on the organization;
- History of the company and recent news.

It will also be important to examine characteristics that are most important to you – pay attention to those qualities as you gather information about an organization as well and compare them with what you would ideally want in a position.

Locate the above information by:

- Combing through the company's website and/or contacting an employer directly to initiate an informational interview
- Use online resources such as Glassdoor.com, Google News, and Plunkett Research
- Attending a job or internship search workshop sponsored by the Career Services Center and learning about additional resources

## Behavioral Based Interviewing:

Research has shown that job performance, job satisfaction and retention increase significantly if an organization hires the “right fit” for the organization. Employers want to know what you have done in the past, is a predictor of what you will do in the future and how you will perform on the job.

Many employers are trying to rate particular competencies in a candidate:

- |                                 |                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Communication- Oral & Written | • Business Insight        |
| • Team Orientation              | • Technical Skills        |
| • Leadership Skills             | • Customer Service Skills |
| • Project Management Skills     | • Professional Growth     |
| • Problem Solving Ability       |                           |

### The STAR Response:

When a recruiter gathers examples of behavior in an interview, he/she wants to get the “real story.” An easy way to give the recruiter the “real story” is to use the acronym STAR to describe a complete behavioral example. Responses to the questions should be framed with the STAR model in mind.

### Elements of a STAR

#### SITUATION/TASK THAT YOU FACED

- Describe a situation...
- What were the circumstances surrounding...?
- What was the most memorable time when that happened...?
- What did you do ...?

#### ACTIONS THAT YOU TOOK

- What exactly did you do in the situation...?
- What was your specific role or what steps did you take in the situation...?

#### RESULTS OR CHANGES CAUSED BY THESE ACTIONS

- What were the results...?
- How did it work out...?
- What problems/successes resulted from...?
- What feedback did you receive...?
- What lesson(s) did you learn...?

### **Top 10 Behavioral Interviewing Questions**

Tell me about a time when you....

- planned a project from beginning to end.
- resolved a conflict with a coworker or team member.
- persuaded others to do something.
- worked on a team project that didn't work out as you planned.
- your ethics or morals were challenged.
- experienced disappointment – what did you learn?
- were unable to complete a project on time.
- used data to prove a point.
- a team member wasn't pulling his/her weight.
- developed the trust of your fellow team members.

Write a response to any of the previous questions based on the STAR model. Practice answering the questions with a friend, family member, professor or career professional.

### **Examples:**

What has been your proudest accomplishment?

**Situation/Task:** When I was a junior in college, I was having difficulty with calculus. On my first test, four weeks into the class, I received a C- on the test, and I was really discouraged. This was the first time that I had received a C on any test. I knew that I had to do something differently, because I knew that the class was going to continue to be tough.

**Action:** I had always heard that tutoring was available to the students, but I had never taken advantage of the assistance. One day after class I asked my professor if she could give me some information about how to acquire the assistance of a tutor. I went on to tell her that I was struggling with the class, and wanted to strive for at least a B average. As luck would have it, she told me that she would be my tutor. We started meeting that week for two hours a week.

**Result:** Beyond the two hours that I spent with my professor, I also carved out an additional three hours to study on my own. This really helped me. On the next test, I received a B+, and on the final exam I received an A. For the final grade, I received a B+.

Describe a project in which a team/group member wasn't "pulling their weight"?

**Situation/Task:** Last year in my Fashion Merchandising class, I was paired with two other classmates and instructed to present a report on the marketing strategies of a large apparel company. Shortly after starting the project, one member decided not to show up to our planning meetings.

**Action:** I thought that it was important that they understand the role they play and how it affects our overall group project and grade. I contacted the team member to discuss what was preventing them from participating in our group. At which time, the team member revealed they were overwhelmed with other classes and indicated they would make a strong effort to contribute in future meetings.

**Result:** After our conversation the team member did show up to our next meeting and offered two companies to explore and suggested some resources that could be used. We ended up putting together a great presentation and received a good grade on the assignment.

## **Common Interview Questions:**

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- How would your boss or colleagues describe you?
- What attributes would your ideal job include?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Tell me how you would build a team out of independent individuals.
- What do you like to do best?
- What are the two most important decisions of your life?
- What important trends do you see in our industry?
- What is the biggest risk you ever took?
- Do you prefer working on a team or as an individual contributor?

## **Questions You Should Ask the Interviewer:**

Always have a list of questions ready to ask! Write them down ahead of time on the notepad in your portfolio. It shows that you have prepared ahead of time.

- What objectives would I be expected to meet?
- In what areas of the company do you expect growth?
- What do you like best about the company? What do you find most challenging?
- Are employees encouraged and given the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns?
- What type of relocation or training do new employees receive?
- Can you describe a typical workday in the department?
- What are the possibilities for personal growth and promotion?
- What types of learning opportunities are there?
- What kind of personal qualities are you looking for to fit this position?
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization?
- What are some of the more challenging aspects of this job?
- What are the company's plans for future growth?
- What are your expectations of new hires?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- What is the next step in the process?

## **After the interview:**

- Ask for a business card
- Shake hand and thank interviewer for his or her time
- Ask one of the following: "When will you be making a decision?" or "When will I be hearing from you?" You should always know what the next step is upon leaving the interview.
- Send a follow-up thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview. This is VERY IMPORTANT, as it serves to keep you fresh in the interviewer's mind, and it acknowledges the meeting. It also allows you to make an additional contact with the employer while demonstrating your writing skills and professionalism.

- Remember to address the interviewer by name in your letter, and if there was more than one person interviewing you, be sure to send a personalized letter to EACH recruiter. Keep it concise but make sure you address three main points:
  - That you paid attention during the interview;
  - That you can do the job and would be a positive contribution to the organization;
  - Include a phone number where you can be contacted.

## Sample Thank You For Interview Email:

Dear Ms. Smith,

Thank you for your time during my interview on March 5th at [Location] for the position of [Job Title]. I learned a great deal about [Employer] from our time together, and would like to reaffirm my interest in this position.

The opportunity to work for a company that is committed to developing and marketing quality apparel products and services is very appealing to me. As a [Job Title], I will be able to draw upon my education in Fashion Merchandising as well as my skills in analysis and organization to meet and exceed [Employer] commitment to excellence.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding the possibility of scheduling an on- site interview. If you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone at 215-951-0000 or by e-mail at [mye-mail@yourmail.com](mailto:mye-mail@yourmail.com).

Thank you once again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Craig Senior