

The First Job Interview

Introduction

Often it is the degree of preparation that makes the difference between a successful and unsuccessful interview candidate. Read carefully—the following information will guide you through your first interview and provide the groundwork for future success.

Prepare for the Interview

When an appointment is made for an interview, it is imperative for you to be fully prepared for it. There are three areas to cover in order to be properly prepared. They are as follows:

Know the Employer

This is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your research skills. It is important for you to find out as much as you can about the organization, agency, institution, etc., with which you are interviewing. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What does the organization make or what service does it provide?
- What is the size of the organization? What is its organizational structure? How much potential for advancement is there within this structure?
- Who are the organization's officers, administrators, etc.? Know something of their background and recent achievements.

Find out how the position you are applying for relates to the whole organization. Try to pinpoint some challenges, opportunities, policies, or philosophies of the organization, and plan to focus on these during the interview.

You can find some of this information in the Career Center Library, Strozier Library, or at the local library. Visit employer websites to find additional information. The following resources in the Career Center Library might be helpful to you:

- Employer Literature Files
- *Job Choices* Guides
- *Guide to Employer Directories*



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- *Almanac of American Employers*
- *Hoover's Handbook of American Business*
- *Directory of Florida Industries*
- *Florida Trend* magazine
- National Jobbank

This research can be very valuable to you during the interview. It will not only increase your self-confidence, but will also impress the interviewer. S/he will regard you as a person who has sincere interest in the organization because you took time to find out something about it. For additional information, see the *Researching Potential Employers Guide* in the Career Center or online at www.career.fsu.edu/advising/guides.html.

Know Yourself

You need to know many facts about the employer, and the interviewer needs to know many facts about you in order to make a fair evaluation. Interviewers are often amazed at answers they receive in response to the question: "Who are you and what do you want to do?" Before an interview, know what you have to offer the potential employer and organization.

Evaluate yourself in terms of your strengths, and how you could translate these strengths into skills your prospective employer can use. It is also helpful to know your weaknesses, as no one is perfect. If you are asked to state a weakness, do not elaborate on it. Instead, state steps you are taking to improve upon your weakness. For example, if you are shy and public speaking is difficult, think about taking a toastmasters course or volunteering to lead meetings or give presentations. This demonstrates that you are self-aware and proactively working to better yourself.

Be ready to talk about your career objectives, your short- and long-term goals, and your interests. Study your resume and be familiar with your education and experience. Practice illustrating how your extra-curricular activities are examples of skills in leadership and responsibility. The most important point to remember when preparing for an interview is that the prospective employer is primarily

concerned with hiring someone who will make a valuable contribution to the organization. Be prepared to tell an employer why you should be hired. With many applicants for the same job, it will be up to you to convince the interviewer that of all those interviewed, you are the best choice. To help prepare yourself, study the *Sample Questions* in this guide and use the Career Portfolio to identify and describe your skills.

Learn to Communicate Effectively

It is imperative for you to know yourself and the organization with which you are interviewing, but if you are unable to communicate your knowledge clearly and concisely, your interview will not be impressive. You must be able to express yourself to the interviewer.

The best way to improve your communication skills is to practice role-playing before the interview. **Consider participating in a mock interview** at the Career Center or ask a friend, your partner, or your roommate to help you simulate an interview. Use the sample questions in this guide to prepare. Make sure you are critiqued on your voice tone, body language, and eye contact.

Another suggestion for role-playing might be to get together with people who are also preparing for interviews. You could learn a lot by critiquing different approaches and comparing experiences might also be a good way to boost morale.

A critical point to remember while practicing, is to avoid memorizing what you want to say. If you come across like you have a speech prepared, your interview will be less effective.

You will be nervous during the interview. Concentrate on what is being asked and respond appropriately. Many people make their voices more monotone to sound professional. Don't! Speak as you normally would in conversation.

Another essential component of effective communication is active listening. Be sure to pay close attention to the interviewer's questions. Don't get distracted or daydream. Remember, take a moment after each question is asked to prepare a thoughtful, thorough answer.

Attend the Interview

Be on Time

It is better to be a few minutes early than one minute late for your interview. Interviewers have busy schedules and if you are late, it will cut down the amount of time allotted to you. Most important, if you are late you will make a bad initial impression.

Dress Appropriately

When seeking a professional position, you must look like a professional. A good guideline to follow is to dress as others do in the same occupation. Remember, the first impression is a lasting one.

Women: Wear a simply tailored suit or dress. Wear conservative nail polish and lipstick. Make sure your hairstyle is neat and professional. Leave flashy earrings in your jewelry box. Be moderate in use of perfume and makeup.

Men: Wear a clean, pressed, conservative suit with a subtle shirt and tie. Have your shoes shined and wear plain socks that match your suit color. Make sure your hair is neat and trimmed. Long hair and extremely long sideburns are considered unprofessional. Clean and trim your nails. Avoid gaudy or flashy jewelry.

For more on business dress, see the Career Center's *Dress to Impress* guide.

Anticipate the Interview Situation

The interview situation can vary from a one-to-one contact between you and an employee of the organization (human resources manager, campus recruiter, department manager, etc.), to a panel composed of several different employees or department heads representing various levels or functions. It is also possible you will have a single interview with an organization representative or a sequence of several interviews on a given day. Performance interviewing is another technique some organizations use. In this case, you will be asked to perform tasks which your possible job will entail in a limited amount of time. Mistakes are expected. The employer is looking at the way you handle yourself. In other situations,

especially academic settings, you may be asked to lecture or present in your area of expertise.

Another type of interviewing is called behavioral interviewing, where the employer seeks to predict future behavior by examining past behavior. Employers often use the STAR approach to gauge past behavior. When answering questions about previous jobs or responsibilities, be able to describe past work **S**ituations, **T**asks at hand, **A**ctions you took to complete the tasks, and the **R**esults you achieved. For more information on behavioral interviewing strategies, see articles in the Career Center Library Mobile File.

Break the Ice

Interviews are unpredictable and no two interviews are alike. Much depends upon the interviewer's personality and experience. Remember that your interviewer is in control, and your responses should reflect this dynamic. Interviewers usually try to make you as comfortable as possible as the interview begins. Often they start with basic questions from your resume. Since this information is familiar to you, the interview will become less tense. Be ready when the interviewer starts to concentrate on specific facts.

Answer the Interviewer's Questions

After an introduction, the interviewer will usually get to the point. Typical questions are:

- What was your major when you started college? What is it now?
- Did you change your goals? Why?
- How can a job with this organization help you meet your career objectives?
- What contributions do you see yourself making to our organization?

From this type of questioning, the interviewer can gauge whether you are looking for any job you can get or if you know yourself well and are trying to meet your needs through selective interviewing. The interviewer will attempt to assess your motivations as well as the way you operate. While a resume provides the facts, the interview provides the "why's and "how's."

During the interview, the most important thing to remember is to **be honest**. Interviewers will not be able to evaluate you fairly if you attempt to deceive them. Telling interviewers what you think they want to hear is not the purpose of the interview. If you are deceitful and interviewers sense this, the chance of being invited for a second interview is slim.

Be prepared to back up what you say. According to interviewers, too many applicants make statements that they are unable to prove. If you state that you have certain skills and abilities, cite specific examples where you have demonstrated them. The FSU Career Portfolio is a good way to document your skills and accomplishments.

Some interviews might include stress questions so that the interviewer can get to know you better. Stress questions usually involve problem-solving and have no right or wrong answers. The purpose of this type of questioning is to see how you think and react under pressure. For sample stress questions, visit the Career Center Library.

Be Prepared to Talk Salary (But don't bring it up first).

One question you should be ready to address is expected salary. On your resume it is not proper to mention salaries. You can even leave it open on your application form or write *negotiable*. But in an interview, you might be asked to state a figure. Know standard starting salaries for those with your general qualifications in similar positions. For salary information, consult resources in the Career Library, including the National Association of Colleges and Employers *Salary Survey*.

There are also several websites that provide salary information. One example is **www.salary.com**. Many other sites can be found by simply searching the Web using the term "salary" in conjunction with your desired position title. These sources can give you some idea of what your salary range will be. By knowing the rate

beforehand, you can be realistic in your terms. Candidates whose rates are too high might price themselves right out of the job. If you are too low, the interviewer might not consider you an ambitious person, and there is a chance you will not be given further consideration. Another possibility is that they might hire you at a lower rate and there will be no chance for renegotiating your salary.

One way to handle salary questions is to give a range. Be prepared to back up your salary request with specific information about your education and experience. Generally it is recommended that candidates allow employers to address salary. For more information, see the Career Center guide *Negotiating Job Offers*.

Ask the Interviewer Questions

During your pre-interview research, you should prepare some intelligent questions to ask your interviewer. Examples include:

- What training do you provide?
- How long is the training period?
- What is the normal progression of a trainee over the first few years?
- How much travel is required?
- Do you encourage continuing education and reimburse tuition?
- What options do I have in selecting/accepting assignments?
- What continuing staff training programs are available?

Never ask about vacation time or retirement. These are not work-related activities. You must talk opportunity, not security, although you can ask for more information regarding all fringe benefits. It can be helpful to prepare questions concerning the organization's markets, methods, and projected plans. Ask for general information, not how these issues will affect you. Interviewers will be impressed by your interest in the organization.

During the interview you should be sensitive to signs that it has run its course. Campus interviews are usually scheduled for twenty

or thirty minutes. Interviews end in different ways. Some interviewers might look at their watch, which is a cue for you that the interview is nearing an end; some interviewers are blunt by standing up, holding out their hand and thanking you for coming in. Most employer representatives however, expect you to sense the proper time to leave on the basis of subtle indications that your time is up.

When the interview is over, **thank the interviewer** for taking time to talk with you. Re-emphasize your interest in the position and your appreciation for being considered. This is important, since many candidates mistakenly assume that interviewers sense their interest.

If the interviewer does not offer you a job (this is very rarely done in the initial interview) or indicate when you will receive word, ask when you might hear about a second interview or an actual offer. This is important because even though the interviewer is interested in you, sometimes s/he may continue looking for a more qualified candidate. If the interviewer is impressed with your performance, you will probably be invited to visit the organization, meet other personnel and go through more extensive screening. It is usually after the second interview that a job offer is given. For help on these second interviews see the Career Center's guide on *Preparing for the Second Interview*. So in effect, the main purpose of an initial interview is to qualify you for a follow-up.

Follow-up After The Interview

Write a Letter of Thanks

Ask for the interviewer's business card and write a letter of appreciation, either as an e-mail or handwritten note. Previous communication with the organization may give you an idea of the best format to use. Make your letter more than a plain thank-you note. Tell the interviewer you are still interested in the position and review some of your qualifications discussed in the interview so that his/her memory will be refreshed. You also can include some pertinent questions that you did not ask in the interview. If the interviewer answers you quickly, this

might be an indication that the organization is interested. For further help, refer to the *Writing Effective Letters* guide.

Make each interview a learning experience

As soon as possible after the interview, write down what you have learned. Ask yourself:

- Which of my points interested the employer?
- Did I present my qualifications well?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I too tense? Was I too aggressive? Too passive?
- How can I improve my next interview?

By reviewing your performance, you can make plans to improve your skills. The more you interview, the sharper your skills become and the sooner you will receive an offer.

Sample Questions

- What are your short- and long-term goals and objectives? When and why did you establish these goals? How are you preparing to reach them?
- What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next 10 years?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- What do you expect to be earning in five years?
- Why did you choose the occupation for which you are preparing?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
- What motivates you to make your greatest effort?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your chosen occupation?
- Why should I hire you?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in this field?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- Why did you select your college or university?
- What led you to choose your major or field of study?
- What college subjects did you like best? like least? Why?
- If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
- What changes would you make in your college or university ? Why?
- Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
- Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
- What have you learned from previous jobs?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- How do you work under pressure?
- In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- Are you seeking employment in a organization of a certain size? Why?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Are you willing to spend six months as a trainee?
- Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our organization is located?
- What have you done that shows initiative?
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Describe an example where you worked as part of a team.

Questions adapted from *The Endicott Report: Trends in Employment of College and University Graduates in Business and Industry*, by Frank S. Endicott

Inspect Your Online Identity

Have you researched and cleaned up your on-line reputation?

If not, google yourself and check your social networking profile(s) to determine if the information out in cyberspace is incriminating, outdated, embarrassing, wrong, or not even about you. Even if you don't look yourself up, employers might, and it may cost you the interview, the job, and your professional reputation. Take these five steps to ensure your online identity is clean.

Step 1: Investigate

Use search engines to explore your on-line identity and check at least the first five results. Search:

- with your name in quotation marks
- your name and your school name, fraternity/sorority, organizations, middle name/initial, hometown, dorm, major, etc.

Examples of search engines to use include:

- www.google.com
- www.yahoo.com
- www.bing.com
- www.ask.com
- www.myspace.com (Search Engine)
- www.technorati.com (Blog Search Engine)
- www.blogsearch.google.com (Google Blog Search)
- www.video.google.com (Google Video Search)
- www.youtube.com (Video Search)

Step 2: Secure Facebook and MySpace Accounts

If you can't stand to do away with questionable material (politically incorrect, rude, explicit, sexist, etc.) on Facebook then change the privacy setting to restrict availability to only confirmed friends you trust. By doing so, recruiters and employers will not have access to your account. A good way to clean up your MySpace page is to remove negative pictures and blog entries.

Step 3: Ask for Help

Your editorial might have been published on your school newspaper's website, you might have added a comment to a blog, or someone might have posted information about you. If any of this information is damaging, you might want to ask the website owner or editor to remove the information. Ask nicely and be specific as to the page(s) or section(s) you are requesting to be removed.

If the case is extreme, you may want to consult with an attorney. If you are unable to have the information removed, be prepared to speak to an employer about your actions by turning the negative situation into a positive one.

Step 4: Become Your Own Online Agent

Build your professional identity by creating and posting positive and accurate information about yourself on sites such as: www.ziggs.com, www.zoominfo.com, and www.linkedin.com, which focus on career profiles.

You may want to add videos of you winning an award, giving a speech, or playing a sport to YouTube.com or video.google.com.

Step 5: Buy Your Own Domain Name

You can determine if your name is available by visiting this list of reputable domain name registrars.

- www.godaddy.com
- www.register.com
- www.networksolutions.com

Source: Adapted with permission from *Not Just Your Space: The College Student's Guide to Managing Online Reputation*, by Tom Drugan located at www.naymz.com/blog/?p=32.



