

The First Job Interview

Introduction

Often it is the degree of preparation that makes the difference between the successful and unsuccessful interview candidate. While this guide cannot guarantee success, the following three easy steps may improve your chances of doing well in a first interview.

Step 1: 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:

A. 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. For example, ask yourself the following questions:

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

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



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

- Employer Literature Files
- Job Choices Guides
- Guide to Employer Directories
- Almanac of American Employers
- Hoover's Handbook of American Business
- Directory of Florida Industries
- Florida Trend
- 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 Career Center's *Researching Potential Employers Guide*.

B. 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 given when they ask the question: "Who are you and what do you want to do?" Before an interview, **know what you have to offer a potential employer.**

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's perfect. If you state a weakness, do not elaborate on it. Try to turn it around into a potential strength for the organization.

Be ready to talk about your career objectives, your long- and short-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.

C. Learn to Communicate Effectively

Though it is imperative for you to know yourself and the organization with which you are interviewing, if you are unable to communicate your knowledge clearly and concisely, your interviewer(s) will not be impressed. You must be able to express yourself during your interview.

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, roommate, or significant other to help you simulate an interview. Use the *Sample Questions* in this guide and make sure you are critiqued on your strength of voice 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 this might also be a good way to boost each other's morale.

A critical point to remember while practicing, is to avoid memorizing what you want to say. Whether you are talking about yourself or the organization with which you are interviewing, let it be a natural flow of words. If you come across like you have a speech prepared, your interview will be less effective.

You probably 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. Use normal tone and don't speak too softly.

Step 2: Attend the Interview

A. 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 reduce the amount of time allotted to you. Most important, if you are late you will make a bad impression.

B. 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. Have hair neatly done. Leave flashy earrings in your jewelry box. Be moderate in use of perfume and makeup.

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

For more information on dressing appropriately, review the Career Center's *Dress to Impress* guide.

C. 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 representing various levels or functions.

The situation also can vary from a single interview with an organization representative to a sequence of several interviews on a given day. Performance interviewing, or in-basket interviewing, is another situation in which you might find yourself. 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 for the way you handle yourself.

Another type of interviewing is called behavioral interviewing, where the employer seeks to predict future behavior by examining past behavior. For behavioral interviewing strategies, see articles in the Career Center Library Mobile File. **Remember, you need to respond and actively participate in each interview. Don't assume what you have told the first interviewer will be communicated to others in the organization.**

D. Break the Ice

As stated in the introduction, interviews are unpredictable and no two interviews are alike. A lot depends upon the interviewer for s\he has control and you should respond to that control. At the beginning of the interview, interviewers usually try to make you as comfortable as possible. They often start with basic questions from your resume since this is information is familiar to you. Be ready when the interviewer starts to concentrate on specific facts.

E. Answer the Interviewer's Questions

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

1. What was your career objective when you entered college? What is it now?
2. Why did you change your goals? (If pertinent)
3. How can a job with this organization help you meet your career objectives?
4. What contributions do you see yourself making to our organization?

From this type of questioning, the interviewer will be able to know whether the candidate is just looking for a job by using a shotgun approach or whether a candidate has spent some time in self-appraisal and is trying to meet his/her needs through selective interviewing. The interviewer will also be assessing reasons or motivations for a candidate's actions or activities as well as the individual's style of operating. 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 your interviewers sense that you are being dishonest, the chance of being invited for a second interview is slim.

Another point to keep in mind: 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, be ready to cite specific examples where you have demonstrated them. FSU's online Career Portfolio is a good way to document your skills and accomplishments. Gathering this information in one place can help you speak about your strengths in an interview

During some interviews, the interviewer may ask some stress questions in order to know you better. Stress questions are usually problem-solving in essence, and there are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of this type of questioning is to see how you think and react under pressure. For more sample questions, visit the Career Center Library.

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

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

There are also a variety of Web sites that provide salary information. Examples include salary.com and salary.monster.com. Many other sites can be found by simply searching the Web using

the term "salary." These sources can give you some idea of what your salary range could 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 negotiating a salary figure. One way to handle salary questions is to give a salary range. Be prepared to back up your salary request with specific information about your education and experience. Generally however, it is recommended that candidates allow employers to address salary. For more information, see the Career Center guide *Negotiating Job Offers*.

G. Ask the Interviewer Questions

If you have done your pre-interview research, then you should have prepared some intelligent questions in advance. Some questions you might ask are:

- What kind of 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 (or accepting) assignments?
- What staff development programs are available after the initial training?

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

During the interview you should be sensitive to signs that the interview 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 hear from him/her, ask him/her to estimate a date when a decision might be made about another interview or an actual offer. This is important because even though the interviewer is interested in you, sometimes s/he may wait until s/he finds someone more qualified. 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. For help on these second interviews see the Career Center's guide on this topic. It is usually after this second interview(s) that a job offer will be given. So in effect, the main purpose of an initial interview is to qualify you for a follow-up.

Step 3: Follow-up After The Interview

A. Write a Letter of Thanks

Ask for the interviewer's business card and send him/her a note, either via e-mail or a handwritten note. Previous communication with the organization may give you an idea of the best format to use. Make it 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. Possibly include a couple of pertinent questions that you did not ask in the interview. If s/he answers you quickly, this might be an indication that s/he is interested in you. For further help, refer to the *Writing Effective Letters* guide.

B. 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? Not aggressive enough?
- How can I improve my next interview?

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

Sample Questions

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

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

Special Section: Inspect Your On-line Identity

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

If not, try Googling yourself and checking your social networking profile(s) to determine if the information out in cyberspace is incriminating, outdated, embarrassing, wrong, or not even about you. Social networking sites are one of the best things to ever happen for recruiters. If you don't look yourself up, employers will, and it may cost you the interview, the job, and your professional reputation. Don't get burned by your on-line identity, take these five steps to sanitize it instead.

Step 1: Investigate

Use these search engines to explore your on-line identity:

- Google.com
- Yahoo.com
- Search.msn.com
- Ask.com
- Search.myspace.com
(MySpace Search Engine)
- Technorati.com (Blog Search Engine)
- Blogsearch.google.com
(Google Blog Search)
- Video.google.com (Google Video Search)
- YouTube.com (Video Search)

Search:

- with your name in quotation marks
- your name and add your school name, fraternity/sorority, organizations, middle name/initial, hometown, dorm, major, etc.
- at least the first 3 – 5 search engine results

Step 2: Secure FaceBook and MySpace Accounts

If you can't stand to do away with the questionable material (politically incorrect, rude, explicit, hateful, sexist, etc.) on FaceBook then change the privacy setting to restrict availability to only the confirmed friends you trust. By doing so, past graduates won't be able to allow recruiters or employers to view your account. The best way to clean up your online profile pages is to remove negative pictures and blog entries.

Step 3: Ask for Help

Your editorial might have been published on your school newspaper's Web site, you might have added a comment to someone's blog, or someone might have posted information about you. If any of this information is damaging, you might want to ask the Web site owner or editor to remove the information. Ask nicely and be specific as to the page(s) and the 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, then 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: Ziggs.com, ZoomInfo.com, and LinkedIn.com, which focus on career profiles.

You may want to add videos of 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, just be cautious if your first and last name can mean something inappropriate when joined together:

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

Source: Adapted from *Not Just Your Space: The College Student's Guide to Managing Online Reputation*, by Tom Drugan.





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Alternative Format Available.
Revised 3/09 Pub ID: 44
