Career Services
University of La Verne

JOB AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

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Job Interviewing

An interview is a **mutual exchange of information** between two people in order for both to evaluate the fit between the applicant and the organization. As a candidate, don’t forget that you are also interviewing them; you should be thinking about whether or not the company or job is best for you.

**Screening/initial interview** - intended to eliminate candidates who do not possess the necessary qualifications. Interviews conducted over the phone or at a career fair are usually screening interviews. They are short (30 minutes-1 hour) and are meant to evaluate any or all of the following:
- experience
- education
- technical skills/abilities
- soft skills (i.e., enthusiasm, initiative, maturity, leadership potential)

**Selection/final interview** - longer and more thorough, lasting anywhere from an hour to an entire day. A candidate will visit the organization and may meet with a series of people throughout the course of the interview.

**Behavioral Interview**
(adapted from “Acing the Behavioral-Based Interview” on Jobweb.com and quintcareers.com)

Employers know that they can teach you the techniques needed to do a job- what they can’t teach are social skills, self-management and communication abilities, or **soft/transferrable skills**. In order to measure these skills, they will ask questions that require you to give an example or tell a story about a task, accomplishment, or even a difficult situation you faced. The goal is to measure how you responded to a situation and what you learned or gained from it. When answering these questions, remember:

**S.T.A.R.**
- **S**ituation/Task
  Describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a job, volunteer position, academic assignment or campus involvement. Avoid personal experiences.
- **A**ction you took
  Describe the action you took; be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don’t tell what you might do, tell what you did.
- **R**esults
  What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? If the situation turned out poorly, what would you do differently?

**Examples of Behavioral Interview Questions:**
- Can you remember a situation in which you demonstrated real compassion to a teammate when it would have been easier not to? Tell me about a time when you put your own work aside to help someone else.
- Tell me about a time when you took a calculated risk to achieve a goal, but were unsuccessful. What did you learn? What about a time you championed an idea, but failed to convince others? What did you learn?
- Can you tell me about a time when you felt that you exceeded the needs of a professor, supervisor, or team? What did you do and why was it successful?
- This position requires you to interact with customers who are often frustrated or in a hurry. Tell me about your experience working in a fast-paced environment. How do you handle angry or disgruntled clients?

**Preparing for the Interview**

Jobs are usually offered to the person who can best communicate his/her interest and skills related to the position. This person may or may not be the most experienced or even qualified candidate. Before you head into an interview, **PREPARE**!

1. **Know the organization**—research the company and be able to answer these questions:
   - What is the organizational structure, history, and philosophy/mission statement?
   - What are the company’s locations and products or services?
   - Have they shown substantial and/or consistent growth?
• Who are their major competitors? What other companies are in the same market or field?
• Where do they stand in the marketplace in relation to their competitors?
• Has there been and is there likely to be any major change in the company’s field (i.e. technological changes, labor market changes, etc.)?

*Along with the company’s website, Vault.com and glassdoor.com offer insider information via employee surveys, general statistics and message boards.

2. **Know the position—what type of employee are they looking for?**

Become very familiar with the job description, and required and preferred qualifications. Also, review the company’s mission statement. Think of examples from your professional/academic career that demonstrate you have these skills (remember S.T.A.R!) Below are listed some of the most common attributes or qualities that interviewers look for.

- Interpersonal skills
- Written and oral communication
- Leadership/motivation/initiative
- Analytical abilities
- Work ethic
- Sensitivity to others, especially within multicultural settings
- Planning/organization/time management
- Sales ability/persuasiveness
- Goal setting and work standard

3. **Know yourself—be ready to speak to all of these areas!**

**Your Interests and Values:** What career fields or type of work inspire you? What is important to you in a work environment? Are your general interests consistent with the particular job for which you are interviewing? You may be asked, "Why do you want to work in this field?"

**Your Personality:** How do you relate to others? Be sure you understand your style and what you contribute as a member of a team.

**Your Skills and Abilities:** What are you good at? What skills do you have that will contribute to the organization? What skills do you need to acquire for this job?

**Your Experience:** What have you done that qualifies you for this position? Consider all previous jobs, volunteer work, academics, and any other experiences you’ve had.

**Your Education:** What education and training do you have that qualifies you for this position?

**Your Goals:** What do you want to be doing in 5 or 10 years? Clearly define short and long range goals. Employers look favorably upon candidates who have well-defined goals, but be sure not to communicate that you are using the position as a stepping stone to get a better job.

4. **Practice—set up a mock interview in Career Services and review commonly asked interview questions (see page 5).**

5. **Other Preparation Tips**

• Know where to go and be on time. If you are at all uncertain of the location, call for the exact address/directions and allow extra time for traffic. Don’t be more than 10 minutes early; if you arrive before then, use the extra time to relax or prepare in your car.
• Be sure to know the name and title of your interviewer. Greet the interviewer with a smile, a firm handshake and good eye contact.
• Bring at least one extra copy of your resume with you since you may need it for reference if filling out an application. Also bring your references page.
• Bring a pen and notebook. Take notes during the interview, but be sure to ask for permission. Also bring a list of the questions you plan to ask the employer.
Dressing for the Interview

Your clothes say a lot about you. Employers will generally assume they are seeing you at your best. If you are not looking your best, they may wonder how much worse it can get. A good rule of thumb is to know what the typical dress norms are for the organization, and dress one step above that. Always dress conservatively.

For traditional business settings (banking, consulting, insurance, etc.):

**For Men**
- Dark colored or charcoal tailored suit (double or single breasted), well pressed.
- Long sleeve, wrinkle free 100% cotton shirt, usually white, light blue, pastel or pin-striped.
- Ties should be plain or have a conservative stripe, paisley or a small print.
- Do not wear red- this is a “power” color and is not appropriate until you get the job.
- Tie should extend to the belt buckle, not below or above.
- Calf length socks that match the color of the suit and coordinate with the shoes (black or dark blue).
- Black or brown dress shoes (loafers or wing-tips), polished.
- Accessories may include a classic metal or leather watch, wedding ring if married and briefcase.

**For women**
- Dark colored business skirt, suit or pantsuit. Skirt length can be on or just above the knee; avoid mini-skirts.
- Solid colored (bright colors or neutrals are allowed) collared blouses with sleeves no shorter than elbows; avoid plunging necklines and sheer materials.
- Closed-toe shoes in a dark color, polished. No sandals or extremely high heels.
- Skin-toned or dark sheer hosiery, avoid patterns.
- Simple and conservative make up and jewelry.
- Hair pulled back and bangs out of face.

For arts, education, non-profit, and other settings, the following may also be appropriate:
- Dress slacks plus sport coat (wool or wool/polyester blend) or dark blazer.
- Dress shirt, tie and dress shoes.

**For other settings, the following may also be appropriate:**
- Dress with jacket.
- Jacket, skirt and blouse.
- Nylons and flats or medium heeled pumps.

**General Tips:**
- Avoid distracting hair styles, jewelry, nail polish.
- For men, clean shaven is best, but a short mustache/beard is acceptable.
- Cover piercings and tattoos.
- Have neatly groomed, neutral colored fingernails.

No scented lotion, cologne or perfume- you may be meeting someone who is allergic!
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
(adapted from Business Week Careers Job Search)

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. What makes you stand out from the other candidates for this position?
3. Why do you want to work at this company?
4. What is one of your greatest accomplishments in your former positions?
5. What are your greatest strengths? What are your biggest weaknesses?
6. Where do you see yourself in five years? What are your long term goals?
7. What do you do to manage stress in a high stress work environment?
8. Describe your relationship with your last supervisor. What were the best and most challenging aspects of that relationship? What would your last supervisor say about you?
9. What do you expect from a supervisor and colleagues in order to be productive in the work place?
10. Why are you leaving your current or most recent position?
11. How do you schedule your time and determine priorities?
12. What aspect of this job do you think would be most challenging for you?
13. What was your biggest disappointment? How did you cope with it?
14. Tell me about your most recent work history. How does it qualify you for this position?
15. Can you think of a recent problem in which old solutions wouldn’t work? How did you solve it?
16. Tell me about a time in which you demonstrated initiative and creativity. How do you think these attributes help you to do your job better?
17. Give me three words that describe you.
18. Tell me about a time that a colleague or co-worker criticized your work. How did you handle it?
19. What questions do you have for me?

Questions you might ask the interviewer:

1. In your opinion, what is the personality of this organization?
2. Can you tell me about the people with whom I would be working on a daily basis?
3. How would you describe your management style?
4. What are the best aspects and most challenging aspects of your job? Why do you stay in your position?
5. What are the organization’s goals, objectives, and direction this year?
6. What are the opportunities for growth/new responsibilities in this position?
7. What do you think is the biggest problem I would face in starting this position?
8. Where did my predecessor go? How long was he/she with you?
9. What are the intangible expectations for the position as well as the job description?
10. What kind of ongoing training does the organization offer?
11. What opportunity for performance reviews/evaluations would there be? I want to be able to regularly receive feedback so I can be sure that I am performing well in my position.

HANDLING ILLEGAL QUESTIONS
(Adapted from “Planning Job Choices 2000”)

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

1. You can answer the question—you’re free to do so, if you wish. However, if you choose to answer an illegal question, remember that you are giving information that isn’t related to the job; in fact, you might be giving the “wrong” answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.

2. You can refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of coming off as uncooperative or confrontational—hardly words an employer would use to describe the “ideal” candidate.

3. You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, the interviewer asks, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” or “What country are you from?” You’ve been asked an illegal question. You could respond, however, with “I am authorized to work in the United States.”
Similarly, let’s say the interviewer asks, “Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?” You might answer, “I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires.”

### Examples of some illegal questions and their legal counterparts

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<tr>
<th>Inquiry Area</th>
<th>Illegal Questions</th>
<th>Legal Questions</th>
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| 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 US?  
What languages do you read/speak/write fluently? |
| Age                     | How old are you?  
When did you graduate?  
What is your birth date? | Are you over the age of 18? |
| Marital/Family Status   | What is your marital status?  
With whom do you live?  
Do you plan to have a family? When?  
How many kids do you have?  
What are your childcare arrangements? | Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?  
Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job?  
Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? |
| Personal                | How tall are you? How much do you weigh? (Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential for the safe performance of the job.) | Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry 100 yards, as that is part 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 them and give dates when these occurred.  
What was the date of your last physical exam?  
How’s your family’s health?  
When did you lose your eyesight? How?  
Do you need an accommodation to perform the job? *This question can be asked only after a job offer has been made.* | Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? (This question is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.)  
Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?  
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 exam results. |
| Arrest Record           | Have you ever been arrested? | Have you ever been convicted of ____?  
The crime named 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? |
Informational Interviewing
(adapted from quintcareers.com)

Purpose: Informational interviews with a professional in your field of interest will help you gain better understanding and insight into a particular field or company. You may bring your resume, but do not assume that the professional will want a copy of it. Also, NEVER ask for a job or assume that he/she will help you to find one.

Be sure to research the field and company beforehand so you can tailor your questions to that person’s situation. Dress professionally and ask if you may keep in touch with the person in case you have more questions regarding their career. Send a hand-written thank you card directly after the interview.

Informational interviewing calling/emailing script example:

“I am a student at University of La Verne and thinking about exploring a career in book publishing. I got your name from the Assistant Director of Career Services, who suggested I contact you to talk about how you began your career. I am very interested in hearing about how you got into publishing and any advice you might have for me. Would you have about 30 minutes to sit down with me so I can ask you a few questions?”

Sample Interview Questions
(choose up to ten and tailor to your needs)

1. “How did you become interested in this field?”
2. “What do you think is the best educational preparation for a career in this field?”
3. “Of all the individuals you have met in this field, what personal attributes do you think are essential to success?”
4. “What professional journals and organizations should I know about in this field?”
5. “What do you wish you had known before you got into this field?”
6. “What did it take for you to get into this position?”
7. “What skills are required of a (insert professional title) on a day to day basis?”
8. “What is a typical work day like for you?”
9. “How many hours a week do you work? How often do you work overtime?”
10. “What more do you think I need to know to make an informed decision on graduate school or a career in this field?”
11. “How long do people stay in this field? Do you know why they leave?”
12. “Who are the most important people in this field and what are the current changes and developments?”
13. “What type of work/volunteer/internship experience do you think I need to get?”
14. “What do entry level/mid-level/senior level positions require in terms of education/experience?”
15. “What are other job titles comparable to technical writer?”
16. “What do you believe the current hiring trends are in your field? Do you believe there will be a need for entry/mid-level/senior level positions if I decide to apply?”
17. “What industry experience do most of the members of the board of directors have in common?”
18. “Regarding promotions, how quickly have most managers gotten to the top of this field?”
19. “Can you suggest anyone else whom it would be helpful to talk to? May I use your name when contacting him/her?”