The Employment Interview

CAREER SERVICES…
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Cardinal Stritch University

(414) 410-4157 • (800) 347-8822 Ext. 4157 • FAX (414) 410-4160
Visit us at http://career.stritch.edu, or e-mail us at career@stritch.edu

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The Interview

The interview is a **CRUCIAL** step in your job search. It gives you the opportunity to display your:

- Strengths
- Personality
- Enthusiasm

During an interview, employers want to know:

- Can you successfully perform the job?
- Will you fit into the organization?
- Will you stay for a reasonable amount of time?

Although these questions may not be directly asked, they will assuredly be on the interviewer's mind. Every answer you give should provide support to one of these three areas:

- Your **Ability** to do the job
- Your **Suitability** for the job and the company
- Your **Willingness** to give time to the job

An interview is by no means a one-way street. You, the interviewee must also be seeking some answers. Some questions you must internally answer, based on the information you obtain about the company and the position, are:

- Will this position's responsibilities fit well with who I am?
- Will I be happy working in this industry?
- Will I be a good match for this particular organization?

What is the **key** to an effective interview??? **PREPARATION**!!!

Being unprepared for an interview indicates to an employer that you would probably be unprepared with your work assignments as well. Employer's state: "The main reason candidates fall short in an interview is that they don't inspire confidence." Confidence is rooted in knowledge, which is in turn rooted by preparation.

What should you prepare?

- Knowledge of **Yourself**
- Knowledge of the **Organization**
- **Verbal Communication** Skills
- **Non-verbal Communication** Skills
- **Appearance**

What Employers Want

- Interpersonal Skills
- Internships/ Experience
- Teamwork
- Flexibility
- Critical Thinking
- Honesty/Strong Work Ethic
- Communication
- Leadership
- Self-Motivation
- Self-Confidence

Which of these areas do you possess? How can you illustrate them?

What You Have

Write down your answers to the following questions. **Be as specific as possible!**

What **Skills** and **Abilities** do you own?
- What *specific examples* can you give to demonstrate them?
- How do they relate to the position you are interviewing for?

What basic **Values** and **Attitudes** do you hold?
- How do they relate to the world, others and yourself?

What are your **Career Goals**?

What **Types of Work** excite and/or inspire you?

What **Kind of Job** do you really want?

What **Knowledge Bases** can you exhibit?
- How has your education both on and off campus contributed? (Be specific.)

What have you gained from your **Work Experiences?**

"Nothing great has ever been done without enthusiasm."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

What You Need to Know

Never go to any interview without **thoroughly researching the organization** offering the job.

Some areas you could research include:
- History
- Products/services offered
- Size/organizational structure
- Reputation
- Promotional activities
- Prospects for growth or change
- Financial stability
- Philosophy
- Locations
- Industry trends/problems
- Major Competitors
- Weaknesses

How do you find this information????

- Come to Career Services!!!
- Ask for the full job description
- Review annual reports, brochures and internal publications (i.e. newsletters)
- Look through recent business magazines, trade magazines
- Talk with anyone that might know about or be employed by the organization
- Check company sites on the Internet
- Contact the Better Business Bureau
- Check the Cardinal Stritch University and public libraries

Being able to converse intelligently about the organization will create a favorable impression. Research coupled with being able to ask pertinent questions and discuss the organization (and field) with some degree of familiarity will reflect your ability to be a self-starter.

"If they haven't prepared for the interview by knowing about my company, it raises serious questions about how they would perform on the job."

- told to Changing Times magazine by an employer

What to Say...

- Give clear and concise answers.
- Provide a quick, simple example to clarify your response.
- Ask for clarification if you are not certain of the question.
- Do not hesitate to pause, collect your thoughts and then answer.
- Relate your answer to the position.
- Do not lie.
- Remember, the interview is a two-way street. You are making decisions, also.

...and How to Say It

Behavioral Based Interview

Behavioral based interviewers believe that past behavior is an accurate predictor of future behavior. They concentrate many of their questions on situations that candidates have encountered in the past. What they want to hear is an illustration of your behavior. Typical questions focus on understanding the situation or challenge, your actions and their results. To maximize the effectiveness of your answers, try using the **STAR SYSTEM.**

ST = Describe a **situation**. (one - two sentences)
A = Explain the **action** you took. (one - four sentences)
R = Talk about the positive **results**, quantifying if possible. (one - three sentences)

An example of the **STAR** system:

***Sample question*:**

"What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?"

***Sample answer*:**

"I worked for a summer in a small warehouse. I found out that a large shipment was due in a couple of weeks and that there was very little space. The rear of the warehouse was disorganized and the inventory system was outdated (**Situation**), so I came in on a Saturday, figured out how much room was needed, cleaned up the mess in the rear and catalogued it all on new inventory forms (**Action**). When the shipment arrived, the truck just backed in. There was even room to spare and the new inventory system saved us a good deal of time (**Results**)."

- For other sample questions, see the "What You Could Be Asked" section on page 7.

Actions Speak Louder than Words

We speak with our voices and also **communicate** with our:

- Posture
- Facial Expressions
- Hands
- Actions
- Body Language
- Mouth

Are you aware of how you communicate and of what you are communicating?

Key points to remember:

- Shake the person's hand firmly and look him/her in the eye.
- Do not sit down until invited to do so.
- Maintain good eye contact, but do not stare at the person continuously. It is natural to have less eye contact while speaking and to have more while listening.
- Smile when appropriate. Be natural. (Deep breathing reduces stress.)
- Watch out for distracting personal habits: touching your hair, shaking your crossed leg, biting your nails, fiddling with your pen. Focus on the person(s) in front of you.
- Utilize your natural body language to emphasize what you are saying. Sitting up in your chair, leaning forward slightly, smiling and moving your hands as you speak will demonstrate enthusiasm.

Practice! Practice! Practice!

Practice makes perfect. Try to answer some of the questions listed in the "What You May Be Asked" section. Three ways to improve your verbal and non-verbal skills:

1. In front of a camera - ideal for observing verbal and non-verbal communication skills.
2. Audiotape - play back and really listen to how you came across.
3. Ask a friend to role-play and provide feedback.

The bottom line… "Would you hire yourself?"

You Never Get a Second Chance... to Make a First Impression

Whether we like it or not, first impressions carry a lot of weight in an interview. Appearance is about 90% of an employer's first impression, so this is definitely worth your time and effort.

Get it together!

- Wear polished, professional shoes
- Makeup should be soft, simple and subtle.
- Nails should be manicured. (Natural color polish if any.)
- If you are concerned with bad breath, eat a mint or use a breath spray right before the interview. (Never, never chew gum – even in the waiting area!)
- Wear simple jewelry.
- Do not wear perfume or cologne – what smells lovely to you may smell offensive to the interviewer.
- Don't smoke before or during an interview. Make certain your clothing does not smell like smoke.
- Women – carry one item only, preferably a briefcase or folder, not a purse.

Clothing should be the best you can afford. Invest the time and money in your wardrobe that your future deserves. Wear new clothing for a while before the day of the actual interview so that when the day arrives you are accustomed to the outfit and comfortable with it. If you feel really good in your attire, it will show in your self-confidence!

When dressing for an interview, your main objective is to look like the professional job for which you are applying. Try to find out ahead of time what the norms are for your career field and even for the company itself. Anything that draws attention to what you are wearing and away from what you are saying should not be worn to a job interview.

What if you are told to come in "business casual"? Ask exactly what that means! Then be certain that you do not under dress. You want to look professional.

Remember to make a last-minute stop in the restroom just before your interview to confirm your personal appearance!

Questions regarding attire?

Visit Career Services – BH201, or call (414) 410-4157 or (800) 347-8822 ext. 4157.

What to Expect

Rule Number One: Be sure your answering machine has a **professional sounding message** recorded on it. Ask roommates, friends or parents to answer the phone and take messages with professionalism. (A greeting of "Joe's house of beer" or "Grand Central Station" will not impress prospective employers!!!)

Phone Interview:

Be prepared. This interview may or may not be scheduled in advance. If you are busy or not prepared, set a time convenient for both of you.

- Keep a folder by the phone with a copy of your resume, a notepad and pen.
- When called by an employer, move to a quiet spot (away from roommates, noisy dishwashers, loud pets and televisions).
- When a phone interview is scheduled, have in front of you company information and a copy of your cover letter and resume.
- Smile while speaking - the enthusiasm will carry through your voice.
- A final hint – ignore your call waiting!!!

One-On-One Interview:

One person will decide your suitability for the position and whether you should advance to the next step of the hiring process. How much rapport can you establish?

Group Interview:

Groups are often made up of individuals from different areas of the organization such as the direct supervisor, a co-worker, the head of a collaborating department and/or a person from human resources.

- If a particular chair is not mentioned when you are asked to take a seat, be sure to select one that will enable you to have unobstructed eye contact with each individual. A seat at the head of the table may feel uncomfortable to you, but it will be the best place for you to both listen and speak from.
- When responding to one interviewer's question, don't forget about the other individuals in the room. It is appropriate to focus on the individual who asked the question, but be certain to make eye contact with everyone while answering.
- Write down everyone's name and title (for later when you send personalized thank-you letters to each individual).

What You Could Be Asked

Education/Background

- Why did you select your college or university?
- What college subjects did you like the least? Best?
- What are your skills or strengths? Areas to improve?
- I see that you worked as an intern. How did you go about getting the opportunity? What skills did you gain as a result?

Skills/Achievements

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would you describe yourself?
- What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction? Why?
- Tell me about a time when a co-worker criticized you in front of others. How did you respond? *
- Have you ever been instrumental in anticipating a problem before it happened? Could you tell me about it?
- Why should I hire you?

Traits/Values/Beliefs

- How would others describe you?
- What motivates you?
- How do you determine and evaluate success?
- Why are you interested in this organization specifically?
- Could you give me an illustration of when a collaborative effort worked well?
- Tell me about a time:
  - When you failed to meet a deadline. *
  - When you had to adapt to a difficult work situation.
  - When you worked with someone you disliked and how you handled the situation.

Work/Career

- What are your long and short-term career goals?
- Where do you see yourself in three years? In five years?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates.
- Tell us about the best supervisor that you have had. What about the worst supervisor? *
- What was your biggest challenge in your last position? How did you meet this challenge?
- Give us an example of your ideal work environment.

*** The answers to some questions may seem negative. When this happens, be certain to state what you learned from the experience.**

What You Could/Should Ask

It is your responsibility to interview the employer. What information do you need before you can make a good decision? Employers want you to care about where you work. Your questions will indicate your level of interest.

- Major challenges/primary responsibilities of the position
- How and when evaluation and feedback are delivered
- How the position fits into the "big picture" of the company
- Skills successful employees possess
- Training opportunities available
- What employees like best and least
- about the department/company
- Reason for position vacancy / rate of turnover
- Who your co-workers and/or your
- supervisor will be
- Mission / goals / philosophy / vision of the organization
- Whether or not employees are encouraged
- to express their ideas and concerns

What You Want to Look For

- Do the employees seem happy?
- Are they friendly and helpful?
- Do the employees seem to enjoy their jobs?
- Do they like/respect their organization?
- Do you feel welcome?
- What do you think of the site and facilities?
- How will the management style work for you?

How to Close an Interview

1. Highlights of why you should be hired.
2. Appreciation for the interview opportunity.
3. Ask for the job.
4. Process and timing of the hiring decision.

What Winners Don't Forget

Whew, you made it through your interview. But wait…there is more!!!

- Within twenty-four hours, you must send a **typed thank you letter** to the employer.
- Send a personalized thank-you letter to each individual with whom you interviewed.
- If you have decided that you are no longer interested in the position, you should indicate your withdrawal from candidacy.
- Record the name of the interviewer, place, date, time, a short review of the conversation and what you wore.

How Did You Do?

You can learn from your successes and failures. Build upon each interview to make the next even more successful.

Interview Review

On a scale of 1-5 (5 being the highest), how well did I…

1 Know myself: convey interests, values, skills and accomplishments in an effective and concise manner and relate them to the employer's needs?
2. Provide clear, professional, concise answers using the STAR system?
3. Ask for clarification, then pause and collect thoughts before answering?
4. Convey career goals?
5. Show preparation, organization and motivation?
6. Listen carefully to the questions and respond to the specific content of the questions?
7. Appear confident and enthusiastic?
8. Maintain good body posture and eye contact?
9. Ask for the job?

How else can I improve?

Thank You Letter Format

2422 Sarasota Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53209

March 5, 1999

Ms. Sara Burnett
Employment Representative
DBNMA Company
37546 Glen Road
Milwaukee, WI 53209

Dear Ms. Burnett:

Opening Paragraph: Thank the person for your interview. Refresh the employer's mind by stating the date and time of your meeting, the positions(s) discussed and/or the topics covered.

Middle Paragraph: Reaffirm your interest in the organization and mention how several items that were discussed affected your general outlook of the company, or interest in the position. If there was a personal characteristic, work experience, or other type of pertinent information that you did not mention during the interview, use this letter to convey it to the interviewer.

Closing Paragraph: If applying for a specific job, state your continued interest and offer a phone number or address at which you can be reached for any further questions. Finally, in all cases, thank the person for their time and consideration in meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Signature

Type your name here
Type your telephone number here

Upon Not Receiving An Offer

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone that interviewed you wanted to hire you? If your experience parallels the national average, you will receive one job offer for every ten interviews. Unfortunately…

REJECTION WILL BE AN INEVITABLE PART OF YOUR JOB SEARCH

When you are turned down, it is important to react professionally. Be certain the employer knows:

a) You would still like to work for them,
b) You would like to be kept in mind for future openings, and
c) You would appreciate any suggestions they might have for other companies you should contact.

Always close a company contact the same way you began, in a courteous, businesslike and enthusiastic manner. (You may be their second choice, and if the person they hire does not accept, you may still receive an offer.)

How can you stay "up", though, after hearing several "no's"?

Be pragmatic. Look at the rejection as a learning experience. Ask yourself if there is a discernible pattern to the rejections you are encountering that might give you some insights.

Depersonalize the issue. Rejection does not mean you are not capable or that you aren't qualified. It simply means that the employer chose someone else.

Look at the grief issue. Think about what you lost in the situation, remembering that you can only lose something that you owned. Realistically, what did you own before the interview that you now have lost? Time and effort, most likely, but not the job.

Take a long-term perspective. Realize that you will have to handle rejection throughout your career. After you are employed you may be told "no" regarding projects, promotions or desires to transfer or relocate. Your response to being told no -- and how you say no to others -- will define a great part of your future career success.

The most effective job searchers are the most active. A "no" may be a disappointment, but in an active campaign you will have other opportunities that you are in the midst of pursuing.

Decide that you will be successful; then put every ounce of physical and mental energy into the effort of making your goal come true. It will!

"We fail toward success." - Peter Drucker

Last, But Certainly Not Least!!!

Things to remember:

- Before the day of the interview, drive to the interview location (preferably at a comparable time of the day when your interview will be held). Note construction, traffic and parking possibilities so that you can plan accordingly and face less stress on the actual day of your interview.
- Drive courteously. It would not be beneficial to cut off a car whose driver ends up on your interview panel!
- Arrive in the location you are to be interviewed about five minutes early. (This means in the appropriate office, not the parking lot or main building.)
- When you arrive at the location, continue being polite and courteous to EVERYONE that you meet. Support-staff are often part of hiring decisions.
- Smile and be **positive**. The weather is wonderful, the drive was pleasant, you found every thing just fine (especially since you drove the route previous to the day), sitting and waiting for the interviewer who is ten minutes late will be no problem, etc. No one wants to hire a complainer.
- Relax. Remember, the chances are very high that the interviewer(s) are more pressured than you are. They have the difficult task of trying to find an excellent employee that will meet their needs and be a good fit for their organization.

Sources for Success...
The Career Services Resource Library

Self-Assessment

Map Your Journey – Career Assessments for Guidance Career Services
What Color is Your Parachute? also on CD-ROM Richard Bolles
Unlocking Potential Scheiber and Talpers
Career Development – Taking Charge of Your Career Monica Breidenbach
The Career Discovery Project Gerald M. Sturman, Ph.D.
Do What You Are Tieger, Barrow-Tieger
The Key to Your Unknown Talent Donald Seymour
I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was Barbara Sher

Organization Research

Non-Profit Organizations in the Milwaukee Area
Wisconsin Services Directory
Wisconsin Manufacturers Register
Job Opportunities in .....Series
Chicago JobBank
Wisconsin JobBank
Minneapolis, St. Paul JobBank

Verbal and Non-verbal Issues of Interviewing

Interview for Success Krannich and Krannich
Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed H. Anthony Medley
In Search of the Perfect Job
Dynamic Answers to Interview Questions Krannich and Krannich
"Do you know what to say in an interview?" (Video tape)
"Effective Answers to Interview Questions" (Video tape)
Adams Job Interview Pro - CD-ROM

Interview Questions

Knock 'Em Dead with Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions Martin John Yate
Employment Interviewing – Joan Lloyd's Pocket Guide
Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed H. Anthony Medley
Interview for Success Krannich and Krannich
Dynamic Answers to Interview Questions Krannich and Krannich
Adams Job Interview Almanac
Getting Your First Real Job J. Michael Farr

Follow-up and Thank-you Letters

200 Letters for Job Hunters William S. Frank
Career Development: Taking Charge of Your Career Monica E. Breidenbach
Job Search Letters That Get Results Krannich and Krannich
The Resume Solution David Swanson