EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

The interview is an expected part of the selection process for employment, internships, and many graduate and professional programs. It explores a candidate’s interests and qualifications beyond what is provided in a resume, application, vitae, or cover letter. But, the interview is a two-way process. While the interviewer’s goal is to find the best candidate, the interview is also an opportunity for the candidate to gain insight into the position and organization to determine if it is, in fact, a good fit. Both parties give and receive information during an interview. Approach your interviews as a two-way conversation rather than an interrogation and you will be more successful.

The Process

The interviewing process can be intimidating if you don’t know what to expect. Even though interviews range from 30 minutes to several hours, or a day or more, most interviews fit general patterns that share common characteristics: the beginning, middle, and conclusion. The beginning of the interview usually consists of small talk, but don’t be fooled, you are being evaluated. First impressions count in an interview situation! Don’t hesitate to extend your hand first when introduced; it shows assertiveness and confidence!

The middle of the interview focuses on the organization, position, and your qualifications. This is the longest part of the interview. The interviewer will most likely describe the organization and position, ask questions, and then it is usually your turn to ask questions. Need help with that? Keep reading.

The close of the interview is just as important as the other two parts. The interview isn’t over until you have left the building, so it is important to remain courteous and enthusiastic. You want to leave the interviewer with a good impression and sense of who you are.

Follow up! One of the most important things you can do after the interview is to send a thank-you email or letter within 24-48 hours of the interview! The letter should be brief, but communicate your appreciation for the interview, highlight aspects of the conversation you found helpful, restate your interest, and provide any additional information requested. For sample thank you letters see the guide on Cover Letters.

Preparing for the Interview

Interviewers have expectations of candidates and look for particular qualities when they interview. Identify these qualities through preparation; it will help you feel more confident and relaxed during the interview.

Research

Learn about the internship, scholarship, graduate program, or job for which you are interviewing, and make every effort to familiarize yourself with issues in the field. Identify the skills, abilities, and attributes that are expected of candidates; which are outlined in the position description and on the organization’s website. Take the time to conduct this research and it will demonstrate your sincere interest in the position and the employer.

Know why you’re a Good Candidate

Interviewers expect candidates to know what they can offer. Studies show that approximately 90% of people cannot adequately describe their skills. If you take the time to identify your skills, abilities, and personal qualities, you are ahead of the competition. Whatever strengths you plan to present, be prepared to offer examples of where you acquired or demonstrated them. Follow these tips:

- Make an inventory of experiences, skills, and adjectives that describe you;
- For the adjectives, identify experiences where they worked to your advantage;
- For experiences, identify the skills, knowledge, and personal qualities you demonstrated or acquired;
- For knowledge and skills that you claim, identify examples where you demonstrated or acquired them.

When preparing for a specific interview, compare the job description to your inventory and note the skills, abilities, and attributes that support your candidacy. Remember; always keep your answers in the context of
the position for which you are interviewing. Where you were born is not what the interviewer wants to hear. For skills employers are looking for, refer to the Transferable Skills Quick Reference Guide (34.5 kb pdf).

Behavioral Interviewing
Behavioral interviewing is widely used by employers and is based on the premise that past behavior predicts future performance. Behavioral questions will be phrased in ways such as “Describe a situation when . . .” The interviewer expects you to do just that – tell him/her about a specific situation. Be prepared to tell short (1-2 minute) “stories” that provide evidence from the past to document your skills or qualities. One strategy to use when answering behavior-based questions is to use the C-A-R process:

- **C**: the **circumstance** you were in (the what, where and when)
- **A**: what **action** you took (the task or challenge at hand, the why and how) and
- **R**: the positive results, achievements, skills/competencies learned.

You can best prepare for behavioral interview questions by conducting research on yourself. For each experience on your resume (job/internship, leadership, project, etc.) brainstorm three skills you developed, then develop your C-A-R stories that support these skills. Afterwards, try to also identify one achievement and challenge. You may use the following chart to assist you in this process:

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**ACHIEVEMENT:**

**CHALLENGE:**

**Interview Questions**

Interviews involve both questions the employer will ask you, as well as questions you will ask them. Although each interview/interviewer will be different, the following is a sample of questions that you may be asked:
- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you apply to this position?
- Why did you choose to major in…?
- Tell me about two strengths and one weakness.
- Where do you plan to be in five years? Ten years?
- What motivates you to succeed?
- What accomplishment has given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- What would you like to develop or improve in yourself? Have you thought about how you will do this?

**Behavioral Question examples:**
- Tell me about a time when you got co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time that you made a mistake. What were the repercussions? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome?
While it is good to prepare for these basic types of questions, interviewers can ask one question in many different ways, so it is important to understand the themes behind most interview questions:

1. Why are you here?
2. Can you be an asset to the organization?
3. What kind of person are you?
4. What distinguishes you from other people who can do the same tasks as you?

**Questions to Ask**

Interviewers expect you to ask questions, and if you’re not prepared with intelligent, planned questions, it may communicate lack of interest. Research using the organization’s website and the job description as you prepare these questions. Good questions vary, but here are some basics:

- Ask specific questions about the position, although not ones that basic research should have already provided an answer for.
- What are the major challenges and priorities in the position?
- Is there an orientation? What type of on-the-job training is available?
- What might be a typical first assignment/project?
- What is the culture of the organization?
- How are performance evaluations conducted? How often?
- What do people like best and least about working for the organization?
- Will there be opportunities for professional development?
- Questions concerning advancement and promotion paths
- What can I expect next? What is your timeline for making hiring decisions?

**Questions Not to Ask**

Just as there are good questions to ask, there are questions you should not ask during the initial interview:

- Salary/benefits information. Do not discuss this issue until the interviewer brings it up. Research the salary range for the position prior to the interview. If asked about your salary requirements, give a range that reflects your understanding of typical salaries for the position and your experience. Check out books and internet resources on salary negotiation, salary surveys, or speak to a career consultant about this issue.
- Questions about the interviewer’s personal background including education, marital status, etc.
- Questions that have already been answered during the interview. If your “planned” questions have already been answered, focus on clarification of those issues, but do not repeat the question.

**Lawful Employment Interviewing**

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a potential employer can ask a job candidate. If asked an illegal question, there are three things you can choose to do:

1. Answer the question, keeping in mind that your answer may actually hurt your candidacy in some way.
2. Refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Depending on how you phrase your refusal you run the chance of coming across as defensive.
3. You can examine the question for its intent and answer it in a way that applied to the position. For example: If you’re asked, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” you can respond by saying, “I am authorized to work in the United States.” Or, with the question, “Do you have children?” you can respond by saying, “I can meet the travel and work hour requirements.”

**Making a Positive Impression**

Interviewers expect candidates to make a positive impression which includes paying attention to personal grooming, dress, eye contact, nonverbal behavior, and even your tone of voice. Dress in a manner consistent with how you want to be perceived. Keep in mind some of these basic tips:

- Check the greeting on your voicemail. Is it professional? What does it reflect about you? Would you want an employer or graduate school representative to hear it?
- Don’t forget to smile, make eye contact, and listen! Nonverbal behaviors can make or break an interview!
- Have a confident handshake! The wimpy “dead fish” handshake does not communicate confidence!
- When unsure of style of dress (business casual versus full business attire), always choose a conservative, tailored look, usually indicated by wearing a suit (pant or skirt suit for women).
- Be sure your attire is odor, stain and wrinkle free!
Personal Hygiene
Personal presentation for a job interview is about more than just clothes. Nobody likes to talk about it, but personal hygiene can leave more of a lasting impression than your interview performance. No matter how professional your interview attire, personal hygiene can make or break a good first impression.

- Bathe and make sure your hair is clean – get it cut well in advance of the interview, so you’re comfortable with the style.
- Use deodorant but avoid deodorants, perfumes or aftershaves with overpowering scents; people may have negative reactions to them. The interviewer should remember you, not your scent!
- Clean, manicured finger nails – this doesn’t mean to have a full manicure, it just means have clean hands and nails in order to feel confident shaking hands with the interviewer.
- Polished shoes – many a great suit is let down by scuffed shoes.
- Fresh breath – brush your teeth before an interview; be mindful of what you eat or drink before the interview. Take breath mints with you; use them before you enter your interview (not during).

You only get one chance to make a first impression and you will feel more relaxed if you know you are looking (and smelling!) your best. Refer to the Presenting Yourself Professionally Quick Reference Guide for more tips on grooming to make a good first impression.

Interviewing Advice from Employers

- Research organizations in advance of interviews
- Be enthusiastic and sincere during your interviews
- Be honest and realistic
- Do practice interviews
- Think about how your experience in work, classes, and activities can relate to the job you’re seeking
- Allow plenty of travel time and visit the site in advance to make sure you know how to get there
- Make sure your interview attire is pressed, your shoes are shined, and you are well groomed
- Bring extra copies of your résumé and a list of references
- Speak slowly and clearly; don’t be afraid to pause to collect your thoughts before answering questions
- Be assertive (not to be confused with aggressive)
- Send a thank-you letter as soon as possible after the interview

Interviewing Advice from Binghamton Graduates

- Be prepared to elaborate on information from your resume without having to re-read it during the interview
- Identify your skills and experiences; be prepared to discuss how they relate
- Be ready to explain what you offer and why the organization interests you
- Listen carefully and don’t interrupt
- Be prepared to ask questions
- Know what type of work (with this employer) interests you and why
- Be prepared to “describe yourself and your interests”
- Be prepared to talk about your goals and how they relate to the position
- Make your interest in the position and organization clear
- Be genuine

Interview Stream
Practice is the key to success in any interview. Interview Stream is an online tool that allows you to create video responses to a set of interview questions. Watch these recordings to evaluate yourself and refine your answers. You may also set up an appointment through hireBING to have your Interview Stream videos evaluated by a staff member in the Fleishman Center. Refer to the Interview Stream User Guide to get started!

Practice Mock Interview Program
The Fleishman Center offers the opportunity to practice your interviewing skills with alumni, employers and/or Fleishman Center staff. If you are doing a “practice” or “mock” interview, treat it as if it were a real interview. This will help you be more comfortable when the time comes for a real interview. Remember to ask your “mock
interviewer” for feedback on possible points of improvement, and practice, practice, practice for that real interview! You can schedule a practice mock interview through hireBING.

**Interviewing Remotely**

Interviewing prospective candidates for a job can be expensive and time-consuming. To reduce time and expenses, many employers choose to pre-screen candidates by phone or Skype prior to inviting them for a face-to-face interview. The Fleishman Center offers the opportunity to reserve an interview room if you prefer to conduct your phone or Skype interview in a more professional setting.

**Why Telephone/Video Interview?**

Phone/Video interviews are:
- Cost effective and efficient, for both employer and candidate;
- A way to differentiate candidates who appear similar on paper;
- Helpful for employers in determining organizational “fit” of a potential candidate;
- An easy method for the employer to check if the candidate is serious, affordable, and available;
- A convenient screening device for all applicants regardless of location

**Preparing for the Telephone/Video Interview**

Prepare for a phone/video interview just as you would for a traditional face-to-face encounter.

**Tips for Preparing:**
- Practice: Complete a practice interview using InterviewStream. Participate in Practice Interview Programs.
- Research the organization.
- Be ready 10 minutes before the phone/video interview appointment.
- Warm up your voice and practice smiling – sitting in front of a mirror can be helpful; you’ll be able to monitor your own body language.
- Prepare a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
- Prepare a short list of questions about the job and the organization.

**What not to do…**
- While it is good to have important points written down, do not prepare a copy to read when you are on the phone/video, as it sounds like you’re reading a script, rather than having a conversation.

**During the Telephone/Video Interview**

**What to do…**
- Have a spill-proof container of water nearby in case you need to sip.
- Have a pen and paper ready for taking brief notes.
- Keep your resume or CV, cover letter, job description, and career portfolio (sample work, etc.) in clear view.
- Ensure interview materials are strategically laid out and that you are familiar with them. No employer wants to hear shuffling papers. Having these documents on your computer screen may use up too much bandwidth or risk accidentally closing your video connection.
- Turn off your phone’s call waiting function/Skype chat functions so you are not interrupted.
- Turn off your TV and stereo (or any other devices that would make any distracting sounds, such as pop up messages on your computer).
- Ensure that the location where you are conducting the interview is free of distractions (roommates, TV/radio, children, pets, traffic, etc.).
- Have a clock nearby to monitor the time you have remaining in the interview. Respect the time parameters.
- Speak slowly, clearly, and directly into the phone receiver/microphone.
- Enunciate your words, use correct grammar, and complete sentences.
- Make sure you sound interested, confident, and capable.
- Smile so your friendliness can be heard and seen.
- Address the interviewer by name (Mr. or Ms.). If more than one person is interviewing, know who asked the question and address the answer to that person.
- Ask for the question to be repeated, if necessary, to clarify your understanding of what is being asked.
- Sit up erect at a desk/table or consider standing. Your voice may sound stronger and more alert.
- Let the caller do most of the talking, without interruptions.
- Avoid being too wordy or going off on tangents.
- If things sound interesting to you, say so. The interviewer may not be able to see you, so he/she can’t read your body language, such as nodding or smiling.
- Express your interest in the job and the organization.
- Ask the interviewer at the end of the conversation what the next step will be (time line, second phone interview, arranging an on-site interview, etc.).
- Request contact information for follow-up questions and thank you letter submission.
- Thank the interviewer(s) for the opportunity.
- As with all interviews, “ask for the job!” Restate you interest and desire to move to the next step.
- Have a calendar and/or scheduler available should you be asked to schedule another interview.

**Specifically for Video Interviews**

- Do a test run of a Skype call with a friend the day before to make sure the lighting, angle, and background looks OK, your face is visible, and the webcam works. Test the microphone and the audio quality too.
- Take a look at the background that is showing in the webcam. Try your best to make the background really boring (blank wall) or a professional environment that is not distracting from you the interviewee.
- Dress (at least from the waist up!) in a business suit or appropriate business attire.
- Prepare the interviewer(s)’ name(s) and phone number just in case the audio drops, screen freezes, or other technical hiccups occur. Stay calm if this happens and act promptly to reconnect either by video or phone again to continue the interview.
- To book a Skype capable interviewing room at the Fleishman Center using this form.

**What not to do …**

- Don’t smoke, chew gum, eat or drink (an occasional sip of water is fine, just don’t spill it!).
- Avoid the overuse of too many filler words such as “umm” “ah” and “like”. This habit is especially noticeable on the phone/video and eliminating it takes practice.
- Avoid the simple "yes" or “no” response: add selling points at every opportunity by backing up your answers with specific examples from previous work and/or education experience.

**After the Interview**

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered. This step is very helpful to prepare you for your next interview, and in writing a thank-you note!
- Evaluate the conversation to improve your performance in future interviews.
- Follow-up with a thank-you note or email that reiterates your interest in the job. Write a unique thank-you to each and every interviewer.
- Send any requested material immediately.

**Interviewing Resources in the Fleishman Center**

For further assistance with interviewing skill development, please visit the Fleishman Center and check out our many available resources:

- **Interview Programs** are held throughout the semester; the program schedule is featured on our website.
- **Walk-in hours** are available Monday through Friday from 11AM to 4PM.
- **Practice Mock Interview Appointments** can be made with a staff member through hireBING.
- **InterviewStream** is an online resource that you may also use at a time that is convenient to you.
- **Interview Rooms** are available for your use in the Fleishman Center; request using this form.
- **Our website** also features a great deal of resources.

*Updated 4/16*