

Inside Interviews

From the University of Massachusetts Amherst
Career Services



Be Prepared

- Have your resume polished. Bring a copy of your resume, a list of references, perhaps an unofficial transcript and a list of questions for employers (see below). Place all documents in a portfolio with a pen.
- Be able to answer the most important employer question: “Why should I hire you?” Become familiar with the information on your resume. Anticipate potential questions and be able to use examples from your resume. Practice your answers out loud.
- Be remembered for who you are not what you wear. Consider a solid conservative suit with coordinated shirt or blouse, polished shoes and limited jewelry. Be well groomed with little scent or makeup. Be sure to feel comfortable.
- Think of your interview as actually a business meeting between equals.
- Know the directions to the interview. Plan your commute with time to spare.
- An interviewer’s most common reason for hiring someone? – “I liked him/her.”

Asking Questions

Research the company. Prepare a list of at least five questions to ask the interviewer. At the end of any interview make sure you know what the next steps are in the application process.

Questions to Ask

- What are the qualifications of individuals who have excelled in this position or a similar position?
- What type of person are you seeking?
- Can I progress at my own pace or is there a structured training program?
- What would a normal working day be like?
- How would you describe your company culture?
- Can I expect to be supervised, or will you expect me to work independently?
- What will be the measurements of my success in this position?
- Does the company provide any professional development or educational benefits?

Questions Not to Ask

- What does this company do? (Do your research ahead of time!)
- If I get this job when can I take time off for vacation? (Wait until you get the offer to mention prior commitments)
- Can I change my schedule if I get the job? (If you need to figure out the logistics of getting to work don’t mention it now...)
- Did I get the job? (Don’t be impatient. They’ll let you know)

UMassAmherst



Student Affairs and Campus Life

Goodell 511 M-F 800-5
www.umass.edu/careers
413-545-2224

Answering Questions

- When answering questions, remember the “3 P’s:”
 - **Ponder:** ask yourself why the employer has asked a question. This will help you determine what skill, trait, value or ability is being measured.
 - **Prove:** if you say that you have developed excellent communication skills give examples of situations where you utilized these skills.
 - **Project:** always project a positive image even when the questioning gets negative. If you are asked to state one of your weaknesses, do so. However, explain what you are doing to eliminate that weakness and what you have learned in the process.

Potential Questions

- **Why should I hire you?**
- **Tell me about yourself?**
- **What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?**
- **Describe the worst boss you’ve ever had.**
- What are your long range and short range goals and objectives?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now? Ten years from now?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- What are your long range career objectives?
- 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?
- How well do you work with people? Do you prefer working alone or in teams?
- How would you evaluate your ability to deal with conflict?
- What’s more important to you - the work itself or how much you’re paid for doing it?
- How would a good friend describe you?
- Describe the best job you’ve ever had.
- What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project or job?
- What makes you qualified for this position?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Do you consider yourself a leader?
- Which is more important: creativity or efficiency? Why?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between the supervisor and those reporting to him or her?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
- Give me an example of a time you worked under pressure.
- What’s one of the hardest decisions you’ve ever had to make?
- Why did you decide to seek a position in this company?
- What can you tell us about our company?
- What interests you about our products?
- What do you know about our competitors?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- What have you accomplished that shows your initiative and willingness to work?
- Do you have any hobbies? What do you do in your spare time?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are becoming increasingly common. It is important to make sure that your voice mail is appropriate and professional. When a phone interview is scheduled make sure to have the employer call you to a land line where there will be no background noise. Treat the phone interview as you would an in-person interview. Smile, sit up straight or walk around - your body posture greatly influences your tone of voice. Make sure you send a thank you just as you would following an in-person interview.

Manners and Etiquette

- Turn your cell phone off before going into the interview.
- Plan on arriving 15 minutes prior to the interview. Give yourself time to run to the bathroom and make sure everything's in order. Take a deep breath!
- Be friendly to everyone you see! Stand when people come into the room or are being introduced to you.
 - Handshakes: gender does not change who offers the handshake or how it is done; give the pressure you receive; web to web; hold objects (business cards, portfolio) in your left hand to keep the right free.
- Sit up straight and look people in the eye. Do not slouch or cross your legs.
- If your interview includes either lunch or dinner, read up on table etiquette before you go. Remember that this meal is not about food – you are the entertainment. Order from the mid-price range on the menu, something easy to eat and not messy. Do not order alcohol, no matter what your age. Do not speak with your mouth full. The person inviting you is expected to pay. Remember to thank them for the meal.

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smile as frequently as possible (especially when you are asked a question and respond to the person who has asked the question) but don't over do it! • Maintain good eye contact. If there's more than one interviewer look from person to person. • Be articulate and listen carefully to each question before giving your answer. • It is okay to take your time answering questions and/or clarifying questions if you need to. • Keep calm and don't panic! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crossing your arms: makes you look defensive. • Sit on the edge of your seat. • Mess with your face or play with your jewelry or hair. • Rock on the seat. • Interrupt when being asked a question. • Give one word answers (unless the answer dictates a one word answer!)

Handling Inappropriate Questions

Questions regarding your marital status, age, race, religious preference, children, sexual orientation or other issues are not always illegal but definitely inappropriate or unethical because they are unrelated to the job qualifications. Handling these questions can pose a personal dilemma as you decide how to respond. There are no strict guidelines to follow in dealing with these questions and many times they are asked by interviewers who are unaware that the questions are inappropriate. However, if you feel uncomfortable about a question ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I really want this job?
- How badly do I want this job?
- Do I really want to work for an organization that asks inappropriate questions?
- Does the interviewer realize that this question is inappropriate?

Based on your responses to some of these questions you may wish to:

- End the interview.
- Ask the interviewer what relevance the question has to the position or why the question is being asked (the University of Massachusetts Amherst Career Services favorite).
- Refuse to answer the question.
- Answer the question with or without regret.

Keep in mind, the way you handle this situation says a lot about your professionalism and maturity.
Avoid being rude and argumentative while remaining positive, polite and assertive.

Always Remember to...

- Thank everyone that you meet for their time.
- Get the business cards or contact information of everyone that you meet at the interview. This will be helpful in writing thank you e-mails or letters. Within 12 to 24 hours after your interview make sure to send thank you letters to anyone you interviewed with. Make sure to express your sincere appreciation, reemphasize your strongest qualifications and reiterate your interest in the position.

2913 Baxter Road
Amherst, MA 01002

November 4, 2008

Ms. Marge Romano
Wildlife Biologist
P.O. Box 9955
Goose Rocks, ME 03217

Dear Ms. Romano:

I want to thank you for taking the time to interview with me yesterday for the Biological Wildlife Aide position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about the organization.

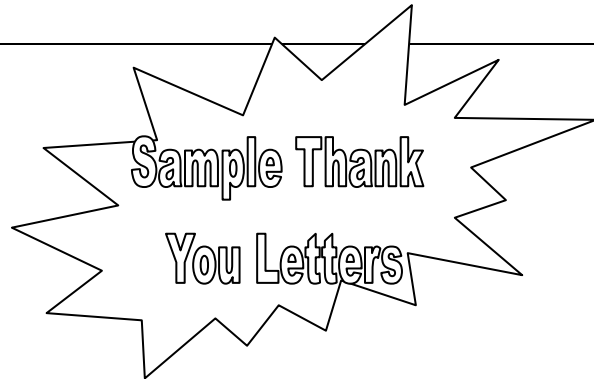
My enthusiasm for the position and my interest in working for the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge were strengthened as a result of the interview. I think my education in Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation and internship fit nicely with the job requirements, and I am sure that I could make a significant contribution to the organization over time.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. You provide the kind of opportunity I seek. Please feel free to contact me at 413-555-4321 or anatures@student.umass.edu if I can provide you with any additional information.

Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Andy Natures



November 4, 2008

Dear Mr. Carse:

I would like to thank you for your kind words and suggestions during our meeting at the K-12 School Professionals Fair at University of Massachusetts Amherst on January 6, 2008. I look forward to the opportunity to volunteer with your new High School's guidance team in the near future.

I will get in touch with the Guidance Department to see how I may be of service in assisting students with the college admissions and scholarship application process.

Having grown up in Amherst and volunteered in Greenfield, I have developed tremendous respect for the local youth over the years. Thank you again for your input and a door left open for future contact.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Teaches

Contacting Employers after the Thank You

At the end of every interview be sure to ask what the next steps are in the application process. This knowledge can help you decide if or when you contact the employer after the interview after you have sent the thank you letter.

What to Do Before Accepting a Job Offer

From WetFeet.com

- Get the offer in writing: the written offer should spell out the important terms of the job and your obligations to the company.
- Know what you're getting into: be sure that you have a clear understanding of your job responsibilities. Try to get a sense of how the department you'll be working for fits into the company as a whole. Will you work with people from other departments? Is there room for advancement? What if you start in publicity but become interested in doing something business-related? Does there seem to be much flexibility?
- Know what you're after: a job isn't like a date – you shouldn't just accept the offer and see what happens.
- Like the people: get a sense not only of the individuals at the company but the office culture as a whole. Was there a buzz of energy when you walked in, or were you met with dead silence? Is it the type of environment you would be able to concentrate in? Was there personality to the office? If not, can you bear looking at white walls all day long?
- Find out the hours: how many hours per week is considered standard?
- Find out the benefits and consider the perks (see below for greater detail).
- **CAN YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THIS PICTURE?** Imagine what your new life will look like at this new job – commute in the morning, neighborhood you'll be working in, the clothes you'll have to wear. Are you excited about the job or are you simply resigning yourself to it for the time being?

Selected Excerpts from

Evaluating Job Offers & Negotiating Salary

By Thomas J. Denham, JobWeb.com

Considering Fringe Benefits

Don't focus solely on salary, because most employers offer a range of other benefits, sometimes worth as much as 30-40 percent in addition to your actual salary. Listed below are major categories of benefits and illustrative "generous" benefits in each category. **It is unlikely that any employer will offer all these benefits at these high levels, but they provide a measure of what might be offered in specific areas by organizations with especially attractive benefit plans.** When you evaluate a job offer, there is much to consider. Only you can be the one to decide whether a larger salary will balance more promising advancement opportunities, or whether better health insurance will make a longer commute worthwhile.

- **Vacation:** 1-2 years: 2 weeks; 3-10 years: 3 weeks; 10+ years: 4 weeks; extended service: sometimes 6 weeks.
- **Holidays:** Ten paid holidays a year. Some firms give employees a holiday on their birthday.
- **Retirement:** Pension is a percent of highest five years of salary at a typical rate, fixed at 50-60 percent of the highest salary years.
- **Life and disability insurance:** Pays full cost of life insurance coverage equal to a full year's salary. Added insurance available at a low cost. Provides disability insurance and pays for 50-65 percent of salary if employee is unable to work.
- **Medical insurance:** Employer pays all or part of premiums on policy that covers all (or 80 percent of major hospital and other expenses). Employees usually pay for some (or all) of costs for routine physical and prescriptions. After the first \$100-\$200, employer pays for all dental expenses up to a ceiling of \$1,000.
- **Tuition assistance:** Pays all or most of job-related classes. Some payment amounts related to grade received in course.
- **Stock purchase or savings plan:** Stock options priced below market value or contribution matches are available.
- **Child care:** Employer pays for preschool children, free or at a low cost.
- **Bonuses:** Cash awards may be given for useful job-related suggestions. \$100-\$500 bonuses for hiring referrals.

Continued Excerpts from **Evaluating Job Offers & Negotiating Salary**

By Thomas J. Denham, JobWeb.com

Step 1 - Perform Research on Your Salary

Start by taking a good look at your own salary requirements as well as developing an understanding of what your skills are worth in the market. Keep in mind that your paycheck after taxes is approximately 28 percent less than your gross monthly salary. You do not need to tell anyone your salary requirements, doing your research on salary ranges for a field provides you with a foundation on which you can make decisions. In order to know if the offer is reasonable, you need to have a rough estimate of your requirements. Research the career field and position to find a good salary range approximation. Salary range information is available from a variety of sources including your university career center, professional journals, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Consider your range in terms of low/middle/high. If you are considering salary and benefits in another region or city, be aware of the differences in the cost of living. Everything is negotiable, but the person with the most information typically wins.

Step 2 - Price Screening

Try to avoid discussing salary until an offer has been extended or at least you get a chance to meet the employer. Wait for the employer to bring it up. When an interviewer asks for a salary history, he/she is interested in establishing a starting point for negotiation and wants to know if you are within their range. When employers begin speaking with you, they are typically in the budget stage. They seek to spend as little as possible. The first inquiry may come in the form of an application. When completing application forms, be sure to use "open," "negotiable" or "competitive." Avoid stating a specific figure or basing your desired salary on your current salary level and thereby getting screened out of the process. Employers like to spend their time interviewing candidates whose salary requirements fall in line with what they can pay for the position.

When stating a salary range, use the top figure of the employer's stated salary range, and extend the range to approximately 5 percent to 15 percent above. This shows that you are near their price range but interested in somewhat more compensation. If you must state your present salary, consider describing your salary history by stating the percentage increase in salary each year or with each job change. This way you do not have to mention any yearly salaries.

Step 3: Practice negotiating

If you practice what you will say, it can benefit you financially. When negotiating, aim for the top of your estimated salary range, but be prepared to accept less. Many large employers either have formal pay structures or set entry-level salaries at fixed levels and are therefore not negotiable. Most employers try to hire above the minimum and slightly under the midpoint.

Step 4: Practice what to say

Avoid being confrontational; be reasonable in your approach. The outcome should be a win/win situation. Reiterate that you are very interested in working for the employer and you want to find a way to work this out. Remember the first person to set a price typically loses. Practice is key. You can state that your preference is to focus the discussion on your competitive market value rather than your salary history or current earnings. You may want to state "at present my salary requirements are negotiable within the range of high twenties to low thirties initially."

Another way of putting it would be, "Given the responsibilities of this job, I would expect this position to pay in the range of...." If, however, you are not pleased with an offer, what harm can come from asking for more?

Once an employer has given you an offer, they have made an emotional investment in you, and it is highly unlikely that they will rescind the offer. Other ways to negotiate may include:

Say: "I'd prefer not to bias salary discussion based on my current salary (if you are employed). My research reveals that for this position the range is from \$28,000 to \$35,000 depending on other factors. I think I am within that range and I am curious to know what range you are considering."

Say: "As long as you pay a fair market value and the responsibilities fit my level of skill, I think we can work out a reasonable arrangement. You must have some range in mind. I'll tell you if it's near my competitive value."

Say: "I am very interested in this offer. I need to have some clarification. Do you think that this offer is a fair market price given the responsibilities of the position and my talents?"

Say: "Thanks for the offer. I am very excited about working for you, because ABC employer is my first choice. However, knowing the going rate is _____, I was really looking for something in the range of \$32,000 to \$34,000; is there any possibility of that?"

Step 5: Get it in writing

Most employers will send an offer letter confirming your start date and salary, employment location, and details of your package. If the employer does not offer this, ask, "Will you be confirming this in writing?"

If nothing arrives to confirm your agreement, it's a sign you still need to keep looking. An employer cannot be specific about the amount of pay if it includes commissions and bonuses. The way the pay plan works, however, should be explained.

Take into account that a starting salary is just that, a start. Your salary should be reviewed on a regular basis. Some employers conduct an annual review. If the employer is pleased with your performance, how much can you expect to make after one year? Two years? Three years, etc.? Don't think of salary as the only measure of your compensation. If you approach salary as something that you and the employer will agree on as mutually beneficial, your chances of salary negotiation success are greatly enhanced.