

# Interview Tips

## Before the Interview

### Be Prepared

Know your own information on your resume, research and know the field, the organization, and read the job description thoroughly. Practice interview questions by writing out the answers and rehearsing by yourself or with friends. Sign up for a mock interview appointment at Career Services by calling 413-545-2224 or stopping by 511 Goodell.

### Present yourself professionally

Dress conservatively with muted colors and moderate styles, and dress somewhat better than what may be expected at that workplace. For most interviews, a suit is recommended. In any case it is always better to be overdressed than underdressed. 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. Turn off your cell phone.

### Arrive early

Arrive 5-15 minutes early - do not keep the interviewer waiting. Know the directions to the interview and plan your commute with time to spare. Call to reschedule if you have an emergency or get sick.

### Remember...

An interviewer's most common reason for hiring someone? – "I liked him/her."

## Your Questions for the Employer

Research the company. Prepare a list of at least five to seven questions to ask the interviewer, and then ask three at most. 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)

# Answering Questions

In an interview you are asked to share details of your experiences on the premise that past behavior (performance) predicts future behavior (performance). Past examples may come from work experience, internships, academic experiences, extra-curricular activities or volunteer work.

## Give details. Tell **SHORT** stories.

An interview is, ideally, a conversation between a business (you, offering your labor) and another business (the employer, offering to pay for your labor). It's not an interrogation. **Don't monologue! Don't give just one word answers!** Make it a conversation, as much as possible.

### Interviewer asks: **Why should I hire you?**

Stress what you have to offer the employer, not how nice it would be to work there or what you want from the employer. Identify at least three specific reasons you are a good fit by speaking to the skills, experiences and credentials that are unique to you. Whether this question is actually asked or not, you want to make sure that the employer knows those three reasons they should hire you before the interview is over.

### Interviewer asks: **Tell me about yourself.**

Remember, this is a job interview, not a psychological or personal interview. The interviewer is interested in the information about you that relates to your qualifications for employment, such as education, work experiences and extracurricular activities.

### Interviewer asks: **What do you expect to be doing five years from now?**

The interviewer is looking for evidence of career goals and ambitions rather than minutely specific descriptions. The interviewer wants to see your thought process and the criteria that are important to you. The interviewer is not looking for information about your personal life.

### Interviewer asks: **What is your greatest strength and weakness?**

Work-related answers only, please. Whatever your weakness, you must continue on to explain how you have already been repairing this trait within a work context. Use specific examples.

### Interviewer asks: **Tell me about the worst boss you have ever had.**

Warning! Trick question! Do not launch yourself into righteous wrath! Do not go on and on about how awful someone else was, and certainly do not name names. The interviewer is looking for a professional, calm attitude and is checking to make sure you can handle stress. Speak to how you coped and what you did to get your work done rather than focusing on the shortcomings of your ex-manager.

### **Assessment questions**

What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives and how are you preparing yourself to meet them?  
What rewards are the most important to you in your chosen occupation?  
How would you describe yourself?

### **Attitude questions**

What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this field?  
What do you think it takes to be successful in our organization?  
In what ways can you contribute to our organization?  
Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and employee.  
What factors are most important to you in your job?

### **Questions about your education**

Describe your most rewarding college experience.  
Why did you select your college or university?  
What motivation led you to choose your major/field?  
What college subjects did you enjoy least? Why?  
If you could, how would you have planned your academic study differently? Why?

### **Questions about your knowledge of employer**

Why are you interested in working for us?  
What do you know about our organization?  
Do you prefer a small, medium, or large organization?  
What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you want to work?  
Do you have a geographical preference? Why?

### **Behavioral questions**

Tell me about a time when you had to organize a project under tight time frames. How did it turn out?  
Give me an example of when you had to deal with an irate customer/client. How did you handle it?  
Describe the last time you used teamwork to solve a problem. What did you do and what was the outcome?

# Phone and Skype Interviews

Phone interviews are often the first interview you might have with an employer. It is therefore important to make sure that your voice mail is appropriate and professional. When a phone interview is scheduled, have the employer call you on a land line where there will be no background noise. If it has to be to your cell phone, make sure it is charged and you are in a quiet area with 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. Have your resume and the job ad in front of you for reference. Make sure you send a thank you just as you would following an in-person interview.

Be sure to treat a Skype interview as an in-person interview. **Dress up** (your bottom half, too) and have your resume/questions for the employer/job announcement there in front of you. But further, make sure your computer is charged/or plugged in, and that the background that will appear behind you is bland or blank. And yes, you still need to send a thank you afterwards.

# Manners and Etiquette

- **Turn your cell phone off** before going into the interview.
- Be friendly to everyone you see! Receptionists are often asked their impression of you.
- 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; thumb web to thumb web; stand to shake even if they don't; hold objects (business cards, portfolio, coat over the arm) on your left side to keep the right hand 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 still being interviewed, in fact 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

- 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!

- 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!)

# Digital Dirt

Maybe it doesn't seem quite fair that an employer will Google you or check out your Facebook profile. But justice or not, you need to be prepared for at least a cursory search. Google your own name and see what comes up – make sure that everything about you during this job search time is "grandmother approved".

Conversely, you should do some digging of your own. Google every person you know who will be interviewing you. Don't just look at the company's website, search for professional and news articles about the company that are free of the company's bias. Don't go in blind, but be judicious in your use of your fact-finding missions.

# 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 good etiquette 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 Write Thank You Notes

Get the business cards or contact information of everyone that you meet at the interview, as this will be helpful in writing thank you emails or letters. No more than 12 hours after your interview be sure to email thank you notes to anyone you interviewed with. Make sure to express your sincere appreciation, reemphasize your strongest qualifications and reiterate your interest in the position.

Dear Ms. Romano:

I want to thank you for taking the time to interview 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](mailto: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