

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 answers and rehearsing by yourself or with friends. Attend a workshop on Interviewing at the HFA Advising and Career Center (visit umass.edu/hfa/careers homepage for event listings).

Present yourself professionally

Dress conservatively with muted colors and a moderate style, and dress better than what may be everyday dress at that workplace. For most interviews, a suit is recommended. It is always better to overdress than underdress. 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, and a pen, in a portfolio. **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 five to seven questions to have on hand (you typically ask three questions at the end of an interview). Before leaving make sure you know what the next steps are in the application process.

Possible 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 for this position?
- Is there a structured training program for new employees?
- What would a normal working day look like?
- How would you describe your company culture?
- Would I be supervised closely, or expected 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 are the salary and benefits for this job? (Wait until you have received a job offer.)
- What does this company do? (Know this ahead of time!)
- I have a vacation planned, is the schedule flexible? (Wait until you have received the offer to negotiate.)
- 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, co-curricular activities or volunteer work.

Give details. Tell SHORT stories. Don't monologue.

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! But don't give just one word answers!** Make it a conversation, as much as possible.

Q: 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 to hire you before the interview is over.

Q: 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.

Q: What do you expect to be doing in five years?

The interviewer is looking for evidence of career goals and ambitions rather than specific descriptions. The interviewer wants to see your thought process. The interviewer is not looking for information about your personal life.

Q: What is your greatest strength and weakness?

Work-related answers only, please. You must name a weakness, and then explain how you have already been overcoming this trait within a work context. Use specific examples.

Q: 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.

Behavioral questions

- Tell me about a time when you had to organize a project under a tight time frame. 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?

Questions about attitude

- What qualifications do you have to be successful in this field?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and employee.
- What do you think it takes to be a successful employee?
- In what ways can you contribute to our organization?

Questions about your education

- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- Why did you select your college or university?
- What 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 studies differently? Why?

Questions about your knowledge of the employer

- What criteria are you using to evaluate the organizations for which you want to work?
- Why are you interested in working for us?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?

Experience questions

- Describe your most rewarding work experience and what about it made it so rewarding.
- Tell me about a time you failed, what you learned from the experience and what you did differently afterwards.
- Select an experience from your resume and describe how it relates to this position.

Phone and Skype Interviews

PHONE interviews are often the first interaction you might have with an employer. It is therefore important to make sure that your voicemail is appropriate, professional, and not full. Make sure your cellphone 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 and sit up straight** - 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 afterwards.

Be sure to treat a SKYPE/ZOOM interview as an in-person interview. **Dress up** (your bottom half, too) and have your resume, questions for the employer, and job announcement there in front of you. Make sure your computer or tablet is charged or plugged in, and that the background behind you is bland or blank. Do a test call with a friend beforehand. Always 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 for their impression of you.
- Stand when people come into the room or are being introduced to you.
- Handshakes are very important: Your gender does not change who offers the handshake or how it is done. Commit to the gesture fully – give the pressure you receive and allow your thumb web to touch their thumb web. Stand up to shake hands, even if they don't. Finally, hold objects (i.e. business cards, portfolio, coat) in your left hand to keep your right hand free for any handshakes.
- Sit up straight and look people in the eye. Do not slouch or cross your legs.
- If your interview includes a meal, read up on table etiquette before you go. Remember that this 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 your age. Do not speak with your mouth full. The person inviting you is expected to pay. Remember to thank them.

Do

- Keep calm and don't panic!
- Smile (especially when you are asked a question).
- 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 asking for clarification if you need to.

Don't

- Cross your arms, as it makes you look defensive.
- Sit on the edge of your seat.
- Play with your face, jewelry or hair.
- Rock back and forth on the seat.
- Interrupt when being asked a question.
- Give one word answers (unless the answer dictates a one word answer!).
- Bring coffee or food in with you.

Digital Dirt

In some states, it is illegal for an employer to Google you or check out your Facebook profile. But that doesn't mean it won't happen, so 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 careful how you use the information you find.

Handling Inappropriate Questions

Questions regarding your marital status, age, race, religion, children, and sexual orientation can be illegal. 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. If you feel uncomfortable about a question, ask yourself the following:

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

Based on your assessment of the intentions of the interviewer, you may wish to:

- Ask politely what relevance the question has to the position (the recommended response).
- Answer the question with or without regret. (It is not illegal for you to answer an illegal question.)
- Refuse to answer the question.
- End the interview.

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.

What to Say if Salary is Brought up During an Interview

The appropriate time to discuss salary is after an offer has been made, BUT... sometimes the question gets asked early on, as a request for salary history or as your desired salary for the position. In many states (including Massachusetts) it is illegal for employers to ask your salary history, but it is not illegal for employers to ask the salary you are looking for. It is best to hold off these discussions as long as possible so that your relevant skills, experiences and credentials are very clear to the employer. Then we recommend that you give a salary range, not specifics. The bottom of the range should be a figure you would be willing to accept and acts as a placeholder until you enter into real negotiations when a solid offer is made. See Negotiation Tips, last page.

Some ways to say it:

"I would be happy to discuss the issue of salary as we get further along in our conversations about this opportunity. Right now I want to be sure that I am the right person for your organization."

"My salary requirements are negotiable and depend upon benefits as well as the responsibilities agreed upon at the time of a job offer."

"I assume a range has been set for this position, and I wonder what the organization has in mind?"

Always Remember to Write Thank You Emails

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. Send them no more than 12 hours after your interview. Make sure to express your sincere appreciation, reemphasize your strongest qualifications and reiterate your interest in the position.

Dear Ms. Romano,

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 and interest for the position were strengthened as a result of the interview. My education in Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation and past internship fit nicely with the job requirements, and I think I could make a significant contribution to the organization over time.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in this position, and in working with you and your staff. You provide the kind of opportunity I seek. Thank you for the interview and your consideration.

Sincerely,
Andy Natures