Successful Interviews: Tips & Strategies

Welcome!

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First Things First…

- You *can* be effective and successful in your interviews … believe that
- Interviewing is a skill you can learn
- Knowing strengths = important
- Interviewing = “2 way street”
Workshop Overview

• The interviewer’s perspective
• What to get across in the interview
• Various types of interviews
• What to expect at your interview
• Preparation for the interview
• Common types of interview questions
• Best/Worst questions to ask the employer
• After the interview: Key follow-up tactics
• Resources and summary
The Employer’s Perspective

Three Primary Objectives for the Interviewer:

Can you do a great job?
Are you a good fit for our organization?
Will be a good colleague?
What to get across in the interview…

• You are a ‘good fit’ for the position
• You are a ‘good fit’ for their org./company
• You have a positive attitude and are professional
• You came prepared for the interview and are enthusiastic about their org./company
• You want the job or internship
Types of Interviews ...

• Initial screening
• Telephone
• On-Site Interview-most common
  – 1:1 Interview
  – Group Interview: multiple interviewers
• On-Site Interview-less common
  – Group Interview: multiple interviewees
  – Presentation
  – Simulations/Role-playing
What to Expect (Generally)

• Logistics
  – Find out ahead of time who will be interviewing you
  – Arrive *early*: know where to go & how to get there
    (Call ahead if necessary)
  – Bring extra copies of resume; pen, paper
  – Be respectful to absolutely everyone

• Typical chronology/sequence of events
Preparing for the Interview

• Study the job description
• Anticipate questions & think about examples & answers you could give
• Practice interviewing (out loud)
• Pick what (professional-looking) outfit you’ll wear
• Prep your references
  – Give them copies of your resume and the job description
  – Tell them why the job would be a good fit for you
  – *It is best to do this before your interview!*
During the Interview: General Tips

• Introductions and beyond
  – Be friendly, smile, maintain good eye contact
  – The handshake: firm, but not crushing
• Show enthusiasm & interest
• It’s okay (and natural) to be nervous
• Be positive and emphasize your strengths
• Listen carefully and ask for clarification if necessary
• Pause and think, if you need to, before answering
• Never say anything negative about anyone
• Keep answers to the point (90 sec – 2 min max)
The Silent Question

...is the one question behind all questions that employers ask.

“How can you be valuable to me?”
Do You Know Your Strengths?

• If not, spend some time getting clear about them
  – Complete the “Explore Your Strengths” exercise
    in the UWCC Career Guide (pp. 6 – 9)
During the Interview: Types of Questions

Common Introductory
Behavior-Based
Situational
Unexpected
Negative
Logic/Technical
Case Study
Illegal

Questions to ask the employer
Common Introductory Questions

These are typically open-ended questions at or near the beginning of an interview

• “Tell me a little about yourself”
• “What do you know about our org. / company?”
• “Why are you interested in this position?”

Anticipate you’ll be asked questions like this and know what you want to say beforehand, then give your answers to the best of your ability

• See strategy on page 30 in the Career Guide
Behavior-Based Questions

Employers believe past actions predict future behavior

• “Tell me about a time that demonstrates your problem-solving skills.”
• “Give an example of a time when you experienced an unexpected problem and how you handled it.”
• “Tell me about a time that demonstrates your ability to work well on a team.”
• “Give an example of your leadership abilities.”
• “Tell me about a time you experienced an interpersonal difficulty and how you handled it.”

Try to answer with a *specific* example
Use the STAR method
The STAR Method

S = Situation (the context)

T = Task(s) (the over-arching goals/objectives)

A = Action(s)  
   (how you went about achieving those goals)

R = Result (s): If result wasn’t entirely positive, say what you learned/would do differently next time
Project Title: Led a team effort to design an effective public relations campaign for a new bank

**STAR METHOD**

**Situation:** Recently, I was part of a group project in my Organizational Communications class. We were assigned to design an effective public relations campaign for a fictitious company.

**Task:** Our group chose to market a bank opening a new office in a small community. We developed a marketing plan and media kit designed to introduce the company to its new community and to solicit new bank customers.

**Action:** Since I was selected as the project team leader, I set up an appointment with the Director of Marketing at XYZ Bank and got her insight on the project. After the meeting, I shared the bank officer’s comments with my team and together we came up with a creative marketing plan. I then assigned each group member a particular marketing task, based on his or her area of expertise. For example, I assigned one member with excellent writing skills to write a press release. I monitored the group’s progress to make sure we were meeting our deadlines and also coordinated the strong oral presentation we made to the class.

**Result:** The project was fun and allowed me to develop the management skills necessary to lead a very diverse group of 6 people. The most rewarding part was that our group received the highest marks in the class and the professor currently uses our project materials as an example in his classes.
Situational Questions

Employer describes a hypothetical situation (you realistically may encounter on the job) and asks how you would respond

- “A customer you are working with becomes frustrated and angry about your company’s products/services and wants to talk with your manager – what do you do?”
- “What would you do if the priorities on a project you were working on changed suddenly?”
- “You are leading a project, a team member isn’t contributing, how will you deal with this?”
- “You don't have the information you need to prioritize your projects. Your co-workers and supervisor are unavailable for you to ask for assistance. How do you handle the situation?”

Relate your answer to a real situation if possible
Use your best judgment if you’ve never experienced a situation like this
It’s ok to ask for time to think
Unexpected Questions

Questions you didn’t anticipate being asked, which often surprise you

• “What is the last book you’ve read and would you recommend it?”
• “What are your salary expectations and when can you start?”
• “If you could be a superhero, what would you want your superpowers to be?”
• “How would you describe your sense of humor?”
• “How do you spend your free time / what do you do for fun?”

Pause – think – respond
Okay to ask for time to think
Okay to ask for clarification
Try your best, be yourself
Negative Questions

Answer the question truthfully, but *emphasize something positive*:

1) What you learned from the experience and/or
2) how you would do it differently next time

- “Tell me about a weakness that you have.”
- “What is a weakness that you would need to improve to become a really great [job title]?”
- “Tell me about a time you experienced an interpersonal difficulty and how you handled it.”
- “Tell me about a mistake you made in the past.”
- “I see a two-year gap in your work history – what were you doing during that time?”

*Possible Approaches*
Talk about a weakness you used to have but have already eliminated or improved
Talk about behaviors that are negative in their extremes, but positive in moderation
Mention a weakness that is unrelated to the job / wouldn’t impact your success at the job
Mention a weakness they already know you have (it didn’t prevent them from interviewing you)

End on a positive note!
Logic Questions

Employers sometimes ask questions like this to test your problem-solving and critical thinking abilities

• “Which would you rather have, a trunk full of nickels or a trunk half full of dimes?”
• “How can you throw a golf ball with all your might and (without hitting a wall or any other obstruction) have the ball stop and come right back to you?”
• “Estimate the number of haircuts given in a year”
• “How many ping-pong balls can you fit in a Boeing 737 airplane?”

Ask clarifying questions as needed & then indicate (out loud) how you might arrive at an answer, stating assumptions along the way
Ask if you can use your pen/paper or a whiteboard
Employers mostly interested in your thinking processes, not in a “right” answer
Technical Questions

Employers ask questions like this to test your work-content knowledge and problem-solving and critical thinking abilities

• “What is the difference in memory management between Java and C++?”
• “Write a function of factorial using C language”
• “How do traditional economic theories of elasticity relate to today’s global economic downturn?”

Ask clarifying questions as needed & then indicate (out loud) how you might arrive at an answer, stating assumptions along the way
Ask if you can use your pen/paper or a whiteboard
Employers mostly interested in your thinking processes
Case-Style Questions

Mostly consulting-related employers ask questions like this, to evaluate your problem-solving abilities, communication skills and how you handle ambiguity

• “If one of our clients wants to invest in a French pharmaceutical company, how would you go about researching them for potential risks?”
• “You're taking a trip to Indonesia tomorrow to work with a company for a period of time. You don't know anything about this firm but you are provided with the financial statement of this firm from last year. How do you get the general idea about the firm's "health“/situation, given that you only have one hour to report your opinion to your boss?”
• “Your client is a large electric utility. Consolidation has been widespread in the utilities industry and your client wants to know if they should be jumping on board this trend. What advice would you give them?”

Listen carefully
Ask clarifying questions & use a pen/paper for quick strategizing
Talk out loud as you state your assumptions, prioritize the issues and articulate your approach to solving this case
Participate in a mock interview & practice
Illegal Questions

These are questions that relate to your race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a veteran or disabled veteran.

- “How many children do you have?”
- “What is your religious affiliation?”
- “You look awfully young – how old are you, anyway?”

Think of the underlying question the interviewer might have in mind and answer it

Another Option: Ask how the question relates to the job

Other Options
Questions to Ask (and not Ask) the Employer

Interviewers will almost always offer you a chance to ask them questions (usually toward the end of the interview). Definitely take advantage of this opportunity!

Specific questions about the job
Questions that show you have researched the organization and are curious about learning more

- “What results do you expect to get from the person in this position?”
- “What are the current challenges for this job?”
- “What is a typical day like for the person in this position?”
- “What are the next steps in the job application/hiring process?”
- “When may I expect to hear from you?”

Questions **NOT** to ask during the interview:
- Don’t ask about salary, raises, benefits, flex-time, leave/vacation accrual
- Questions that reveal you haven’t done your research into the position/employer prior to interview
After the Interview: Reflect

• How did it go?
• Try to remember what questions you were asked and write them down.
• What did you do well & what could you have done better?
• Assess whether this position is a good fit for you or not.
• What might you do the same or differently in future interviews?
After the Interview – Follow-up

- Send a thank you note that day
  - Email or paper O.K.
  - Be specific in your thanks
- If they don’t contact you, call or email a week after you expected to hear from the employer
After the Interview: Possibilities

• You are invited to more interviews!
• You receive an email or call with an offer!
• You never hear back from the employer
• You learn that you did not get the position
What if You Don’t Get the Job?

• Review your approach (You know your resume worked; any quirks in the interview?...)
• Contact hiring manager and ask for feedback
• Be positive, professional and appreciative—keep the door open for the future
Utilize Interviewing Resources

• Mock interview program

• “Interview Survival Kit”
  – (Career Center or Amazon.com)

• Employer Conversations/Panels on campus

• UW Career Guide
careers.uw.edu/Career-Guide

• Various websites (Ex: glassdoor.com)

• Google/Bing (Ex: Company + Interview)
Final Tips

- Be your **best** self
- Speak clearly
- Stay positive
- Communicate your value
- Demonstrate interest and enthusiasm
- Treat everyone well, including the receptionist
- Follow-up

QUESTIONS?
Successful Interviews: Tips & Strategies

Thank You!