

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

In order to have a successful interview experience, it is important to prepare thoroughly. This handout provides guidelines and information on how best to prepare in order to be ready for an interview.

1. Perform a self-assessment

Have a clear picture of your interests, skills, values, and individual characteristics as they relate to the position for which you are applying – in order to make a positive impression on a prospective employer, you must first know yourself well.

Look closely at yourself and the experiences that have shaped you as a person as well as a candidate for the job. Have discussions with a friend, relative, advisor, career consultant, or faculty member to help clarify your strongest qualities.

Self-awareness will allow you to better articulate to a prospective employer who you are and what you can offer to the organization.

2. Research the employer

Gather information about the organization's goals, history, competitors, and culture to allow more effective communication with the company.

Conduct a web search and visit the company's website and social media platforms for more information on the company's goals and current initiatives.

Ask alumni who work at the company for input about the company's culture.

Seek printed literature and well-known business databases for more information.

3. Prepare questions to ask during the interview

Brainstorm a list of questions to ask during the interview; keep in mind your goals and expected outcomes of the interview when composing this list.

Create intentional and intelligent questions from information that you have gathered about both the position and the company.

If meeting the employer for a first interview, it is discouraged to ask questions about salary – convey enthusiasm for the job, not how much money you will make.

4. Practice for your interview

Ask a friend or family member to help you practice answer common and potential questions that may come up in the interview.

Rehearse responses to some common interview questions and polish your presentation in front of a mirror.

Sign up for a practice interview in the Center for Career Development and receive feedback on your interview skills.

5. Gather relevant information and materials for the interview

Gather information (e.g., transcripts, list of references, materials related to past educational and employment experiences).

Prepare extra copies of your résumé in addition to the list of questions that you plan to ask the employer.

Carry these additional materials in a pad folio for easy reference during the interview.

Interviews can take a variety of formats. The two most common interviewing formats include the traditional interview and the behavioral interview.

Traditional Interviews

Traditional interviews consist of questions that can apply to all candidates in a variety of career fields, regardless of the position for which the candidate is interviewing.

The goal is to determine how well a candidate knows him- or herself, as well as how familiar the candidate is with the prospective employer.

Practice speaking confidently and articulately about your skills and accomplishments – employers are looking for responses that demonstrate the candidates have thought about his/her abilities and the employer in advance of the actual interview.

- **Sample questions include:**

Tell me about yourself.

What accomplishments are you most proud of?

How has your college experience prepared you for a career?

What quality or attribute do you feel will most contribute to your career success?

What specific goals have you established for your career?

Behavioral Interviews

Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past performance; questions require the candidate to provide information about how he/she behaved in certain situations in the past – it provides the employer with insight into how you might behave in a similar situation as an employee.

Reflect on circumstances that required you to use problem solving skills, adaptability, leadership, multi-tasking, and initiative.

Describe details of circumstances utilizing the S.T.A.R. method to organize your thoughts into Situation, Task, Action, and Result so that responses are both thorough and concise.

- **Sample questions include:**

Describe a time when you demonstrated leadership abilities.

Describe a time when you faced a challenge or a difficult situation.

Give an example that demonstrates your ability to make important decisions.

When have you had to resolve a problem in your supervisor's absence?

Give an example of a time when you accomplished something with the help of another.

Tips for preparing for the day of the interview

Review directions in advance – know exactly where to go for your interview and how long it will take to get there.

Dress to impress. Avoid anything that could be distracting for the interviewer (e.g., jewelry, perfume/cologne, short skirts, revealing blouses, visible body piercings) – you should look neat, clean, and professional.

Arrive for your interview 5-10 minutes early; this will give you an opportunity to relax.

Bring paper and a pen (to take notes or remind yourself of questions to ask) and any other materials (i.e., resume, list of references, supporting documents).

Leave your phone in your car or silence/turn off your phone to prevent ruining your interview.

After the interview, do not forget to follow-up with a thank you letter to all interviewers present. Express your appreciation for meeting with you and reiterate your skills, education, and experiences that make you uniquely qualified for the position. A thank you letter may also take the form of an email, but be sure to keep in mind that this is still a professional communication (i.e., avoid using "text language", inappropriate punctuation, or emoticons). Be sure to send out the thank you letter within 24 to 48 hours.