

Effective Interviewing

Even the highest qualifications will do you little good if you cannot market them convincingly during an interview. Since it is such an important step in the job search, we recommend that you invest time learning about the interview process, then preparing and practicing for it.

Purpose of the Interview

The success of any organization is tied directly to the quality of its people, and one key to identifying quality people is the interview. The job interview is a two-way conversation between an interviewer and an applicant. Information is exchanged to determine if there is a match with the applicant's qualifications, the position responsibilities, and the organization's culture.

The success of the interview depends upon the skills of the participants and the "chemistry" between them. Your goals in the interview are to:

- Provide information about your qualifications so the interviewer can determine if they are compatible with the position's requirements and the organization's needs.
- Obtain information about the position, the organization, and the work environment so you can determine if they are compatible with your career goals.

The interviewer's goals are to:

- Gather and assess information about each interviewee's qualifications to increase the chances of selecting the person who is best qualified to do the job
- Provide information about the position and the organization so interested and well-qualified candidates continue to be attracted.

Interview Types

Interviewing is usually a two-stage process, consisting of an initial (or screening) interview and a follow-up (or selection) interview. The purpose of the screening interview is to narrow the candidate pool by finding reasons to eliminate applicants. The interviewer validates the education, skills, experience, and accomplishments of applicants and tries to ensure that unqualified applicants do not move forward in the process. Examples of a screening interview include the campus interview, the phone interview, and the web camera interview. The use of technology helps organizations reduce recruiting costs and make more effective use of the recruiting staff's time.

In the selection interview, the number of candidates has been reduced to a manageable number and interviewees are typically invited to the organization's site. The second interview's purpose is to identify the finalist for the position. This interview is longer in duration, from one-half day to two days. The position's supervisor is the primary interviewer; however, other department heads and prospective co-workers may be involved.

By the second interview, your qualifications are generally known. The interviewers will ask more specific questions to determine if there is an appropriate match for you, the position, and the organization. During this interview you want to have all of your questions answered so you can make an informed decision if the position is offered to you.

Components of an Interview

Interview Components	Interviewer may ask questions related to:	Interview looks for:
INTRODUCTION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your travel to interview; traffic conditions; the weather; common interests, etc. • Breaking the ice and building rapport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm handshake • Eye contact • Professional appearance • Interpersonal and social skills • Poise/confidence/comfort level • Enthusiasm
BODY:	<p>Education/Training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for choice of university and major • Grades and effort required to obtain them • Special areas of academic interest • Courses enjoyed most and least (and why) • Academic achievements • Academic challenges and how you handled them • Your opinion regarding the value of your degree or major • Professional development/training outside the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How your education and/or major has prepared you for the job targeted • How specific courses you have taken will help you meet the job challenges • Ability to learn and adapt to a changing work world • Breadth and depth of knowledge • Willingness to work hard; perseverance • Relation between ability and achievement • Willingness to continue to learn
	<p>Internships & Work Experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of jobs held and why undertaken • Type and level of responsibilities • Skills used • Duties liked most and least • Accomplishments • Team projects/relationship with co-workers • Difficult problem with which you dealt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General work traits, such as responsible, dependable, and reliable • Problem solving/decision-making skills • Self-directed/self-motivated/time management abilities • Conflict resolution/interpersonal skills • Planning and organizing skills • Flexibility/adaptability to change • Energy level and enthusiasm • Teamwork skills • Interpersonal and communication skills • Project management skills; ability to achieve desired results
	<p>Campus & Community Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in extracurricular, athletic, community, and social activities • Positions held • Your role as a group or team member • Your specific involvement in special projects or group activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership roles; ability to motivate others • Accomplishments • Commitment to professional activities • Interpersonal/social skills • Positive “can do” attitude • Diversity of interests • Awareness of world outside classroom • Teamwork capabilities; ability to work in a diverse group • Interest in community service

Interview Components	Interviewer may ask questions related to:	Interview looks for:
BODY: (continued)	Career Goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of work and kind of organizations desired • Immediate and long-term goals • Interest in additional education or training • Geographical preferences and limitations • Willingness to relocate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A realistic knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses • Compatibility of your work interests and your talents • Your knowledge of career opportunities • Match between your career goals and the employer's opportunities • A willingness to further your education • Career-oriented, rather than job-oriented, attitude • Your attitude towards relocation
	The Employer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why you applied with the organization • Why you applied for the position • What you know about the key responsibilities of position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your basic knowledge of organization and organizational/reporting structure • Your depth of research about the organization and its services/products • Your understanding of the position's responsibilities • How you see yourself fitting with the organization and its goals • How you see yourself contributing to the organization • Indications of interest in position and organization
CLOSE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time for questions from you • Information is usually provided about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overtime/travel required – Current and future projects – Training/educational opportunities – How performance is evaluated – Salary and benefits • Information is also provided about hiring process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Next step you should take – Next step employer will take – Hiring timeline – Decision deadline – Notification process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed and relevant questions from you • Additional information about your qualifications • An expression of your interest in the position and organization

Before the Interview: Review, Research, and Rehearse

Review. The interview starts long before you appear in the interviewer's office. Your first responsibility is to develop a "sales presentation" that will sell the interviewer on the fact that you're the best person for this position. Just as a good salesperson does, you must make a thorough analysis of your product (Y-O-U).

- What are your career goals?
- What qualifications do you have related to this position?
- What are your strengths and achievements?
- How have your education and experiences prepared you to manage the responsibilities of the position?
- What can you do for this employer?

Research. The next step involves research. To create a favorable impression, you need to be able to converse intelligently about your qualifications relative to the position and the organization. Do your "homework" to show that you have initiative and care enough to get some information in advance of the interview.

- What are the primary responsibilities of the position?
- What is the organization's culture?
- What skills or experiences should a qualified candidate have?
- How can you contribute to or benefit the organization?

Rehearse. Finally, you should work on your presentation skills so you can deliver a confident, poised interview performance. Practice responding to some common questions to improve your comfort level in an interview situation. Schedule a mock interview with a Career Services staff member or practice with a friend so you have the opportunity to rehearse aloud. Video the session so you can review your verbal and non-verbal presentation skills.

- What are the five major qualifications that you want the interviewer to remember after the interview? What sets you apart from the other candidates?
- Did you back up your statements with specific examples of projects, activities, and experiences?
- Were you honest and sincere?
- Were you positive (focusing on what you have accomplished) and not negative (apologizing for lack of experience or complaining)?
- Were your responses complete, but concise (not rambling)?
- How were your verbal communication skills? Did you use slang, say "um" or "like," or use poor grammar?

Behavior also can have an impact on your effectiveness during the interview. Your hands, voice, eyes, and posture can send non-verbal messages to the interviewer and provide clues to your sincerity, maturity, confidence, enthusiasm, energy level, and professionalism. Know your nervous habits and practice controlling them.

- Did you make eye contact with the interviewer when listening, responding to, or asking questions? Did you break eye contact when concentrating on what was said or reflecting on what you're going to say.
- Did you appear relaxed (without slumping)? Did you sit erect and lean slightly toward the interviewer?
- Did you limit your hand gestures?
- Did you show interest and smile at appropriate times rather than frown?
- Was your voice neither too loud or too soft? Was the speed neither too fast or so slow as to sound monotonous?

During the Interview

First impressions are important! During the first few seconds, the interviewer is assessing your professionalism through your attire, attitude, and behavior. Show the interviewer that you are confident, respectful, and interested in the job. Make your introduction memorable by smiling, making eye contact, offering a firm handshake, and saying the interviewer's name. Open the small talk conversation on a positive note. You want to present yourself as a serious professional but also someone who gets along with others and is a pleasure to work with. Let your personality show, but be sincere.

During the interview, your goal is to convey confidence and credibility in what you are saying. The interview is not a test, but rather a chance for you and the interviewer to meet and determine if you want to enter into a working relationship with one another. In order to sell yourself as the unique candidate for the position, you must convey a good understanding of the employer's need. It is important that your answers relate to the position under discussion. Even broad questions, such as "Tell me about yourself," should be answered with a focus on how your qualifications fit the job requirements.

One of the great advantages of anticipating questions and practicing your answers in advance is that you can improve them before the actual interview. Your answers should be clear, concise and confident. Give enough detail to sufficiently answer the question and then stop talking. If you are not sure if you provided enough information, simply ask, "Did I answer that sufficiently for you, or would you like more details?"

Closing the Interview and Follow-Up

The interviewer will provide clues that the interview is coming to a close. He or she may begin to shuffle papers, glance at a watch, or stand up. This is your last opportunity to ask if the interviewer has any questions or concerns about your background or qualifications, reiterate your interest in the position, and remind him/her of the skills you can bring to the position.

When the interview starts to wind down and the interviewer asks if you have any questions, be sure to speak up. In addition to the questions you prepared in advance, you might have a few based on how the interview went. If you want clarification about the job or the hiring process, ask now. Do not ask questions related to salary, benefits, or vacations. Wait until after you are offered the job.

After you have left the interview, make some notes about the interview, especially interviewer comments that you want to remember or interesting facts about the position or organization. Use the interview as a learning experience. Rate your interview performance and determine what you need to improve.

- Were you on time?
- Did the opening of the interview go smoothly?
- Were you dressed professionally?
- Did you have a firm, but gentle, handshake?
- Did you use examples to support comments about your skills and experience?
- Did you relate your qualifications to the job requirements?
- Did you use appropriate non-verbal communication skills? Smile? Have eye contact?
- Did you convey five major qualifications that the interviewer should remember about you?
- Did you express your thanks at the close of the interview?
- What would you do differently if you could replay the interview?

Within 24 hours, send a thank-you letter to the interviewer. Keep your message short (less than one page). Express your appreciation for the interview, remind the interviewer about your major qualifications and why you are unique, and reaffirm your interest in the job.

Common Reasons for Rejection

Employers conducting campus interviews at the Career Services Center are asked to comment on the interview performance of Clarion students. Listed below are some of the reasons given for rejecting candidates:

- Lack of preparation for the interview
- Lack of knowledge about the employer
- Unsure of career goals; no purpose or direction
- Lack of interest or enthusiasm; passive; indifferent; too laid back
- Poor communication skills and grammar; inability to express self clearly
- Lack of confidence and poise
- Asks no questions about the job
- Unprofessional attire and appearance
- Poor eye contact during the interview
- Overbearing; overaggressive; know-it-all attitude
- Timid; too quiet; introverted
- Unwilling to relocate; limited geographically
- Talks too much; rambles
- Does not answer the question; gives vague responses
- Negative attitude; condemns previous employers or professors
- Late for the interview
- Poor academic record; just got by
- Lack of involvement; no leadership, teamwork, or problem solving experience

How to Cope with Rejection

Candidates often become discouraged when they experience a series of rejections following interviews. But keep in mind that even outstanding candidates receive rejections. Don't let disappointment become an excuse for letting your efforts slide.

To keep from getting discouraged, turn the rejections into learning experiences. Rather than wonder why you were rejected, place a telephone call to the employer and ask for assistance. Keep in mind that you will have to be very tactful in doing this. Ask the employer why you were not given consideration. Was it due to your qualifications? Your interviewing skills? Ask for recommendations for enhancing your qualifications or developing your interviewing skills.

Most employers will be receptive to helping someone who shows a sincere desire to accomplish a goal and goes about doing so in a positive and professional manner. By analyzing and correcting the reasons for being turned down, you will be able to improve your chances of success in future job interviews.

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