

Effective Interviewing



NO ONE is a “born” interviewee – it takes practice and preparation to perform well in an interview setting. The more time and energy you put into your interview preparation, the more comfortable you will feel during the actual interview.

Interviewing is a focused dialogue with an immediate goal – to convince the employer that you are the best candidate for the position. The interviewer may be asking the questions, but you are setting the tone and establishing the relationship that will lead to your success. Remember that you have a great deal more control in the interview than you may think. Preparation is the key! Let’s break the interview down into its three distinct components – before, during and after the interview.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Learn as much as you can about the type of position you are pursuing

- Read the job description if available. Sometimes job descriptions list the ideal candidate’s skills. Don’t be discouraged if you don’t have capabilities in every area, but think about your transferable skills and experiences.
- Go online or use the career library resources to read about this type of position, typical duties, and skills utilized.

Prepare some general background information on your particular career field

- What have been some of the major news items in the business or other trade publications in the past year or six months?
- What are some of the current trends in this particular career field?

Research the organization

- Besides going to the employer’s website, read their annual report (call and ask for one).
- Know what products or services the employer produces or performs.
- Find out about the employer’s reputation within the industry. How do clients, suppliers and competitors view the employer?
- Research the employer’s competitors. What are they doing in the field? What new advances are being made?
- Other information to research: key people in the organization, size in terms of sales and employees, location, organizational structure, latest news reports that affect the company.
- The Career Center has a number of company research tools available on our website under the For Students section of the webpage: www.stockton.edu/career

Assess Yourself

- Know what job you want and why you want it.
- Think through your job objectives and goals.
- Consider your key skills and how you will use them in this job. Avoid generalities; instead, offer specific evidence.
- Think about your accomplishments and when you have delivered more than what was expected. Focus on the action you took and the positive results.
- Brainstorm stories or examples that demonstrate your creativity, initiative, resourcefulness, problem solving and leadership.

Keep calm through preparation

- Make an appointment with a Career Counselor to discuss your interview preparation and/or schedule a mock interview through the Career Center. Practice the “tough” questions with a career counselor so you won’t be caught off guard in an interview.
- Think about your strengths and work skills related to the position and be able to demonstrate these through an example or story.

- Practice talking about your skills and accomplishments as they relate to the types of skills required for the job.
- Do a “dry run” before the interview. If possible, go to the location a few days before your interview to see how long it takes, to learn where parking is available, and to see the building. This will be one less thing on your mind before the interview.
- Write down, in advance, questions you would like to ask the interviewer.
- Practice, practice, practice. Review possible interview questions and practice responding to them out loud.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

First impressions matter

- Bring paper, pen, extra resumes and list of references with you.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes ahead of time. This gives you time to go to the restroom one last time to check your hair and clothes and to get to the waiting area in advance. When you enter the building where you will be interviewed, consider that the interview has begun. Be pleasant and polite to everyone you see.
- Smile and introduce yourself to the receptionist. That person can be a true ally to you.
- Stand when the interviewer comes to greet you. Smile and show enthusiasm. Establish good eye contact and greet the interviewer with a firm handshake.
- Have the interviewer indicate where you should sit. Keep your hands and your portfolio/notepad in your lap.



It’s show time!

- The interviewer will probably ask some kind of introductory question or will ask you to “kick off” the interview. “Tell me about yourself” is a common kick-off question.
- Really listen to the question, reflect first on your response and then answer the question. If you do not understand the question, politely ask for a clarification.
- Keep your responses short – no longer than 2 minutes.
- Be specific about your skills and experiences and how they can be of benefit to the employer. This is where many interviewees get in trouble. They are too general or too vague. Examples help to emphasize the points you want to make.
- If you are in a group interview, make eye contact with everyone as you speak. Start and end with the person who asked the question.

Wrapping it up

- Raise questions throughout the interview if appropriate. Be ready at the end to ask your questions that you wrote down beforehand.
- It is generally not appropriate for you to bring up salary and benefits in a first interview, but be prepared to talk about this if the interviewer introduces it.
- Sum up your interest and enthusiasm for the position. Let the interviewer know that you want the job.
- Ask the interviewer about the timeline for making decisions and follow-up.
- Make sure to get each interviewer’s business card, and thank the person for the opportunity to interview.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Reflect on your experience

- What parts of the interview went well for you? What went poorly?
- Pat yourself on the back that you have learned from the experience and will use it to improve future interviews.

Thank the interviewer

- Write a thank you note to each interviewer within 24-48 hours of the interview. You can send a thank you via email or US postal mail. It may be typed or handwritten. Use the same paper you used for your resume and cover letter or use conservative note cards. See the Career Center handout on Thank You Notes for additional suggestions.
- Make sure to briefly include things that you might want the interviewer to know about you that you missed in the interview. Keep it personal, mentioning specific things you discussed.

SECOND INTERVIEWS

After completing the initial interview, you may be asked to come for a second interview, which is intended to go into more depth about the job position and your qualifications. While you may feel more pressure attending a second interview, it is important to relax and be as prepared as you were for the first interview. You have made a good first impression on the organization, so it is important to follow up by being decisive about what you want. You also need to be even more descriptive about your skills and abilities and how they relate to the position.

To prepare, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ Re-assess your qualifications. Why are you the best candidate for the job?
- ✓ What specifically can you offer this organization?
- ✓ Which past experiences of yours relate well to this job?



The second interview will most likely involve meeting with several different people from the organization. You must represent yourself with facts and clear illustrations of your abilities and how they will help your employer. Give concrete examples of past performances to show how qualified you are for this position. Remain focused and remember that your most important goal is to give examples of how your knowledge and abilities will benefit their organization. While the employer will continue to assess your fit for the job, remember that the second interview is an opportunity for you to explore and learn more about the organization. Ask questions about specifics concerning your prospective job and the overall organization. Remember that the same rules of etiquette apply to the second interview. Make sure you record the names and titles of the people who interviewed you, and follow up your visit with a thank you letter to each.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Research shows that within the first 4-9 minutes of an interview, the interviewer decides whether or not to seriously consider you for the position. To put it succinctly – you never get a second chance to make a first impression! The following are some guidelines that will help you project a professional image:

MEN	WOMEN
<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear a dark colored suit, long-sleeved shirt (white is preferable), conservative silk tie, dark socks and dark, shined shoes. • Practice good personal hygiene with only light cologne or none at all. • Cover up or minimize prominent piercings or tattoos 	<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear a conservative, dark suit with a coordinating blouse (not low cut) and low heeled shoes (1.5-2 inches high), preferably the same color as the suit. • Wear natural colored hose and always have a spare pair with you. • Practice good personal hygiene, and wear only light perfume or none at all. • Cover up or minimize prominent piercings or tattoos
<p>DON'T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear sports jackets or blazers. • Wear flashy or faddish ties. • Wear a lot of jewelry, including earrings. • Have bulging pockets. • Wear sneakers or topsiders. • Use excessive amounts of cologne or after shave. • Carry a backpack 	<p>DON'T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear flashy, faddish or revealing clothes. • Wear a lot of jewelry, particularly noisy bracelets. • Use excessive or glittery makeup. • Use brightly colored nail polish, or wear chipped nail polish. • Carry a backpack.

One additional tip: Make sure your clothes are well tailored and fit correctly. You can get away with a less expensive suit if it fits impeccably well.

THE PHONE INTERVIEW

Today many employers conduct telephone interviews as a preliminary step in narrowing the field of applicants. To prepare for your phone interview, take the following steps:

- Always be prepared for a full-blown interview, not just a quick screening. Have a copy of your resume near your phone or tape it to the wall.
- Keep all your employer research materials near the phone for easy reference.
- Have a notepad and pen handy to take notes.
- Keep a mirror within view so you can make sure you are smiling while you are on the phone. You will find yourself coming across friendlier, more interested and more alert. You *can* hear a smile through the phone. Standing up while talking also helps.
- Keep your mind focused by eliminating distractions. Turn off “call waiting,” your TV, radio and computer.

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Although you will never be able to know exactly what the interviewer will ask, it may help to review these questions so that you can become more comfortable with the types of questions that might come up. Avoid giving vague or unsubstantiated answers. Always use specific examples, comparisons, and/or descriptions to support your answers. Take time to prepare and PRACTICE your answers. This gives you an edge over others who have not done their homework.



PERSONALITY-RELATED QUESTIONS:

Tell me about yourself.

How would you describe yourself?

What do you consider your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?

What motivates you to give your best effort?

How do you handle conflict?

Who were your favorite professors? Why?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

How do you work under pressure?

What have you learned from your mistakes?

How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?

If I gave you \$10,000,000 right now, what would you do with it?

How would your co-workers (boss, professors, friends) describe you?

What do you want me to know about you that is not on your resume?

Why should we hire you?

CAREER-RELATED QUESTIONS:

Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?

What qualities should a successful manager possess?

What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?

How has your education prepared you for your career?

Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him/her.

How would you describe the ideal job for you?

What two or three things are the most important to you in your work?

Why do you want to work in the _____ industry?

Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?

What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?

Do you have a geographical preference? Why?

Are you willing to relocate or travel?

What are your salary requirements?

FUTURE-RELATED QUESTIONS:

What do you see yourself doing in the next five years?

What do you expect to be earning in five years?

What do you really want to do with your life?

Do you have plans for further education?

EXPERIENCE-RELATED QUESTIONS:

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Describe your most rewarding college experience.

Why did you choose your major?

What major problems have you encountered and how did you deal with them?

What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?

What have you learned from your past work experience that would help in the position you are applying for?



ORGANIZATION-RELATED QUESTIONS:

What do you know about our company?

Why do you want to work for us?

What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in an organization like ours?

In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?

If you were hiring someone for this position, what would you look for?

Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?

“STRESS” QUESTIONS:

These questions are intended to put you on the spot. Interviewers want to see how you can handle stress or a sticky situation so that they know you are reliable under pressure. Simply be calm and specific.

What makes you think you are qualified for this position?

Why shouldn't we hire you?

BEHAVIOR-BASED QUESTIONS:

Based on the premise that an applicant's past behavior will predict how well he or she will respond to similar situations in the future, behavior-based interviews focus on determining how you, the interviewee, have actively applied your skills. The interviewer is looking for proof that you can demonstrate the desired capabilities in the real world.

You will be expected to give detailed, but focused, descriptions of actual circumstances. Take your time in formulating your response. The interviewer will understand and allow you to gather your thoughts. In your response, be thorough yet direct. Describe an overview of the situation, the action you took, and the result (SAR). Below are some of the questions commonly asked in the behavior-based interview.

- Describe a creative/innovative idea that you produced which led to a significant contribution to the success of an activity or project.
- Tell me about a time when you handled a conflict with a team member.
- What was the most complex assignment you have had? What was your role?
- Provide an example of how you acquired a technical skill and converted it to a practical application.
- By providing examples, demonstrate that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and/or environments.
- Tell me a suggestion you made to improve the way job processes/operations worked.
- What are the three effective leadership qualities you think are most important? How have you demonstrated these qualities in your past/present situation?
- Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult person and how you handled it.

NOTE ON UNETHICAL QUESTIONS

It is illegal for a prospective employer to ask questions that relate to race, gender, religion, marital status or other personal areas that do not have any bearing on your ability to do the job. While employers might require certain personal information after hiring, there is no legal reason that those questions should be asked of a prospective employee during the interview if they have no bearing on that person's ability to do the job. An interviewer may not intend to break the law with certain questions – he or she may not have the experience to know what subjects to avoid. If you feel that an inappropriate question has been asked, you can consider the interviewer is either uninformed, trying to put you on the spot, or actually is unethical. Examine whether or not this question was intentional and then decide how you should handle it, either by sidestepping the question, or, in a severe case, by confronting the interviewer about the question.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

Once you have answered the interviewer's questions, you will usually be given the opportunity to ask questions as well. Interviewers make hiring decisions as much from the questions you ask as from the ones you answer.

Winning questions are related to the job for which you are applying. Do not ask about things that you have already been told or things that are obvious or can be easily researched. Use the following types of questions to make a winning impression.

- What type of personality/traits does it take to succeed in this company?
- What is it like working here in terms of job pressures?
- What skills do you find most valuable in an employee?
- Describe the type of person that does best in your company.
- What is it that you need this person to do, right now, to make a contribution?
- Why was this position created?
- What is the organization's competitive strategy?
- What percent of the employees pursue advanced degrees/training in this industry or organization?
- What would a typical first assignment be in this position?
- What is the most difficult part of this job?
- Why did the previous person in this position leave?
- What is your typical day like in this position?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- What freedom would I have in getting the job done?
- Where do you see the company going in the next four years?
- What is the management style of this organization?
- What is your staff turnover rate like compared to the rest of the company?
- What qualities do you believe I lack for this position?
- When will you be making your decision to fill this position?



Be aware of these potential pitfalls during an interview:

- Not listening to the question
- Annoying the interviewer by answering a question that was not asked
- Providing superfluous information; be brief, thorough, and to the point
- Attempting to interview without preparation or practice



Employers also say they don't hire because candidates:

- Have a poor personal appearance
- Show up late for an interview
- Do not show interest or enthusiasm
- Do not ask questions about the job opening
- Do not look at the interviewer when talking to him or her
- Are unable to express themselves clearly
- Do not have career goals
- Have a "know it all" attitude

**The key to a great interview is preparation and practice!
Make sure that you have done your homework well in advance! Make an
appointment with a career counselor in our office for help preparing for
interviews or to do a mock interview: www.Stockton.edu/CareerAppointment**