

Professional Interview Guidelines

When you are invited to an interview, write down the following information:

- Name of the person who contacted you
- Title of the job for which you are being considered
- Time and place to appear for the interview
- Name of the person to whom you should report
- How long the interview is scheduled to last
- Telephone number to call if you will be delayed or need to cancel
- Anything you have been asked to bring

To prepare for the interview:

- Review your copies of the application materials you submitted, the job announcement, and the job description.
- Research the department to gain a general understanding of its mission, functions, services, etc.
- Think of questions you may be asked and develop responses. Research generic interview questions from web sites, books, and other sources, and develop responses to these as well. (See Sample Interview Questions attached.)
- Practice your responses and general interviewing skills with family, friends, or colleagues.

What to expect:

When you interview for a position, you may meet with one person or a panel. A panel may consist of supervisors, subject matter experts, human resources professionals, and members of the community whose backgrounds qualify them to serve as panel members. The hiring supervisor usually serves as the panel chairperson.

For many positions, there are two rounds of interviews. The first interview is structured and all candidates are asked the same questions. It is designed to narrow the field of candidates to the top candidates. The panel recommends that these candidates advance to the second interview. The second interview may be less structured and provide interviewers the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, provide candidates an opportunity to clarify areas that may be unclear, and probe more deeply into the education, training, experience, and other credentials of candidates.

Candidates may be asked to bring references and recent performance appraisals to the first or second interview. It is not unusual to be administered an exercise in which a job-related skill is demonstrated (e.g., written exercise, proofreading, software proficiency, mock presentation).

On the day of the interview:

- Be well rested and be sure to have a meal close enough to your interview time to avoid being hungry at the interview. Being tired, hungry, or uncomfortable in other ways will interfere with your ability to concentrate at the interview.
- Be well groomed and neat in appearance, and wear attire that is consistent with the work and environment of the position.
- Allow plenty of time to get to the interview. Consider the distance from your home to the interview site, potential traffic, availability of parking, and the time needed to walk from your vehicle to the interview site.

- Arrive at the interview site according to the instructions you may have been given or at least 15 minutes prior to your scheduled time. Don't forget to bring with you whatever may have been requested (e.g., references, performance evaluations, etc.).
- Read any materials given to you upon arrival, and review once more your application materials and any other materials that may have been mailed to you or that you brought to the interview. Then try to relax.

When you are escorted into the interview room, go in with the knowledge that:

- You belong at the interview and were invited because your education, training, or experience appear to be a good match for the job.
- The interviewer or panel want you to interview well and will make a fair, objective assessment of your skills.

During the interview:

- Be prepared to discuss your education, training, and work experience, and how they relate to the job for which you are interviewing. Don't forget to mention professional certifications, licenses, and organizations, if applicable.
- Listen carefully to the questions, and give balanced responses, i.e., not too little, not too much. If need be, take a moment to think before responding. If a question has multiple parts, be sure to address all parts. Ask to have the question repeated if necessary. For all questions, give concise, yet complete, responses in a logical and organized manner. When possible, give examples to support your responses. Avoid giving personal information (e.g., age, national origin, marital or parental status, religion, hobbies) that is irrelevant to the selection process.
- Speak clearly and loud enough to be heard. Be sure to make eye contact with and address the interviewer or each member of the panel. Be aware of your body language. Be confident and enthusiastic!
- Don't be modest, but don't be arrogant either. Remember, you are trying to convince the panel that you are the best person for the job, so sell yourself accordingly.
- Manage your time. Know what time your interview begins and what time it is scheduled to end, and know the number of questions to be asked and how much time you can afford to spend on each.

At the end of the interview:

- If time permits, ask questions about the position and the organization. Ask questions that show the interviewer or panel that you've researched the organization and know enough to ask perceptive questions.
- If you are offered the opportunity, give a closing statement. This gives you the chance to provide additional information, reiterate why you believe you should be selected, and convey excitement and enthusiasm for the position and the organization. Be sure to keep your closing statement brief, and don't forget to specifically tell the panel that you want the job.

Don't burn any bridges:

- If the interview fails to meet your expectations, either because of your performance or that of the employer, be cordial and professional to the very end.
- If you are unable to attend the interview, contact the hiring department as far in advance of the interview as possible. Failure to do so will be viewed as unprofessional and may eliminate you from future consideration for other positions.

- Follow up:

Within a day of the interview, send a note to the individual who led the process to express your appreciation for the opportunity to interview for the position and ask him or her to extend your thanks to any others that participated in your interview.

Sample Interview Questions

Identify the questions from this sample that you think you will be asked during your interview. In sentences that are complete and articulate, answer each of the questions out loud or in writing. Use specific examples from your academic and professional experiences that demonstrate the point you want to make. To bridge the gap between knowing what you want to communicate and actually coming up with a response that is intelligent, articulate and concise, practice.

Describe a problem you had to solve in past work experience and how you resolved it. In retrospect, what would you have done differently?

Why should we hire you?

Discuss a time when you worked on a project and your supervisor failed to provide much direction. What did you do?

What is your preferred working style?

What is your public speaking experience? How did you prepare?

Describe a team project you were involved in where one of the team members was difficult to work with or was not contributing. How did you handle this?

What would your colleagues say are your greatest strengths? Where would they say you need improvement?

What are you looking for in your next job?

What do you know about our organization and why do you want to work here?

What are some of the policy issues with which you have had experience?

Describe a situation in which your ethics were challenged and how you dealt with it.

How would you design a benefit-cost analysis of a given program?

Describe a project you worked on where you used your quantitative skills.

Describe an experience working with a large data set. What were the challenges?