

Interviewing Guide

An interview for employment is a chance for you (the job candidate) to get to know the potential employer, as well as a chance for the potential employer to learn more about you. Of primary importance in an interview is the opportunity for both parties to determine “fit” with the organization. For you, the interview provides a sense of an organization’s culture, norms, history, and work ethic. For the potential employer, the interview serves as a means of judging how your personality and style would work within their current structure and possibly what you would add given any planned changes in the organization. You also have the opportunity to sell yourself, and the employer determines how your stated skills (from your resume) would work in their environment and how adept you are with those skills. Finally, a job interview provides a space for you to demonstrate your interpersonal abilities and your unique candidacy.

Before the Interview

Prior to a job interview, you will want to prepare yourself. You have already taken the first step by reading this guide, but interviewing requires a good deal of work because you want to be ready to show that you are the individual who fits the position and gets hired. Following are some tips for the time leading up to your interview.

The Call or Email Invitation

You will receive a call or an email inviting you to interview. At that time, make sure you have all of the details: time, location, any additional materials they may want, who will be interviewing you, and how long the interview will last. If the location is one you’re uncertain about, ask them to verify it for you. You may also want to know if you need to bring anything besides yourself and additional copies of your resume—make sure you bring the exact resume that you submitted for the interview. Sometimes potential employers want to see samples of written work or a portfolio in certain areas. By finding out who will be conducting the interview, you can anticipate the kinds of questions they might ask. Please review the sample questions that appear later in this guide.

Research, Research, Research

The single most common complaint that recruiters have about job candidates is that they didn’t research the organization or the position. You **MUST** research an organization, their structure, their mission, and their hierarchy. For corporate interviews, it helps to know something about their annual sales revenue or their principal lines of business and locations. You do not have to memorize these facts, but it helps you in knowing what to expect from the interview. In doing your research, you might learn some things that will lead to questions you might have for the interviewers. The GSU library is a very strong resource for conducting your job search research. They have career-related books, periodicals, and directories as well as on-line resources to aid you in your endeavor.

Attend a Workshop

The Office of Career Services offers a range of workshops and programs to assist you in your job search. Of particular interest would be the Interviewing Workshop and the Employer Research Workshop. Use these resources as a means of learning more about the interviewing process.

Plan for Your Appearance

Both men and women should consider the following in dressing for an interview:

- Conservative two-piece business suit (solid, dark colors work best), unless the interviewer has suggested some other sort of apparel such as business casual
- Conservative long-sleeve shirt/blouse (preferably in white or another muted color)
- Polished, conservative shoes
- Well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Professional portfolio or briefcase; NO backpacks or messenger bags!
- No visible body piercing (except for earrings on women)

The following are generally good pointers for men:

- Necktie with a conservative pattern
- Dark shoes, preferably black and lace-up
- Dark socks (black always works well)
- If you have facial hair, trim it neatly
- A short haircut works well
- Avoid earrings or other jewelry (except for a ring)

For women, please consider the following:

- Always wear a suit; do not wear a dress
- No high heels
- Conservative hosiery at or near skin color (with no runs)
- No floral patterned clothing!
- If you wear nail polish, use clear or a conservative color and avoid nail art
- Use minimal makeup
- No more than one ring on each hand and only one set of earrings (which should also be small and not overwhelming)

Practice

In order to perform your best during your actual interview, you will want to practice ahead of time. Have friends, peers, colleagues, or family members take on the role of the interviewer and grill you. You should also prepare 4-6 stories about yourself; these stories should be generic enough that they can be used in situations where you don't have a complete answer but where a story will demonstrate your skill or one of your characteristics or traits. For example, think of all the plausible scenarios in interviewing, and develop your stories from there. A story about loyalty or motivation is always good. You can share with the interviewer how you are motivated or loyal; in doing so, keep the stories very short, but make sure the key element is not lost on the listener. Having a spiel on who you are what you want to do for at least a five year period is always useful.

The Actual Interview

Your interview actually begins when you wake up the day of your appointment. Make sure you have planned for any potential problems (oversleeping, car not starting, etc.), and have contingency plans in place just in case the worst case scenario occurs. Sleep enough the night before, and give yourself plenty of time. You never know when you will run into someone from the organization where you are interviewing so always look and act professionally.

Some Tips for Your Interview

- Show enthusiasm: give a firm handshake, smile, walk with energy and demonstrate that you are interested in the job.
- Maintain eye contact at all times.
- Speak in a very clear and articulate way, and always finish your thoughts.
- Listen to questions carefully; it's perfectly reasonable for you to ask the interviewer to repeat a question or to ask for clarification ("I want to see if I understood your question. Did you want me to speak about _____?").
- Provide concise (brief) and pointed answers. Do not meander aimlessly through a response. No single answer should be longer than two minutes, and most should be shorter. You can always ask if they would like to know more, and in many cases, they might have follow-up questions.
- If you are stuck for an answer, use one of your stories that you prepared ahead of time.
- Never chew gum or eat candy, regardless of how dry your mouth might be.
- Respond appropriately to questions: do not just answer yes/no but give the interviewer the information you think they might be seeking. For example, if asked whether you know a particular computer software application, tell the interviewer yes or no and then talk about how well you know it or about what a quick learner you are and how you might know a similar program.
- Do not share more information than you are asked about, including any real or perceived deficiencies. If asked about your weaknesses, always choose something that can be turned into a positive statement such as: "I have a hard time saying 'no,' but I like to get a job done and know that it has been completed well."
- Never lie or stretch the truth.
- Be a resource person, NOT a beggar. A resource person is someone who illustrates for the interviewer how he or she would bring outstanding skills to an organization, while a beggar shows how much he or she needs a job. Do not (even jokingly) respond that your reason for applying is because you need a job.
- Always ask questions. Typically, at the end of any interview, you are asked if you have questions. Make sure you have questions prepared (samples appear in the next section of this guide). If you fail to ask at least one question, you appear less interested in the position or the organization.
- It's a good idea if you are uncertain about your answer to a particular question to ask if you answered the question (completely). You might ask if you provided enough information or if you gave the information they were seeking: "Did I answer that question for you?" or "Is there anything else I could add?"
- Ask for business cards from the people who interview you so you can follow-up appropriately.

Potential Interview Questions from an Employer

Employers may ask any combination of questions, but remember, they are ultimately trying to determine fit, personality, style and overall abilities. As such, they may ask variations of common questions. For example, instead of directly asking about your strengths and weaknesses, they might ask you to talk about any areas where you feel you may need some additional training or where you may feel less confident in your capabilities. This question places a different spin on the weaknesses inquiry. Likewise, for the strengths question, they might ask you to talk about a successful project you were involved in or about a time when you felt very confident in your work. Always pause to think about what they are really asking or what they really want to know. Sometimes, a perfectly innocuous seeming question might be more targeted than you would initially realize.

Following are some common questions that interviewers ask of candidates:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position/organization?
- What makes you qualified (or the best candidate) for this position?
- What were your best courses in school?
- In what areas would you consider yourself an expert?
- Tell me about a time when you didn't live up to your own expectation.
- Tell me about a time when you were a leader, and what was that like for you?
- Give me an example of a problem you solved and how you went about solving it.
- Why should I hire you?
- What makes you think you could perform well in this position?
- Give me an example of a situation where you failed and how you handled it.
- What would your current supervisor say about you? What would he or she say are your best attributes? What areas would he or she say you need to develop?
- What are your long range goals? Where do you want to be in 5, 10, 15 years?
- What motivates you?
- What type of supervision do you require?
- Who are the people you admire and why?
- How did you choose your academic program?
- Are you a team player? Can you give me an example of a collaboration experience?
- Tell me about your ideal supervisor.
- What outside activities are you involved in?
- Is there anything we didn't discuss that you'd like to tell me?

Potential Interview Questions from You to an Employer

You will frequently be asked if you have any questions, and you should always have at least one strong question ready.

Here are some examples of questions you might ask:

- Ask a question about the research you did.
- To whom would I report if I was offered this position?
- What are the greatest challenges to this position?
- Does the organization provide professional development experiences or opportunities for further training?
- What would a typical day be like for someone in this position?
- What do you see as the greatest challenges of this position?

- What do you like most about working for the organization?
- What are the long-range goals or plans for the organization?
- With whom will I be working most closely?
- What would someone have to do in order to be successful in this position?
- What is the timeline for your decision-making process in this search?

Ending the Interview

Try to follow the lead of the interviewer in terms of how the interview ends. He or she will usually ask if you have questions, which often signals that the end of your interview time is near. If you are interested in the position, let the interviewer know: “I am impressed by what we’ve discussed today, and I am even more interested in the position.” If you did not ask about the timeline for their search decisions, then make sure you find out as you end the interview. They will often let you know when they will contact you. People are very busy so do not hound them if they are a bit later than expected in their projected deadlines. Even if you find that you are not interested in the position or if you think you have performed badly during the interview, maintain your enthusiasm. You can turn a position down later if you receive an offer, and you might feel discouraged but some interviewers try to see how you handle interview pressure.

After the Interview

Immediately after the interview and after you have left the building, jot down a few notes about what you learned during your time there. You may be asked for a second interview, or they may call to clarify something you discussed, and you want to be prepared to respond to the employer. When you get home that day, send a thank you letter. A formal laser-printed letter is best, but if they are expecting to make a decision in very short time, you could at least send an initial e-mail thank you note. You should send letters to anyone who interviewed you. If you are asked for additional interview rounds, always show your enthusiasm and be prepared to receive an offer. You will need to research salaries in the industry and determine how your skills measure up so you have a ballpark figure when it comes time to negotiating.