

Guidelines for Effective Interviews



Purpose of an Interview

The purpose of an interview is for you and the employer to meet each other and see if each has what the other wants. The employer will be assessing your strengths and abilities in relation to the position as well as your personality, attitudes, and motivations, communication skills and appearance. The interview is a two-way street, make sure that you communicate clearly how you are qualified for the position AND that you learn what you want to know about the employer and the position. In general, it is unlikely that salary, hours, and benefits will be discussed in the first interview, so you should focus on what you can do for the employer, and on whether the position will fulfill your needs for career growth.

Before the Interview

Research the employer. What is their product or service? You can find out about employers by doing research at the library or on the Internet. How can you contribute to the organization's goals?

Understand the job description. What qualifications are they looking for and how can you fulfill them? Take some time to think about what your skills are, what accomplishments you have, and how those can be evidence that you meet the job qualifications. Review the "Preparation for an Effective Interview" section of this handout. Turn those skills and accomplishments into short (30-60 seconds) stories that you can relate during the interview. Demonstrating that you have done something well is a good way to indicate that you'll repeat similar actions for this employer. Practice those stories out loud by yourself and with others. It's not enough to think about them, you must become comfortable with making the words come out of your mouth.

Visit the interview site in advance, if possible. Make sure you know where you're going, where you'll get off the bus or park your car. How long will it take for you to get there? Be sure to give yourself plenty of time so that you are not late. While you're in the area, observe how people are dressed for work. You'll want to select clothing that is just a little bit more formal than what you see employees wearing. Take extra copies of your resume as well as copies of your reference list, in case they are needed at the interview.

At the Interview

Arrive 5-10 minutes early. This will allow you a few minutes to catch your breath and to observe the workplace. Greet every person you interact with, introduce yourself, use a firm handshake and good eye contact.

Use good posture, and even lean forward slightly to express interest. Maintain eye contact throughout the

interview. Expect the first few minutes of the interview to be small talk as you and the interviewer get accustomed to each other. The interviewer will then ask you questions about yourself and your qualifications. Remember that the interviewer is primarily looking for two things: if you can do the job, and if you will fit in with the other employees. Make sure that you address those (perhaps unspoken) concerns with your answers to the interviewer's questions. The interview is a time to show your confidence and what you can do for the employer. If the interviewer isn't asking you the questions that will reveal your qualifications for the job, volunteer that information. This is your time to communicate what you can do for the employer.

As the interview progresses, the interviewer will ask you if you have any questions. This is where you ask those questions you crafted while you were preparing for the interview. ALWAYS have several questions to ask. Doing so shows the interviewer that you are interested and involved. What do you want to know about the organization and the position? You might ask how the position you are applying for will contribute toward a specific goal of the organization. You might ask for what characteristics the ideal job candidate would have – and then follow up with descriptive statements about how closely you match what they are looking for. You could inquire about advancement possibilities for the position in question. In addition, make sure to ask about the time frame for the hiring process: it's nice for you to leave the interview having an idea of when they will make their decision.

As the interview ends, stand up, thank the interviewer for his/her time, ask for his/her business card, express your interest in the position (if you are interested), give a firm handshake with a smile, and leave. Once you've left the interview, take a few minutes to write down what happened, what went well, and in what ways you meet the job qualifications. Within 24 hours of the interview, pull out the interviewer's business card and write a thank you letter or email expressing your appreciation for the interview.

Preparing for an Effective Interview

Answering these questions will help you organize your thoughts in preparation for a successful interview. The questions in parentheses can guide you to respond to the primary question.

- What information do I have about the company, organization or job? (Why am I interested in this position?)
- How is my education relevant to the job? (What classes, degrees, projects have prepared me to do this work?)
- How is my work experience relevant to the job? (What skills did I use in previous positions that are relevant to this job? What did I contribute and accomplish in my past jobs?)
- What are my career goals? (How are my goals related to this organization and/or job?)
- What are my special skills and abilities, such as computer literacy, fluency in languages besides English, public speaking? (How do these skills relate to the job at hand? What are specific examples of how I use these skills?)
- What interested me in seeking this job? (How are my career goals related to my interest in the position? How does my background relate to the skills in this position?)
- My strengths are...(How did I develop them? In what activities?)
- My weaknesses are...(How am I improving them? Keep this one positive!)
- What additional information should I make the interviewer aware of?

In general:

- Know your interests, skills, strengths, experiences and goals AND how those relate to the position you are applying for
- Be prepared
- Organize your thoughts
- Be specific about what you can do in the job for the employer
- Demonstrate your interest in the position
- Display confidence

Reasons for not receiving a Job Offer

- Lack of knowledge in the required area, not well qualified
- Low level of accomplishment, poor grades
- Poor attitude, lack of poise, confidence, immature, timid, hesitant, fails to look interviewer in the eye
- Lack of goals/objectives, poorly motivated, doesn't know interests, indecisive
- Lack of enthusiasm or drive, not sufficiently assertive, little evidence of initiative
- Lack of interest in our type of business/knows little about the company or the position being offered
- Inability to express self, poor speech, inability to "sell" self
- Poor personal appearance, lack of neatness, poor grooming
- Uninformed about company, lack of preparation for interview
- Overbearing, overaggressive, conceited, cocky
- Asks no questions, inappropriate or poor questions, little depth of thought to questions

Sample Thank-You Letter

Ms. Mary Tsu,
XYZ Company
890 Techno Road
Goleta, CA 93117

Dear Ms. Tsu,

Thank you so much for meeting with me yesterday in my interview as an accounting clerk with your company. Our interview confirmed my interest in the position.

I feel that I am well prepared for the position. Specifically, the accounting courses I have taken have equipped me to start the job with a minimum of training. I am particularly excited about the prospect of using my payroll accounting skills.

I hope that I will have the opportunity to work at XYZ Company, and that I will be hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

Schall Career Center
Student Services Building, Room 282
(805) 965-0581, ext. 2331 www.sbccc.edu/careercenter