

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare for that Interview!

This handout will provide you with information to prepare for your interview. It contains some of the following:

- ❑ rules about the interview, how it will flow and what information should be covered
- ❑ general interviewing questions you should be prepared to answer
- ❑ specific and technical questions that may be asked of you

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Find tips to help you before, during and after the interview. Remember: the more you prepare up front, the more relaxed you will feel during the interview; the more relaxed you feel, the better you will perform; the better you perform, the more likely you will be to get the job! Makes sense, yes?

So, what's the big deal?

OK, you're getting ready for the big interview. What important details do you need to know? First of all, you need to understand what the interview is all about. Your winning resume, cover letter and good use of your networking contacts have won you entree into Potential Employer's office. The interviewer will already have reviewed your resume, which basically provides the hard facts of your employment history and skills. The interview is a subtler, more subjective aspect of the job-hunting process.

Frequently, an interviewer (sometimes without even realizing it) will form an opinion of you based on the nuances of your interaction. You're trying to make a good impression here. You need to portray sincerely, politely and enthusiastically that you are knowledgeable about the organization and have something to offer it. Your resume may well have shown examples of your skills as a team player, but now you need to convince them that you fit their team. In order to make the best impression you can, you need to be prepared, know what you can expect, and know how to handle it if things don't go quite as you had planned.

Preparation

Know how to keep yourself calm. The best way to do this is to be prepared! Research the company and the interviewer, if possible. Have you done any informational interviews about this industry?

Know what kind of interview to expect? a screening interview, a stress interview....

Know why you want the job. Identify your wants and your needs—and know the difference!

Be able to express specifically the marketable skills you have to offer the organization.

Be prepared for the standard interview questions and know your answers to them.

Be prepared to answer that killer question.

Know how to deal with illegal questions tactfully during the interview.

Prepare questions you wish to ask—only ask questions you can't find answers to yourself.

Line up your references in advance and verify that they will be good ones.

Presentation

Find out the standard dress for the organization. Dress on the conservative side and arrive early.

Bring extra resumes, notepad, and pens.

Be sure you know how to pronounce your interviewer's name correctly.

Be polite to everyone you meet there. They all count. Be personable as well as professional.

Do not chew gum, smoke, swear or use slang. Be aware of body language, vibes, and reactions—use your instincts to keep things on course.

Assume all questions are asked for a good reason and answer accordingly. Do not assume that your interviewer knows how to elicit the information he/she is looking for.

Feel free to ask for clarification before answering a question. Take some time to formulate your answers before you speak.

Answer all questions honestly, but in the best, most positive light.

Perseverance

Make some notes about the interview right after you leave.

Send a thank you letter ASAP to each interviewer.

Be sure to know how to spell all names and know correct titles.

TEN RULES ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

- 1. Keep your answers brief and concise.** Unless asked to give more details, limit your answers to two to three minutes per question. Tape yourself and see how long it takes you to fully answer a question.
- 2. Include concrete, quantifiable data.** Interviewees tend to talk in generalities. Unfortunately, generalities often fail to convince interviewers that the applicant has assets. Include measurable information and provide details about specific accomplishments when discussing your strengths.
- 3. Repeat your key strengths three times.** It's essential that you comfortably and confidently articulate your strengths. Explain how the strengths relate to the company's or department's goals and how they might benefit the potential employer. If you repeat your strengths then they will be remembered and—if supported with quantifiable accomplishments—they will more likely be believed.
- 4. Prepare five or more success stories.** In preparing for interviews, make a list of your skills and key assets. Then reflect on past jobs and pick out one or two instances when you used those skills successfully.
- 5. Put yourself on their team.** Ally yourself with the prospective employer by using the employer's name and products or services. For example, "As a member of _____, I would carefully analyze the _____ and _____." Show that you are thinking like a member of the team and will fit in with the existing environment. Be careful though not to say anything that would offend or be taken negatively. Your research will help you in this area.
- 6. Image is often as important as content.** What you look like and how you say something are just as important as what you say. Studies have shown that 65 percent of the conveyed message is nonverbal; gestures, physical appearance, and attire are highly influential during job interviews.
- 7. Ask questions.** The types of questions you ask and the way you ask them can make a tremendous impression on the interviewer. Good questions require advance preparation. Just as you plan how you would answer an interviewer's questions, write out any specific questions you want to ask. Then look for opportunities to ask them during the interview. Don't ask about benefits or salary. The interview process is a two-way street whereby you and the interviewer assess each other to determine if there is an appropriate match.
- 8. Maintain a conversational flow.** By consciously maintaining a conversational flow—a dialogue instead of a monologue—you will be perceived more positively. Use feedback questions at the end of your answers and use body language and voice intonation to create a conversational interchange between you and the interviewer.
- 9. Research the company, product lines and competitors.** Research will provide information to help you decide whether you're interested in the company and important data to refer to during the interview.
- 10. Keep an interview journal.** As soon as possible, write a brief summary of what happened. Note any follow-up action you should take and put it in your calendar. Review your presentation. Keep a journal of your attitude and the way you answered the questions. Did you ask questions to get the information you needed? What might you do differently next time? Prepare and send a brief, concise thank you letter. Restate your skills and stress what you can do for the company.

Because of its importance, interviewing requires advance preparation. Only you will be able to positively affect the outcome. You must be able to compete successfully with the competition for the job you want. In order to do that, be certain you have considered the kind of job you want, why you want it, and how you qualify for it. You also must face reality: Is the job attainable?

In addition, recognize what it is employers want in their candidates. They want "can do" and "will do" employees. Recognize and use the following factors to your benefit as you develop your sales presentation. In evaluating candidates, employers consider the following factors:

- **Ability**
- **Character**
- **Loyalty**
- **Initiative**
- **Personality**
- **Communication skills**
- **Acceptance**
- **Work record**
- **Recommendations**
- **Outside activities while in school**
- **Impressions made during the interview**

Tough Interview Questions - General

1. *Tell me about you!*

Keep your answer to one or two minutes; don't ramble. Use your resume summary as a base to start.

2. *What do you know about our company?*

Do your homework before the interview! Spend some time on-line or at the library researching the company. Find out as much as you can, including products, size, income, reputation, image, management talent, people, skills, history and philosophy. Project an informed interest; let the interviewer tell you about the company.

3. *Why do you want to work for us?*

Don't talk about what you want; first, talk about their needs: You would like to be part of a specific company project; you would like to solve a company problem; you can make a definite contribution to specific company goals.

4. *What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't?*

Relate past experiences that show you've had success in solving previous employer problem(s) that may be similar to those of the prospective employer.

5. *What about the job offered do you find the most attractive? Least attractive?*

List three or more attractive factors and only one minor unattractive factor.

6. *Why should we hire you?*

Because of your knowledge, experience, abilities and skills.

7. *What do you look for in a job?*

An opportunity to use your skills, to perform and be recognized.

8. Please give me your definition of a(the position for which you are being interviewed).

Keep it brief -- give an action- and results-oriented definition.

9. *How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?*

Not long at all -- you expect only a brief period of adjustment to the learning curve.

10. *How long would you stay with us?*

As long as we both feel I'm contributing, achieving, growing, etc.

Research, Rehearse and Relax

No matter how well qualified you are for a job or how articulate you are about your strengths and experience, there is nothing that can replace preparation. Once you have practiced asking and answering questions, the next step is to relax and remind yourself that:

- 1) There is no question you cannot answer,
- 2) You are well suited to the position, and
- 3) You would be an asset to the company.

Visualize yourself sitting in the interview feeling serene and confident. Get a good night's sleep before the interview, arrive a few minutes early, take a few deep breaths and seize the day.

Research the Company. Rehearse Your Presentation. Relax and Project self-confidence.

GREAT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

YOU MAY BE ASKED

TECHNICAL

1. Please describe any technical hobbies or interests you have.
2. How do you approach a technical problem? Give an example.
3. What exposure have you had to (software, hardware, product marketing, budgeting, etc.)?
4. Briefly describe a technical project that you found challenging or rewarding.
5. What have you done above and beyond class or course work especially in an area related to your major?
6. Have you published any papers or projects?
7. Have you ever been in a situation where you found yourself without the specific technical knowledge to perform a task essential to your project? What did you do?

PERSONAL

8. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
9. Can you name some weaknesses?
10. Define success. Define failure.
11. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
12. Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
13. Who are your role models? Why?
14. How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
15. What motivates you most in a job?
16. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/co-worker and how did you handle it?
17. Tell me about yourself.
18. What are your hobbies?
19. Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
20. Describe your ideal job.
21. What can you offer us?

EDUCATION

22. Why did you choose your major?
23. Why did you choose to attend the University of Virginia?
24. Do you think you received a good education? In which ways?
25. In which campus activities did you participate?
26. In what ways does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
27. Which classes in your major did you like best? Least?
28. Which elective classes did you like best? Least? Why?
29. If you were to start over, what would you change about your education?
30. Do you plan to return to school for further education?

EXPERIENCE

31. What job-related skills have you developed?
32. Did you work while going to school?
33. What did you learn from these work experiences?
34. What did you enjoy most about your last employment? Least?
35. Have you ever quit a job? Why?
36. Give an example of a situation in which you worked under deadline pressure.
37. Have you ever done any volunteer work? Of what kind?
38. How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?

CAREER GOALS

39. Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
40. What kind of boss do you prefer?
41. Would you be successful working with a team?
42. Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
43. What other types of positions are you considering?
44. How do you feel about working in a structured environment?
45. Are you able to work on several assignments at once?
46. How do you feel about working overtime?
47. How do you feel about travel?
48. How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?
49. Are you willing to work flextime?

GENERAL

50. What motivates you most in a job?
51. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/ supervisor/co-worker and how did you handle it?
52. Have you ever spoken before a group of people? How large?
53. Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
54. What do you know about our organization (products or services)?
55. Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?

The following may not be directly asked, but you should address them:

56. How can you increase their profits?
57. How can you further develop their product line?
58. How can you increase the efficiency of their existing systems?
59. How can you help their business grow?
60. How can you help their department prosper?
61. How can you make your manager look good?

Before you begin interviewing, think about these questions and your possible responses.

The Center for Engineering Career Development will be glad to assist you with preparing for your job/internship interviews!