

INTERVIEW SKILLS

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Congratulations! You've been invited to interview, now you must come prepared to showcase your interpersonal skills.

Goal of the Interview:

Your goal is to show the employer why you will be the best person for the job, relating your personal strengths and past accomplishments to this particular position. Specifically, you want to tell the employer how you can help them accomplish their business goals and function as a valuable member of the organization.

Research:

Employers want to be assured that you've researched their organization prior to the interview. Most organizations have their own websites. Run a google search (www.google.com) to find helpful links. You may also contact the company to request a recent publication. Research helps you to prepare effective questions for the interview.

Employers are researching you too! It's a popular practice among employers to google candidates. Make sure your Myspace, Facebook, Blog etc. won't get you in trouble!

Preparation:

- Write down all the pertinent details of the interview, such as the interviewer's name and title, phone number and address.
- Make sure your email address and voicemail are professional. Remember to check for messages frequently.
- Know the location. You can run MapQuest or Google maps to have detailed directions prior to the interview (don't forget to find out where you can park).
- Review your resume, cover letter and portfolio presentation.
- Research salary and benefits for a company of this size in this region. You can often find salary surveys through professional organization websites or at the Career Services office. Check out **Professional Organizations** and **Relocation Tools** under **Career Resources** on blackboard.
- Don't be underprepared for standard interview questions.
- Take advantage of the **Perfect Interview** program at Career Services. This online tool allows you to practice and develop your interviewing skills. You see videos of tough questions from professionals, which you must answer on the spot. A webcam records your answers, so you and/or the Career Services staff can evaluate them. We also conduct mock interviews.

What to do on the day of the interview:

- Be on time. Fifteen minutes early is appropriate.
- Dress appropriately. When in doubt, error on the side of conservative. Once you accept a position, inquire about the dress code.
- Bring the questions you prepared during your research.
- Bring extra copies of your resume and a leave behind of your work. You may also want to bring sketchbooks and a hard copy of your portfolio.

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- Be prepared back up everything on your resume. Prepare to answer questions about your accomplishments, strengths, and weaknesses. Think about how your experiences can be tied to the job description or to the organization. *Why did you get involved? What did you learn? What did you contribute?*
- If you are doing a phone or internet interview, make sure you are in a quiet place where you have a good connection and there is no background noise.

Segments of the Interview

Although every interview is different, most follow a general pattern. A typical half-hour session can be divided into four segments.

1. The first 5 to 10 minutes are usually devoted to establishing some rapport between you and the interviewer. Try to relax and enjoy the conversation. The interview starts the moment you introduce yourself and shake hands. Don't discount this period. Your ability to talk and express yourself intelligently is being measured.
2. The interviewer will move to a more specific level of conversation. The second part of the interview gives you a chance to answer some "where, when and why" questions about your background. This is your chance to elaborate on your strong points! Don't monopolize the conversation, and let the interviewer lead. But also don't confine your statements to yes or no answers.
3. Part three begins when the interviewer feels your skills have been identified and can see how they might fit into the organization. The interviewer will then discuss the company and the opening if a good match seems possible.
4. At the end of the interview, find out where you stand. "How do you feel my skills relate to the job?" "What are the next steps?" "When can I expect to hear from you?"

After you leave, take 10 or 15 minutes to review how you did. What questions did you find difficult? What did you forget to say? How can you improve on the next interview? Consider keeping a log with written notes on each of these concerns. Also keep a list of specific interview questions asked and how you responded.

Interview Questions Asked by Employers

The following are a sample of questions typically asked during an interview by prospective employers. In order to prepare for your interview, practice answering these questions. Have answers prepared but not memorized, treat the interview like a conversation. Practice will help you to easily respond to questions during the actual interview. Remember to relax, be honest, confident, interesting and insightful.

- **Tell me about yourself?**
- **Why are you interested in working here?**
 - The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought.
 - Know the job description and qualifications.
 - Know some history of the company.
- **Why did you choose CCS? Why did you choose your particular major?**
- **Where do you see yourself in 5 years, 10 years?**

- **What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?**
 - A perfectionist and too hard of a worker are NOT weaknesses
 - Be sure the weakness you talk about is NOT a key element of the position!
 - Have an appropriate, real weakness prepared. Speak about how you discovered it, why it is important to fix it and how you are trying to improve it.
- **How would others describe you?**
- **How do you handle conflict?**
- **How do you learn about consumers (or customers)?**
- **What can you do for us that other candidates can't?**
- **Do you prefer working in a team or alone? Why?**
- **How do you stay on top of trends?**
- **Tell me what you know about our organization?**
- **What are three adjectives that describe you?**
- **What qualities do you look for in a supervisor?**
- **Describe a mistake you made and how you handled it.**

Questions to Ask an Interviewer

Always ask questions! Asking sound, intelligent and well thought out questions conveys that you have an interest in the position, organization and the interviewer. It also conveys that you are competent in critical thinking skills. Avoid asking questions about salary. You should focus on what you bring to the organization, not what you can get out of it.

- What is the reporting structure in this department?
- What are the key characteristics you are looking for in a candidate?
- What goals is this division currently trying to accomplish?
- Can you tell me some of the reasons people choose to work here?
- What will my day to day activities entail?

Thank You Letters/Emails

Follow up each interview with a thank-you letter. Here are some suggestions for these types of letters.

- Send a thank you letter to the person(s) you met with within 24 to 48 hours of the appointment.
- Make the letter personal by citing some information that is specific to the interview discussion.
- If you have been in contact with an employer through email, an emailed thank you is appropriate.

Here is an example of a thank-you letter:

Jane Doe
102 Main Street
Warren, MI 48092

Mr. John Smith
Manager
Davis Gallery
1254 One St.
Warren, MI 48092

May 14, 2006

Dear Mr. Smith:

I would like to thank you for meeting with me on Monday, May 13, 2006. I enjoyed hearing about your gallery and the many possibilities for professional growth. I was impressed with the efficiency, friendliness and overall atmosphere of Davis Gallery.

I believe that my BFA degree in crafts and my internship experience at Stone Pottery will prove to be a great resource to the gallery. I would welcome the opportunity to join your team. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE

Jane Doe