Preparing for Job Interviews
For business, government and nonprofit organizations

2015
Agenda

- Purpose of an Interview
- Preparation – Research
- Interview Questions (and Answers)
- Practice!
- Setting up the Interview
- Interview Do’s and Don’ts
- Additional Considerations...
- After the Interview
- Accepting and Rejecting Offers
Purpose of an Interview

• An interview is an opportunity to learn whether or not there is a “fit” between you and the employer.
• An interview is a two-way exchange of information:
  - What does an employer need to know?
    – Can you do the job?
    – What are you like to work with?
    – Can we “afford” to hire you?
What do you need to know to make a good decision if you are made an offer?
Preparation - Know Yourself, Know the Employer

- Review your resume and any other materials you’ve sent in an application. “Google” yourself.
- Think about your abilities and experience, know your strengths and your areas for growth.
- Prepare EXAMPLES.
- Research the employer: websites, databases, news and journal articles.
- You should also know about general trends in the industry/field in which you intend to work.
Preparation: Researching Employers

Before your interview, do your best to find out about:

• The employer’s history, mission, products/services
• Sector – nonprofit, private (for profit), public (gov’t)
• Structure and management
• Financial health
• Clients and competitors
• Organizational culture
• The hiring process

*Use your networks to find information you can’t get online.
Preparation: Researching Specific Positions

Understanding specific job or internship requirements:

• Read position descriptions closely.
• Learn about qualifications: including education, skills, prior experience, certifications, and so on.
• What is the role of this position in the department? In the organization?
• Who does the position work with?
• What are the paths for advancement?
• What is the typical salary for this kind of position?
Preparation: Making the Match

• Connect your accomplishments to what you know about the job/employer from your research.
• What are your most relevant skills, qualifications and experiences?
• What do you know about the employer’s workplace needs? How can you support them given your work style?
• How are your goals aligned with theirs?
Interview Questions to Practice

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you know about us?
- Why are you the best candidate for this position?
- Tell me about your research.
- Tell me about a significant accomplishment that makes you proud.
- What is your experience in... (industry, nonprofits, gov’t)?
- How would those who have worked with you describe you?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What motivates you?
- What are your salary requirements?
Structuring your Answers

• USE EXAMPLES & Situation-Task-Action-Result (STAR):

“How would those who have worked with you describe you?”

A not-very-good-answer:

“I am a good problem-solver, I take initiative, I’m a team player, I’m easy to get along with, well organized and highly motivated.”

What’s wrong with this answer?
Structuring your Answers

• USE EXAMPLES & Problem-Action-Result:

“How would those who have worked with you describe you?”

A good answer:

“I am a good problem solver and I take initiative. Recently, I was asked to use a database of department alumni contacts that hadn’t been updated in a while. It took a long time to get through the information, so I reorganized the search fields, and at the same time deleted old records I came across. As a result, the database is a lot more accessible, and we are all using it more frequently, which will help us keep the information much more up-to-date.”
Structuring your Answers

• Now, practice the same question with someone next to you.

• USE EXAMPLES & Situation-Task-Action-Result

“How would those who have worked with you describe you?”
Your Answer:
Practice Interviewing

Practice questions

- There are sample questions on the Career Services website

Do a mock interview

- Call Career Services (215 898-7530) to make an appointment

Use InterviewStream

- CS subscribes on your behalf. You can “mock interview” yourself with a webcam and practice questions that cover a variety of fields
Setting up the interview

- Get the name(s) and title(s) of the person(s) with whom you will meet.
- Find out where you need to be and when.
- What will the interview cover?
- What should you prepare?
  - A presentation?
    - How long should it be?
    - Who will attend?
- What should you bring?
- If travel is involved, work out the arrangements.
The Day Before

- Know what you are wearing.
- Know where you are going.
- Get together whatever materials you need to bring, including the materials you sent when you first applied for the job.
- Prepare some (thoughtful) questions to ask.
The Day of the Interview

• Arrive a little early.
• Shake hands with each person and look them in the eye. Memorize their names.
• Try to establish rapport with every person you meet.
• Respect the time limits of each meeting.
• Make sure your cell phone is OFF.
Interview - “Do’s”

• Think about what makes you genuinely interested in this job and this employer.
• Ask for clarification if you do not understand a question. **Do not guess.**
• Illustrate your answers with specific examples.
• Feel comfortable taking a moment to think.
• Be honest.
• Ask about “next steps” at the close of the interview.
Interview - “Don’ts”

- Avoid saying negative things about your current situation, supervisor, etc.
- Don’t bring up salary or other benefits.
- Don’t be focused on “performing” or giving the “right” answer.
- Don’t be defensive or take things personally.
- Don’t forget you are evaluating them, too!
Closing the Interview

• Be aware of signals that indicate the interview is over.
• Express your enthusiasm for the organization.
• If you’re interested in the position, let them know – “Thank you! From what I learned today, I feel even more excited about this opportunity”
• Maintain eye contact and shake hands.
• Ask for business cards and how to follow up.
Additional Considerations....

• Telephone Interviews/Video Interviews
• First and Second Interviews
• Meals
• Group Interviews
• Keeping yourself calm
• Knowing what are appropriate/inappropriate questions from employers
After the Interview

• Write a thank you note.
• Follow up if you were planning to do so.
• Pay attention to your reactions.
  ▫ Does it feel like a place you’d like to work?
  ▫ Do people seem to enjoy their work and their colleagues?
  ▫ Trust your intuition.
Accepting/Rejecting Offers

• Learn about negotiating strategies from our Career Services website and workshops.
• It’s not a good idea to accept a job on the spot.
  ▫ Reach an agreement with the employer as to when you’ll need to make a decision.
  ▫ A real job offer has terms of employment and a salary figure attached to it. Until an employer gives you an exact figure, keep looking.
More from Career Services....

• Go to the Interviewing and Negotiating portions of our website.
  http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/interviewingadvice/

• Read our Blog
  ▫ You can search prior posts by using the keyword: “interviewing”

• Make an appointment with a Career Services Advisor for a mock interview
  ▫ 215-898-7530