Interviewing Preparation & Practice

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What we’ll cover…

• You’ve got the interview…, now what?

• Types of interview

• Types of interview question

• How can you prepare effectively?

• Everything else…

[Not necessarily in this order…]

The application process

Application materials received
Face-to-face interviews
• Some individual interviews
• Some panel/group interviews
• Industry-specific question types

Screening interviews
• Phone
• Skype
• “informal interviews”
• And more…
• [not for every type of job]

Final decision made on candidates

negotiation

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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 really do the job?
  - What are you like to work with?

- What do you need to know to make a good decision if you are made an offer?
Thinking about “fit”

YOUR BOSS

YOU

YOUR NEW TEAM

YOUR ORGANIZATION

What do employers want to know?

• Your skills and qualifications are important, as are:
  – Your understanding of the company and future role
  – Your ability to think and act under pressure
  – Your interest in organization’s work and clients
  – Your personality type
  – Any risk factors associated with investing in you
  – The likelihood that you will fit in with everyone else
  – Your “value added” extras
  – Your attitude, motivation, and enthusiasm
  – Your communication skills
  – Your preparedness
  – Your design abilities

You’ve got the interview – now what?

STEP 1: gather information
Information about the interview

• Where and when?
  – Be clear about time zone differences

• What type?
  – Phone, Skype, video conference, in person, group, individual, informal…

• Who?
  – Who is primary contact for questions
  – Who will you be meeting with?

• How long?
  – How long is the interview and what is the schedule?

Preparation: Researching Employers

• Before your interview, do your best to find out about:
  – The employer’s history, mission, and projects
  – Structure and management
  – Clients and competitors
  – Organizational culture
  – The hiring process
  – *Use your networks to find info you can’t get online

• Background research can help you to prepare for the different interviewing scenarios you might face
  – Types of interviews
  – Types of questions (e.g., glassdoor.com)
  – Types of people

The informal invitation

• “We’d like you to come and see our firm. Are you free for 30 minutes next week to take a quick tour and speak with a couple of our staff members?”
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Purpose of “informal interview”

• To interview you…

• To give you more information – to know what you are getting into

• To gauge “fit” and to involve other staff members in the process

• To move forward with interview process rapidly

• Commonly used by start-ups and smaller organizations

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How to prepare

• Who, what and how long?
  – There may not be a formal schedule or list of “interviewers”
  – Prepare questions for the type of people you think you might meet

• The logistical aspects
  – Where are you going – how will you get there (dry run?)
  – Copies of resume

• Make use of network of contacts and online resources
  – LinkedIn and Glassdoor
Types of questions

- Lots of unstructured conversations and discussions
- What type of salary are you expecting?
- Plenty of opportunity for you to ask questions

What to wear

"INFORMAL" INTERVIEW

FORMAL INTERVIEW

What happens after meeting

- Send thank you notes/emails within 24 hours
- Nothing
- More interviews
- An offer is made – in very specific situations
Screening interview – Phone

- Usually 30-45 minutes

- Can be a range of people on the other end:
  - HR representative
  - Staff member in relevant role (peer or manager)
  - A group of people (team members and leaders)

- Usually organized in advance
  - Can sometimes be sprung upon you…

“Yes, thank you for getting in contact with me. I am really interested in this position, and I am looking forward to chatting with you, but now is not a good time for me to talk. Is there a convenient time for me to call you back later today [or tomorrow, or on Friday]? I’d be more than happy to work with you to find a time that would work well for your schedule”
Purpose of screening interview

- 300 applications → 15 short-listed candidates
  - Now 15 → 3 finalists
- Do you understand anything about the company or job you have applied to?
- Can you confidently demonstrate how your knowledge and skills are relevant for the role?
- Can you communicate effectively?
  - Do you have appropriate language skills
- Are your questions informed or inappropriate?

How to prepare

- Who and how long?
  - Who will call whom?

- The technical aspects
  - Quiet room
  - Access to alternative means of communication
  - Numbers if connection is lost
  - Other phones on mute

- There will be silence – do not try to fill the space
  - Learn to stop talking…. errr…. um…. so that…. your sentences don’t sort of end like this…. so yes…. this is the end…. of the sentence…. Ok?

They can’t see what you are looking at…

But they can still hear you…
Types of questions

- Who are you?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What do you know about us?
- How relevant are your past experiences and internships?
- What can you bring?
- NOTE: answers should be illustrative but concise

What to wear

- NOT RECOMMENDED

What happens after the interview

- At the end of the interview your last question should be:
  - “Thank you so much for talking with me today, I feel like I have learnt a lot. I am very interested in this position. Could you give a sense of what the next steps are in the process, and what timeline you will be working on?”
  - “If I don’t hear back from you by X, would it be OK if I get back in contact with you?”
- Thank you notes/emails
- Scheduling of in-person interviews
Skype…, and more

Screening interview – Skype

- Usually 30–45 minutes
- Can be a range of people on the other end:
  - HR representative
  - Staff member in relevant role (peer or manager)
  - A group of people (team members and leaders)
- Definitely organized in advance
  - Usually Skype, Google hangout, video conference
- Added layer of technological challenges
  - Adds to feeling of stress already generated by interview
  - Practice and dress rehearsals are important

Purpose of screening interview

- 300 applications → 15 short-listed candidates
  - Now 15 → 3 finalists
  - Video adds a layer of connectedness
- Do you understand anything about the company or job you have applied to?
- Can you confidently demonstrate how your knowledge and skills are relevant for the role?
- Can you communicate effectively?
  - Can you handle unexpected technological hiccups?
- Are your questions informed or inappropriate?
How to prepare

• Who and how long?

• The technical aspects
  – Quiet room
  – Close all other programs and scheduled back-ups
  – Turn off phone
  – Access to alternative means of communication
  – Numbers if connection is lost
  – Think about your surroundings

Don’t be Dougal

Or Dougal’s friend
Choose your background wisely – first impressions do matter

Think about:
- Lighting
- Distracting objects
- Where you are looking

If you are looking at people on the screen, you aren’t looking at the camera…, so they’ll see you looking down. Look at the camera when you are speaking.

No notes or distractions
Eye contact (as best you can manage) is essential
Types of questions

- Who are you?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What do you know about us?
- How relevant are your past experiences?
- What can you bring?

*NOTE: answers should be illustrative but concise*

What to wear

SAME AS IN-PERSON INTERVIEW
What happens after the interview

• At the end of the interview your last question should be:
  – “Thank you so much for talking with me today, I feel like I have learnt a lot. I am very interested in this position. Could you give a sense of what the next steps are in the process, and what timeline you will be working on?”
  – “If I don’t hear back from you by X, would it be OK if I get back in contact with you?”

• Thank you notes/emails

• Scheduling in-person interviews

In-person interviews

• Varied format
  – 1 hour → half a day

• Varied style:
  – Usually meeting with >1 person
  – Individual and group meetings
  – Some social situations possible: lunch

• Usually final round of interview
  – Sometimes penultimate
Purpose of in-person interviews

- To determine if you are the “right fit” for the position, the team, the organization
  - They already know that you are qualified
- 3-5 finalists → offer made to successful candidate

How to prepare

- Who, what and how long?
  - You can ask for schedule for the interview – who will you be meeting with
  - Schedules are subject to change
- The logistical aspects
  - Where are you going – how will you get there (dry run?)
  - Contact numbers so you can call en-route
  - Turn off phone when you arrive
  - Copies of resume, portfolio, pen and paper
- Make use of network of contacts and online resources
  - LinkedIn and Glassdoor

Types of questions

- Industry-specific questions
  - Walk me through your portfolio
  - How have your internships prepared you for this position
  - Behavioural-based questions
- Question v. discussion
  - Be proactive – include answers to unasked questions in your discussion points – just do it subtly
- Good opportunity for you to ask questions
  - Listen to what people say and ask questions based on what you hear throughout the day
What to wear

www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/interviewingadvice/etiquette.php

What happens next

• Send thank you notes/emails within 24 hours
  – Good opportunity to answer questions or provide information not successfully addressed during interview
• Ask about timeline and next steps
• An offer is made at the end of the day
  – Express enthusiasm, but do not say “yes”
  – Request formal offer letter, and state need to consider offer
• An offer is made sometime after interview
  – Sometime 1st choice candidate is offered and turns position down = adds weeks to process before you may be contacted

You’ve got the interview – now what?

STEP 2: preparation and practice
Putting your skills/knowledge/experience into focus

What is your greatest strength?

• Find a partner
• Person A: ask this question, listen to answer
• Person B: ask this question, listen to answer

What is your greatest strength?

• What challenges did you face answering this question?
• As listener, how convinced were you by the answer you heard?
Structuring your answers

• Answer the question and illustrate with examples
  – USE EXAMPLES & Situation-Task-Action-Result (STAR)

• “How would those who have worked with you describe you?”
  – A not-very-good-answer: “They would say 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: “They would say I am a good problem solver and I take initiative. Recently, I was part of a team of 4 students asked to research how a community would benefit from additional transportation options. There wasn’t much information online we could use to review the perspective of the community, but I was able to reach out to a contact I had in the city administration who had access to some preliminary survey data from 2 years ago. I coded the data and shared a summary with my team, and we used this as the basis of our report. I think most people who know me would say that I try to find creative solutions to any problem I encounter.”

General advice for all interviews

• Illustrate your answers with actual examples/anecdotes
  – When talking about effectiveness of skills, think of a situation where you used your skills successfully

Tailor your answers for the people in the room

What is relevant to interviewers

What is important to you

Good examples show you’ve been effective in the past, and suggest the same for the future
What is your greatest strength?

• Now, let’s try again…

• Find a new partner and ask this question
  – Take turns as you did before

• Remember…
  – USE EXAMPLES & Situation-Task-Action-Result
  – Pick your greatest strength that is relevant to the type of employer/industry you want to work for

What is your greatest strength?

• Was it any easier to answer this question?

• As listener, how convinced were you by the answer you heard?

Types of interview question
**Pretty much always asked**

- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why are you interested in this organization?
- What do you know about us?
- What skills and experience make you a good fit for this role?
- Tell me about yourself
- Do you have any questions for us?

**Behavioural-based questions**

- Tell me about a time you demonstrated initiative
- Give me an example of your leadership ability
- Describe your most recent group effort and how you contributed to the team
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your supervisor and how to dealt with this

- Remember:
  - describe a SPECIFIC example
  - describe your role, contribution to, or influence on the situation
  - describe the outcome of your efforts so they can evaluate your effectiveness
Challenging questions

• NOTE: asked to see how you think on your feet, how you handle stress, how creative you are
  – What is your greatest weakness? Now, I know you had one prepared, so give me another one?
  – What has been your greatest mistake?
  – How much do you expect to earn?
  – What don’t you do well?
  – Tell me about a time when you failed at something.
  – Who else are you interviewing with? What do you think of those organizations?
  – If you could be a fruit, what type of fruit would you be?
  – Could you make a commitment now?

Do’s and Don’ts

Interview – “Do’s”

• Think about what makes you genuinely interested in the job and the employer – be authentic

• Illustrate your answers with specific examples, and tie experiences back to current position

• Feel comfortable taking a moment to think
  – Especially when confronted with a challenging question
  – http://tinyurl.com/buyingtimeininterviews

• Be honest
  – Honest…, but selective in terms of what information you choose to provide
  – Be honest, but optimistic, always positive, and confident
Interview – “Don’ts”

• Avoid saying negative things about your current situation, supervisor, etc.
  – This is too honest!

• Don’t focus on “performing” or giving the “right” answer
  – There are often no right answers to interview questions

• Don’t be defensive or take things personally
  – Even when questions are confrontational and personal

• Don’t forget you are evaluating them, too!
  – The types of questions they ask can help you discover the type of organization or people they are

Best practices

• Shake hands with each person; look them in the eye.
  Memorize their names and pronounce yours for them
  – Eye contact = time it takes for you to determine the colour of their eyes

• Respect the time limits of each meeting
  – “I see that we are approaching the end of our time here. I am happy to provide additional information, but I would also like to ask a couple of questions if that would be OK”

• Ask for clarification if you do not understand a question
  – do not guess.
After the Interview

• Write your thank you emails/notes
  – Multiple thank you emails can be appropriate; but each should be tailored as much as possible
  – Single thank you emails/notes to primary contact are also sometimes appropriate – be sure to thank people even within this note

• Follow up if you were planning to do so

• Pay attention to your reactions – remember you are evaluating the employer
  – Stay positive even if the interview was challenging

• Learn about handling offers and negotiating strategies from our Career Services website and workshops

Resources

• Do a mock interview
  – Call Career Services (215 898 7530) to make a 1-hour mock interview appointment

• Utilize InterviewStream to set up practice questions for all/any industry
  – www.penn.interviewstream.com
  – It’s free for you, and you can safely make a fool of yourself in your own room
  – It’s also a great way to practice Skype-type interviews

• Review resources on Career Services website
  – www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/interviewingadvice