Preparing for Job Interviews

For business, government and nonprofit organizations

2014
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 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?

• An interview is an opportunity to learn whether or not there is a “fit” between you and the employer.
  – 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.
• Think about your abilities and experience, know your strengths and your areas for growth.
  ▫ Prepare EXAMPLES.
• “Google” yourself.
• 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: Research the employer

Before your interview, do your best to find out about:
• The employer’s history, mission, products/services
• Sector – nonprofit, private (for profit), public (government)
• 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.
• Understand qualifications including education, skills, prior experience, certifications.
• 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... (higher education administration, the chemical industry, nonprofits, government)?
- 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 going to wear.
• 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 and/or supervisor.
• 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....

- Keep yourself calm.
- Know what are appropriate/inappropriate questions from employers.
Interview types

• Preliminary or Screening Interviews
  ▫ First Interviews
  ▫ Telephone Interviews
  ▫ Video Interviews

• Second/Final Interviews

• Meals

• Group Interviews
After the interview

• Write a thank you note.
• Follow up if you were planning to do so.
• Pay attention to your reactions.
  ▫ Did 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 the 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