
FINDING WORK

The Job Interview

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INTRODUCTION

A job interview is a time to exhibit your work skills, demonstrate your communication strategies and emphasize how the position fits your career goals. The interview process is the single most important part of your job search. The time spent interviewing has the potential to shape your career path. The interview is when you sell your skills to the employer and make a case for the value you bring to the company or organization and how those contribute to the mission and vision of the company or organization. During the job interview, while the employer evaluates your qualifications and skill sets, you should evaluate if this job at the company or organization is a good fit for your career. The purpose of this publication is to provide an overview of the job interview process and how best to ace it.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Congratulations, the employer is interested and you are one of the prospective candidates for the position. Now, it is time to convince them to hire you. Consider the following steps as you prepare for the interview.

1. Do your research and learn about the prospective employer;
 - What is the mission and vision of the employer?
 - What are the products and services?
 - What is its reputation?
 - What type of jobs are available?
 - What are the hiring policies and practices?
 - What are their salary ranges?
 - What are their goals?
 - Call your contacts within your social network (friends, family, sorority or fraternity) and professional network (school alumni, professional organizations, former professors) to get the most information about the employer.
 - Reach out to a person in a similar role and shadow them for a day to learn about the position.
 - Do your market research to identify a market salary range for the position.
 - Prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer.
2. Assemble all necessary documents to take to the interview;
 - Resume or personal data sheet
 - Licenses, Social Security card and/or military records
 - Samples of work, if any
 - List of questions you want to ask the interviewer about the position

3. Identify what you have to offer (Refer to UT Extension Publication W 936-C);
 - Your education, skills, training and experience – what have you done, what you know how to do and what you can do that fits the job requirements
 - Highlight all the relevant skills, abilities and talents you possess that will make you an excellent employee
 - Link the skills, training and experience to the job duties and responsibilities
4. Consider your potential as an employee;
 - Why do you feel you can do the job?
 - What makes you qualified for the job?
 - What do you have to offer to the mission and vision of the company or organization?
 - Why do you want to work for the employer?
 - How does this position fit into your career goals?

Pre-Interview Checklist

Before you leave for your interview, check the following:

- Are you properly dressed? Avoid fashion extremes. Be clean, neat and well-groomed. Proper attire and any protective equipment (as needed) is appropriate for the interview.
- Have you researched the organization you are interviewing with?
- Do you know the interviewer's name and contact information? If not, get it from the front desk professional before the interview.
- Have you formulated answers for common interview questions?
- Do you have all necessary information for the interview? This includes items such as a resume or personal data sheet, names and addresses of references, pen and a notepad.
- Do not post objectionable posts on social media.
- Is there someone you could do a practice interview with? You will benefit from suggestions for improvement.
- If the interview is through a video conference, ensure your computer is ready, test the microphone and camera, ensure internet access is secured and that you have a space where you can talk uninterrupted.
- Plan to arrive 15 minutes early. Use the restroom and freshen up. Carry a water bottle and drink water often to stay hydrated.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- This is the most important part — demonstrate your best behavior, highlight the skills and experience you bring as assets to the company.
- Tell the front-desk professional your name and the purpose of the visit when you arrive.
- Be pleasant and friendly, but business-like and use good manners.
- Obey the rules of politeness and etiquette. Shake hands firmly if a hand is extended to you first; make plenty of eye contact but do not stare. Do not chew gum or your nails, and greet the interviewer by the appropriate title: Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms. or Dr.
- Let the employer guide the conversation and control the interview. Your answers should be frank and brief but complete, without rambling. Avoid yes-or no answers.

- Know the duties and description of the job you are applying for. Avoid saying “I’ll do anything if you will give me a chance.” Be ready to show you are interested in learning a new job if your interviewer offers to train you.
- Emphasize your qualifications. The employer’s questions or statement will indicate the type of person wanted for the job and the preferred qualifications. Use the conversation as clues in presenting your credentials.
- Be ready for surprise questions and think before you answer.
- In discussing your previous jobs and work situations, avoid criticizing former employers or fellow workers.
- Do not discuss your personal, domestic or financial problems.
- Do not be in a hurry to ask questions unless the employer invites them. However, do not be afraid to ask what you need to know.
- If the employer offers you a job, be sure you understand exactly what your duties will be. A definite understanding about the nature of your job will avoid future disappointment for either you or the employer.
- Be prepared to state the salary range you want, but not until the employer has introduced the subject. Be realistic in discussing salary but also be willing to negotiate.
- If the employer does not definitely offer you a job or indicate when you will hear about it, ask when you can expect the hiring decision.
- Conduct yourself in a positive and confident manner. Remember, you have maturity and valuable life experience to offer an employer.
- If the employer asks you to call or return for another interview, make a written note of the time, date and place.
- At the end of the interview, thank the interviewers for their time and consideration for employment. If the company does not hire you, ask about potential employers who may need a person with your qualifications.
- The interview is a two-way test: the employers are evaluating your skills and you are evaluating whether the company is a good fit for your skills and career pathway.

Answer Questions with Care

Following is a list of questions job interviewers might ask and what they really want to know. The manner in which you answer questions is key to your employment. Prior to the interview, consider these questions carefully, formulate answers and practice giving the answers.

| THE QUESTIONS ASKED | WHAT THE INTERVIEWER REALLY MEANS | HOW TO ANSWER |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Tell me about yourself. | Tell me what you can do for this company and how you will fit in here if we hire you. | Give a brief background of your education, skills and relate those skills to the key functions of the job. Be ready to give examples of previous experience and personal characteristics that fit this job and talk about your achievements |
| Why are you interested in this job? | If we hire you, will you be able to manage the problems involved? | Avoid general comments; focus on how you can contribute to solving specific problems and reaching goals. Do not say you just really need a job or talk about money. |

| THE QUESTIONS ASKED | WHAT THE INTERVIEWER REALLY MEANS | HOW TO ANSWER |
|--|--|---|
| What is your experience? | Tell me what you know and what you have done in previous jobs that will be useful in handling this job. | In answering this question, build on your knowledge of the organization and stress the details of your experience that match the needs of the job. Tie your abilities to the needs of this position. |
| What is your greatest strength? | Are you good at any of the things we have a problem with and/or are important to this job? | Know the organization needs and capitalize on that. For example, if you know the last person to hold the job was disorganized, comment on your organizational abilities. Emphasize your maturity, life experiences and achievements. |
| What is your greatest weakness? | Do not tell me you are perfect. I will not believe it. | Do not confess real problems. Choose a “weakness” and explain how you have overcome it. End the answer on a positive note. For example, confess to having a “thing” about promptness or accuracy. |
| Why do you want to change jobs? | I want to know what kinds of trouble we can expect from you. | Give an honest, straightforward answer. Avoid bad-mouthing others and disguise difficulties in positive language. Point out what attracts you to this job. |
| Are you able to perform the duties of this position? | I want to see if you are a dedicated employee while avoiding equal opportunity laws relating to marital status and children. | Be careful not to fall into the trap of mentioning child-related crises. |
| What are your interests outside of work? | Will your leisure activities embarrass us or interfere with giving us your best? | Describe interests that enhance your value to the company, not those that might result in costs to the organization. If the company prioritizes supporting the community, highlight your volunteer work. |
| What salary do you expect? | Do you have realistic expectations or are we wasting each other’s time? | Put this question off as long as possible and try to get the interviewer to give you a salary figure first. Go prepared with what you consider a range of a fair wage based on the knowledge of the organization and local market wages for similar jobs. Be prepared to deal with a lower offer than you expect. Be prepared to discuss your salary realistically. |

As you can see from the previous questions, interviewers are really quite interested in what you have to offer the organization they represent. Listen carefully to the interviewer and with each question, think, “What do I possess that would be useful in that situation?” Discuss that skill, ability, experience or talent that is apt for the question. Help the interviewer visualize that you could be an asset to the organization. This is your chance to market and promote your skills, talents, abilities and maturity.

Questions You May Ask

An interview is a two-way street; you are expected to ask questions as well. Ask relevant questions that indicate that you have thought through the job carefully. Questions you might ask include:

- What are the responsibilities of this position?
- With whom will I be working?
- Describe the environment here.
- What opportunities will the position offer for advancement?
- Does the organization promote from within?
- What is the level of diversity in your organization?
- Is there an organizational training program available for self-improvement?
- What do you like the most about this organization?
- When do you plan to make your decision?
- How much travel is required?
- What are the short-term and long-term goals of the organization?
- Can I see a copy of the latest strategic plan?
- Would you like a list of my references?

Avoid questions about breaks, vacation schedules and working hours.

Illegal Interview Questions

An interviewer must be careful not to ask certain questions because they may be discriminatory. These questions may not be asked on job application forms either. Questions related to age, children, marital status, national origin, race and religion are all prohibited. If an interviewer does ask you one of these illegal questions, you can choose to:

- Ignore the fact that it is illegal and answer it in a way that will not harm your chances of getting the job.
- Answer with a question of your own, such as “is that relevant to the requirements of the position?” or “Does that have any bearing on my work performance? I don’t want to burden you with details of my personal life.”

You should ask yourself, “Do you really want to work for someone who is interested in such questions?”

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Leave the interview on an upbeat note, stating your interest in the job and your hope for a favorable decision. After an interview, a courteous and valuable job-getting task is to write a letter to the person who interviewed you to thank the interviewer for his or her time and interest or advice. The hidden purpose is to remind the interviewer of your particular qualifications and continuing interest. Never follow-up with daily telephone calls to find out what has been decided about the job. Your follow-up letter can be very simple. Make sure it looks professional and is free of mistakes and misspellings. Here is a sample of an excellent follow-up letter.

153 Volunteer Drive,
Somewhere, TN 37111

May 14, 2020

Mr. Sam R. Brown
Marketing Coordinator
Mars Corporation
2020 Factory Boulevard
Anywhere, GA 30311

Dear Mr. Brown.

Thank you for taking the time to interview me yesterday about working for Mars Corporation. The description of the regional marketing position sounds extremely interesting, and I would like to be part of your organization. Mars Corporation impresses me as a company that recognizes employees' skills and assists employees to grow and become productive.

I appreciate having the opportunity to be interviewed for the position. I look forward to hearing from you about your hiring decision.

Sincerely,

John W. Doe

Learn from Each Interview

After you leave an interview, take a few minutes to evaluate how things went. Be honest with yourself, but do not be too critical. The important point is that you do your best and learn from your mistakes. Ask yourself:

- Did this interview go well? Why or Why not?
- Was there something I could improve? What?
- Was there anything I could do differently next time? If so, what?
- Do I need assistance in planning future interviews? If so, what kind of assistance? Where can I find this type of help?

You will not be offered a job every time you are interviewed. This happens to everyone. When you are not hired, you will wonder why. There could be many reasons; use the checklist on this page to determine how you might better prepare yourself for the next interview. Check “yes” or “no” after each statement.

Checklist

| | YES | NO |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. I was neat and well groomed. | | |
| 2. I exhibited a positive attitude. | | |
| 3. I was self-confident, but not cocky. | | |
| 4. I was enthusiastic. | | |
| 5. I had well-defined career goals. | | |
| 6. I completed the job application neatly and accurately. | | |
| 7. I was aware of the organization, its product and/or service. | | |
| 8. I spoke clearly and made eye contact with the interviewer. | | |
| 9. I had the training and/or experience required. | | |
| 10. I was tactful and avoided criticizing others. | | |
| 11. I was courteous and thanked the interviewer for his/her time. | | |
| 12. I had realistic salary demands. | | |
| 13. I was on time for my interview. | | |
| 14. I inquired about job security and benefits, but I didn't show excessive interest. | | |
| 15. I asked questions about the job and its responsibilities. | | |
| TOTAL SCORE | | |

Add up your “yes” answers and your “no” answers. If you come up with more “no” answers, you need to find ways to improve your image as a potential employee. If you have more “yes” answers, you are well on your way to that successful job.

The following ideas might help you as you continue your job search.

- Seek help from friends and colleagues in your network as you undertake your job search. You will want to be careful not to jeopardize your present job, if currently employed.
- Follow up on all reasonable job leads. Be assertive in your search. More than one contact may be needed to land the perfect job, so build your professional network.
- Keep up your spirits. Do not let rejections undermine your self-confidence.

Interviewing for a job is hard work. It requires continued effort. Try not to get discouraged if you don't get the first few jobs you interview for. Remember, the job market is tight, and often many people are competing for the same job. Let each interview be a learning experience for you. Learn from each contact and improve your skills, so when the "right" job comes along, you will be the best candidate.

Are you a SNAP recipient interested in finding a job that can help you be self-sufficient? If so, contact us.

UT Extension offers Skill Up Tennessee, a program designed to help eligible SNAP participants gain the skills, training, work or experience that will increase their ability to obtain regular employment.

To find out more about this program check out skillup.tennessee.edu

Skill Up Tennessee is UT Extension's SNAP Employment and Training program. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) is a partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and states to provide training and employment services to eligible SNAP participants. Skill Up Tennessee is offered through a partnership with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

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