

# **How to Ace the Job Interview**



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## **PREFACE**

Few people can say that they feel completely comfortable in an interview. The word "interview" usually strikes fear into the hearts of even the bravest of job seekers. During an interview, we may feel exposed, scared, nervous, or uncertain. Though the information in this manual cannot promise the complete disappearance of these symptoms, the good news is that by working hard at interview preparation you will become more confident and relaxed. This workbook was designed with this in mind.

Much of the interview process is preparation. In this workbook, we will discuss preparing effectively for interviews by taking personal inventories of skills, qualifications and characteristics. We will explain how to do organizational research. You will be taught how to present yourself, including the proper use of body language, and preparing your interview "look". Finally, we will discuss how to answer questions.

Let's be honest -- interviewing is not easy. There are many communication skills we must have to get through an interview. We need to be comfortable meeting new people. We need to be comfortable talking about ourselves confidently and enthusiastically. We also need to be good listeners and observers. We need to hear and understand the interviewer's questions, and understand their body language. The good news is -- we all have these skills in varying degrees. The task is to become aware of these skills in order to improve them and use them effectively. Acquiring successful interpersonal skills takes a lot of PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

We hope this workbook helps prepare you to present yourself in a positive light and helps you build the confidence you need to be successful and get the jobs you want.

GOOD LUCK!



## **PREPARATION BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

As stated in the preface, the majority of the interview process is *preparation*. This section will discuss what you need to know about yourself and what you need to know about the organization before you enter the interview room.

### **Know Yourself**

One of the keys to effective interviewing is the ability to articulate your positive qualities and attributes to the interviewer. It stands to reason, then, that part of your preparation will be to know what these qualities are. Remember, you won't have time for self-discovery during the interview. This knowledge must be gleaned in advance.

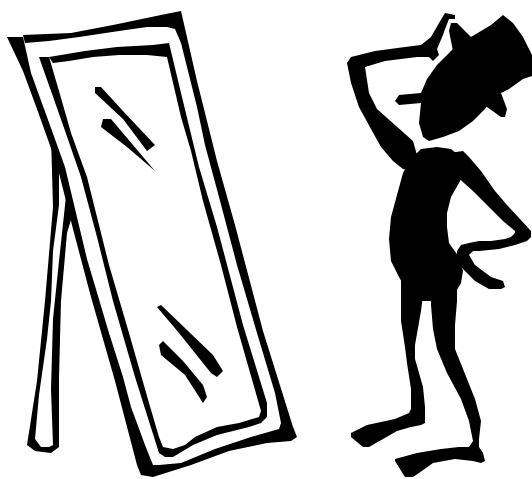
There are several strategies you can employ to help you collect information about yourself. They include:

- Analyzing the information on your resume
- Asking others who know you well
- Using the exercise on the following page

Let's begin with the exercise called "Knowing Yourself". . .

### **REMEMBER:**

The first step in preparing for an interview is to get to know yourself, including your job related skills, personality traits, strengths, and weaknesses.



## WORKSHEET

### KNOW YOURSELF!

This exercise is designed to help you discover your best qualities and skills so that you can easily recall them during the interview.

As you complete this worksheet, think about the position(s) you are applying for. List the skills, qualifications, and accomplishments that relate to the job you seek.

Personality traits or skills I have that are job related:

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Examples of experiences I have had that demonstrate the above traits/skills:

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List 3-5 accomplishments that would be of interest to the person interviewing me:

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What are the 3 most important things I want the interviewer to know about me?

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What concerns might an employer have about me and what will alleviate their concerns?

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## LIST OF COMMON PERSONALITY TRAITS AND SKILLS

Acting	Empathizing	Planning agendas
Adapting	Empowering others	Planning and effecting changes
Administering programs	Encouraging	Planning organizational needs
Advising	Entertaining people	Planting
Agility	Envisioning the future	Predicting futures
Allocating resources	Estimating physical space	Preparing materials
Analyzing	Evaluating	Printing by hand
Appraising services	Exhibiting plans	Programming computers
Arbitrating	Expressing feelings	Promoting events
Arranging social functions	Explaining	Proofreading
Assembling apparatus	Facilitating groups	Protecting property
Assessing situations	Filing	Questioning others
Assigning tasks	Finding information	Raising funds
Auditing records	Fixing/repairing	Reading volumes of materials
Budgeting	Following instructions	Recommending alternatives
Building	Following through	Recording scientific data
Calculating numerical data	Foreign language skills	Recruiting people
Checking for accuracy	Giving ideas	Rehabilitating people
Choosing alternatives	Guiding	Remembering information
Clarifying problems	Handling complaints	Repeating same procedure
Classifying items	Handling detailed work	Researching in the library
Coaching individuals	Helping others	Reviewing programs
Collecting	Identifying	Running meetings
Color discrimination	Illustrating	Seeing or identifying relationships
Committee work	Imagining new solutions	Selecting
Comparing	Implementing policies	Selling
Compiling statistics	Improvising	Sensitivity
Computer software/hardware	Influencing others	Serving individuals
Conceptualize in sequential order	Informing	Setting goals and standards
Conferring	Initiating activities	Shaping institutional values/culture
Confronting other people	Inspecting physical objects	Sketching
Cooperating	Instructing	Solving problems
Coordinating events	Interviewing people	Speaking in public
Copying	Inventing new ideas	Statistical abilities
Corresponding with others	Investigating problems	Strength
Counseling people	Keeping records	Supervising others
Creating new ideas	Leading	Systematizing
Delegating responsibility	Listening to others	Tabulating
Demonstrating	Locating missing information	Testing
Designing	Making layouts	Training
Designing data systems	Managing an organization	Troubleshooting
Designing educational materials	Measuring boundaries	Typing
Developing consensus	Mediating	Understanding
Developing rapport/trust	Meeting the public	Updating files
Diagnosing	Motivating others	Using tools
Directing	Negotiating	Visualizing new formats
Dispensing information	Observing detail	Working with precision
Displaying artistic ideas	Operating equipment	Writing clear reports
Distributing products	Organizing people and tasks	
Drafting	Painting	
Dramatizing ideas	Patience	
Editing publications	Performing	
	Persuading others	
	Physical coordination	

## Know the Organization

We cannot stress enough how important this is. Interviewers invariably ask interviewees what they know *about their organization and the industry* in which they exist. They want to see that you have had enough interest in them to do some homework. They also want to know that you have made an informed choice about choosing to interview with them. Getting information will also help you decide if this organization is the right place for you. Moreover, organizational research will provide you with good background information to formulate the questions that you will need to ask (more about this later).

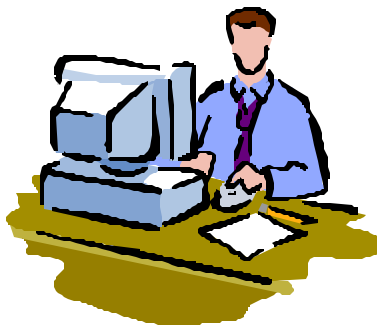
Organizational information can be found in a number of places. The Internet has become a valuable resource. Your local library and the PEP office also have literature on a variety of organizations. The library will also have computerized databases to search for company information, just ask the reference librarian. Finally, you can call the organization yourself and ask for literature, a brochure of services, or an information packet.

Appendix A was provided by the C.W. Post/LIU Center for Business Research (CBR) located in the B. Davis Schwartz Memorial Library. The information on these pages outline the resources available to you through the CBR for your organizational research.

The following worksheet will guide you through the types of information you will need to discover for your interview. We have added an extra worksheet for teacher candidates as there will be slight differences in the information you will need to collect.

### **REMEMBER:**

The next step in preparing for an interview is to get to know the organization you want to work for.



## WORKSHEET

### KNOW THE ORGANIZATION

Teacher candidates see worksheet on page 9.

How long has the organization been in operation?

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Where is the organization located? Are there other locations?

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Is it a public or private organization?

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Has the organization been in the news lately? For what reason(s)?

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What are the services/products/programs this organization provides?

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Who are its competitors?

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How is it doing relative to its competitors?

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What are the organization's short-term goals? Long-term goals?

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What else is the organization known for (e.g., community involvement, supportive of families, relaxed atmosphere, etc.)?

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What challenges/difficulties does this organization face? How can I help solve them?

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## WORKSHEET

### KNOW THE ORGANIZATION (FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES)

What is the school district's mission statement? \_\_\_\_\_

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What schools make up this school district? Where are they located? \_\_\_\_\_

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What is the social and ethnic composition of the student body? \_\_\_\_\_

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Is the school population stable, declining, or increasing? \_\_\_\_\_

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What percentage of students go on to higher education? \_\_\_\_\_

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What special programs has the district implemented? What plans does the district have for future programs? \_\_\_\_\_

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What are the cultural, recreational, and social resources available to the community? \_\_\_\_\_

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How well is this school district doing compared to other districts? \_\_\_\_\_

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Have there been any important changes in administration? \_\_\_\_\_

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What challenges/difficulties does the district face? How can I help solve them?

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## **THE INTERVIEW LOOK**

You only get one chance for a first impression so the clothes you wear need to be appropriate. Indeed, the first thing the interviewer will notice is the way you are dressed. Most people make assumptions about people they meet in the first seconds that they see the person, and like it or not, employers make assumptions about you based on your attire. With this in mind you need to look your best from the moment you step into the interview room.

Appropriate interview clothing will be, for men and women, a business suit. Remember that you are marketing yourself so you want to be dressed as best as possible. In general, dress more formally than what the job requires -- even if you are aware that standard dress code on the job is business casual.

By the way, not only will the employer be impressed, but the way you dress can affect your state of mind. The better you look, the better you will feel about yourself, and the better you feel, the more confidence and enthusiasm you can project to the interviewer. Below are some hints on putting together your interview look.

### **THE MEN'S LOOK**

- Navy, gray, or dark olive suits are appropriate for an interview. Darker color suits project more accomplishment and are therefore preferred. Consider colors which look well on you. Avoid suits with a noticeable pattern (your fast talking car salesman plaid is probably not going to elicit the reaction you want). Wear a solid white or light blue dress shirt. We suggest tab collars rather than button down -- this is more formal and the collar usually sits better.
- Wear socks high on your calves so that no skin will show if you cross your legs. Wear polished leather shoes in a color that compliments or matches your suit.
- Your tie should be silk. Ties can be conservative or bold. Gauge the expressiveness of your tie by the field you will be entering. For example, you would not wear a very bold and graphic tie to an interview within the financial industry, however, this type of tie may be more appropriate for a graphic artist.
- Your hair should be short, neat and clean. Any facial hair should also be trimmed and neat.
- Do not wear earrings or other visible body piercings.

## THE WOMEN'S LOOK

- For most settings, choose a classic suit in a conservative color. In warmer climates, or in summer, pastel colored suits are a good choice. Make sure you choose a suit that fits well. Select a skirt length that is fashionable but covers most of your thighs when you are seated. Yes, we said *skirt*. The skirted suit remains the *expected* women's business uniform. For more creative fields, feel free to add tasteful jewelry to your outfit, or scarves; bolder colors and trendier styles may work as well.
- Keep the blouse simple and subdued.
- If your hair is long tie it back or wear it up, and keep it neat. If you wear nail polish, make sure it is not chipped and that the color is either clear or pale. Avoid long nails -- they are not business-like.
- Wear only a few pieces of jewelry. Keep earrings small and remove visible body piercings. Keep make-up conservative.
- Pantyhose, even in summer, are a must. Open-toed shoes are not appropriate. Wear business pumps.



## Personal Hygiene

Another part of the physical preparation for an interview involves your personal hygiene. On the day of your interview, make sure you shower, wash your hair, and use deodorant. Do not use any perfumes or aftershave as some individuals are sensitive to these odors and allergic to these products. If possible, brush your teeth, use mouthwash or a breath mint immediately before an interview.

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION CHECKLIST

The following is a checklist of things you should do before your interview. Not all listings may apply to you:

- Make sure you have an extra pair of pantyhose.
- Make sure you have money for parking meters.
- Make sure your cellular phone is charged AND that you have money for a pay phone, if necessary.
- Do you have directions to the interview site? If not, call the office. There is no shame in calling to be prepared. If you have the time, make a practice run to the site. Check out the parking situation and the entrance, and note the time it takes to get to your destination.
- Get a map, if needed.
- If possible, get the interviewer's name in advance. Do you know how to spell it and pronounce it properly?
- Make sure your suit fits properly and is cleaned and pressed.
- Prepare a briefcase or a small portfolio (not a backpack!) in which you can carry extra copies of your resume, your reference sheet, a pen and pencil, and telephone numbers. If you tend to carry a purse, try to consolidate its contents to fit in the briefcase so that you are not carrying too much.
- Wear a watch.
- OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## UPON ARRIVAL

Try to arrive about 10-15 minutes early. This will give you enough time to introduce yourself to the receptionist, fill out any necessary applications or paperwork, and make a trip to the restroom to check yourself out. It will also give your interviewer enough time to shift gears and get his or her mind into interviewing you. Wait patiently in the waiting area and remember that the interview started the moment you stepped into the office, so try to compose yourself. Be aware that the receptionist who greets you may also influence the hiring decision-maker, so be on your best professional behavior.

## THE INTERVIEW

You will probably be nervous, and this is okay. Many interviewers expect their interviewees to be nervous. Let's face it, an interview is an important event in a person's life. If you find yourself suffering from anxiety, try taking a few deep breaths. Most people become relaxed after a few minutes.

### Meeting your interviewer

The verbal greeting. Many interviewees botch this up, not by saying the wrong thing, but by giving their greeting at the wrong time. Remember that the interviewer is inviting you into their office. Accept the invitation and presentation of themselves by *listening first*, waiting for their introduction, then responding with your own greeting such as, "Nice to meet you Mr./Ms.\_\_\_\_\_." Too many interviewees end up talking over, or talking at the same time as, the interviewer. Remember, listen first, then respond.

The handshake. Your handshake should be straight on, about waist level, firm and confident, but not crushing. Women more than men have a tendency to shake hands with their fingertips. Please try to avoid this.

### **REMEMBER:**

When greeting your interviewer, listen to their greeting first then respond with your own. Also shake their hand with a firm, waist-high grip.

## IN THE INTERVIEW ROOM

This room could be the interviewer's office, or a separate room all together. Acclimate yourself to your surroundings by quickly looking around the office. If it is the interviewer's office, check out pictures on the wall or on the desk. If there are any, try to get a feel for who the person interviewing you is and what his/her interests are. Information like this may help you in deciding what to say or even start a conversation about something you see. This can be flattering to an interviewer who may be happy to talk about the item. For instance, if you notice a golf trophy or a picture of the interviewer with someone famous it may give you a hint to talk about your own positive golf experience (if you golf), or ask about what it was like meeting the famous person. Certainly, first make sure that speaking about these things seems appropriate at the time, and make sure to avoid making comments about family pictures.

## Sitting

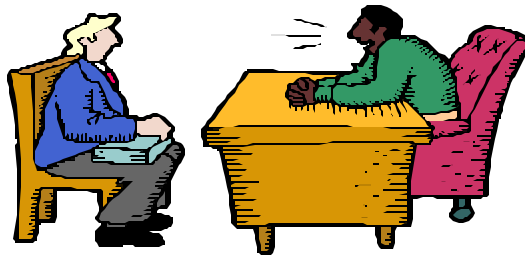
Once in the interviewer's office, you will probably be asked to sit. Place your briefcase or portfolio along side the chair, and have a seat. Feel free to move the chair to face your interviewer in order to engage him/her directly. This move is assertive and projects confidence. It is also better, and more comfortable, than sitting so that you have to turn your head to see your interviewer.

But what if there is more than one chair? Choose a chair that is a good conversational distance from the interviewer. Adjust the chair, if necessary. If you are in a panel interview and have the choice of chairs, try to choose a chair that allows you to see, and be seen, by all of the panel members.

Wherever you sit, make sure you sit up straight, look alert, relaxed, enthusiastic, and confident. Place your hands in your lap. Place your feet flat on the floor, or cross your legs at your ankles.

## Small talk

"Small talk" is common at the beginning of the interview and helps to break the ice or lighten the mood. Small talk topics commonly include the weather, news, your trip to the office, or sports. Do not let your guard drop during this time and expect the entire interview to be lax. This may also be the time to mention some of the possible interesting things you notice in the office, as we described above.



## **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

To improve your communication skills, you must first become conscious of the skills and patterns you employ. For instance, you may be very expressive with your hands or you may speak very softly. Becoming conscious of these patterns will allow you to control them.

## Voice

Your voice should be clear and loud enough to be heard comfortably. Your speech should be slow enough so that you are not slurring your words.

## The Long Island Accent

Every region of the country has an accent. Unfortunately, we live in a part of the country where the accent is particularly heavy, distinct and generally sounds unprofessional. Let's face it, many of us do not sound like Charles Gibson, Peter Jennings or Diane Sawyer.

The Long Island accent has three distinct characteristics that may cause problems in an interview. First, we have a tendency to drop the "g" sound off of -ing endings. For instance, someone who graduates with a degree in education will not spend their career "teachin," they will spend it "teaching." The second distinction is the tendency to drop the -er sound and convert it into an "uh" sound. For instance, this same person will not become a "teachuh," they will become a "teacher." And finally, the phonetic o sound in the middle of words like "talk," "coffee," "dog," and "walk" is converted into a disagreeable "aw" sound. For instance, some of us "wawk, and tawk about dawgs, dawghters, and cawffee." Just listen to the people around you and people on TV or the radio and you'll hear what we mean.

So, how can *you* sound more professional? You must first become conscious of these vocal distinctions. Once you become conscious of this pattern, it is easier to modify your speech. Try to say the last "ing" sounds, -er sounds, and o sounds. Doing a mock interview at the PEP office can help. However, if you are very concerned about this and cannot seem to manage it on your own, you may want to see a speech therapist.

## Silence filler words

The pattern most difficult to control for many people are the *silence filler words*. The silence filler words are: *you know, um, uh, like*, and possibly others. Things to do to try to prevent the use of these words (other than punishment with a cattle prod to the abdomen with each usage) are: 1) try to close your mouth between thoughts where a filler word may occur, 2) take a breath instead of saying the filler word, 3) slow down, or, 4) pay attention to the words as they leave your mouth. This will take practice. Many of us tend to be uncomfortable with silence. Therefore, a long-term idea to prevent the use of filler words is to try to become comfortable with silence. Use the silence to plan your next words or think more about the answer. No points will be deducted from your interview report card if you take three seconds of silence to think fully about your answer in order to choose the appropriate words to deliver the appropriate response.

## Hand gestures

You can use hand gestures. Most people use hand gestures naturally during a conversation. If you usually do, please continue or you will risk looking stiff and unnatural, or even find it difficult to speak. When not using your hands, place them in your lap (but try to avoid wringing them, playing with rings, drumming, tapping, etc.).

## Eye contact

Appropriate eye contact projects assertiveness, confidence, and honesty. The person who will usually have the most eye contact is the listener. The listener will try to pick up visual cues from the speaker's face and body while showing that he/she is attentive to the speaker. Normal conversational eye contact does not occur 100% of the time. In an interview, the speaker may look away now and then to think, or read from a list of questions. Remember, do what seems *appropriate and natural*.

## Nervous habits

Try to avoid displaying nervous habits such as: leg shaking, finger tapping, wringing your hands, touching your hair, playing with your rings, grimacing, huffing between thoughts, and using filler words such as *like, um, uh, ya know*.

## Other skills

Remember to be a good listener when in an interview. Listening not only means hearing the words, it also means being attentive to body language and vocal cues. By being a good listener, you will be able to assess the attitude of the interviewer. For instance, an interviewer nodding his/her head or speaking with enthusiasm may mean that he/she is interested in the things that you are saying, while an unenthusiastic interviewer who merely stares at you may not be interested in you. Remember that a conversation is a two way street and the interviewer will be looking at *your* nonverbal cues as well. Remember too that even interviewers have bad days and that the interviewer's temperament may not be a reflection of your qualifications or performance.

### **REMEMBER:**

Appropriate communication skills are essential for a successful interview. The nice thing about communication skills is that you can practice them every day to improve.



## **RESPONDING TO THE QUESTIONS**

In this section, we will provide you with preparation tips and sample questions to work on, as well as make you aware of questions that interviewers should not be asking. But whatever question you are asked please remember . . .

The only way to become proficient in formulating effective responses to questions is to *practice, practice, and practice*.

Here are tips on preparing your responses:

- 1. Keep your answers brief and concise.** Limit your responses to one or two minutes per question. Practice with a friend or tape yourself to see how long it takes.
- 2. Include concrete, quantifiable data.** Interviewees tend to speak in generalities. However, you need to paint a vivid picture about who you are and what you know. This means being more specific. Include memorable details, buzzwords, and numbers in your response, where appropriate.
- 3. Repeat your key skills, qualifications, and characteristics.** Realize that by repeating key ideas you will be continually associating your name and face with your marketability.
- 4. Prepare success stories.** Use these stories to exemplify your key skills, qualities, and characteristics. These stories will help the interviewer remember you. Always give examples of your strengths and successes.
- 5. Ask questions.** Develop and be able to ask meaningful, intelligent questions. This can make a tremendous impression on the interviewer. This is where the organizational research we asked you to perform in the beginning of this handbook will come in handy. Feel free to ask these questions any time during the interview where it seems appropriate.
- 6. DO NOT ASK ABOUT BENEFITS OR SALARY!** Remember that an interview is about what you can do for the organization and why the organization should invest in you and your skills, NOT about what the organization can do for you. Reserve these questions for after you receive an offer.

### **MORE INTERVIEW TIPS**

- ❑ Think positively! Do not be overly concerned with the possibility of rejection. Show enthusiasm and assertiveness, and remember to focus on telling the interviewer what you can contribute to the organization.
- ❑ You may be asked about your grades. If your grades were low, make sure you have a reasonable explanation.
- ❑ Do not underestimate your extra-curricular activities. They show you are a well rounded individual with a high energy level.
- ❑ NEVER bad mouth a former employer, colleague or organization.
- ❑ Willingness to travel and relocate is always a plus and worth mentioning.
- ❑ Do not argue! Sell yourself with confidence and always keep the discussion friendly and open ("Yes, and..." is always better than "Yes, but...").
- ❑ Do not show irritation with delays or interruptions -- even if you are irritated. Keep in mind that the business day continues and unexpected crises may develop.
- ❑ Do not apologize for things you cannot change or are not responsible for (e.g., your age, education, or work history).
- ❑ DO NOT LIE!
- ❑ Do not be afraid to admit there is something you do not know. No one is totally knowledgeable.
- ❑ Do not be in a rush to answer every question immediately. Not all questions have easy answers. Remember, taking three seconds to think about an answer is three seconds less of a poorly planned response.

## THE QUESTIONS

There are 5 types of interview questions. Being able to identify each of these question types will aid you in answering the interviewer completely and accurately.

*Behavioral questions* will assess how you acted in a particular situation. The interviewer will ask you to describe a particular situation, and how you handled it. Another way for the interviewer to ask this question would be for him or her to ask you to describe a situation in which you used a certain quality or skill. To answer, you need to describe the situation, explain how you handled it, and how the example illustrates the targeted skill. Think of your answer as a story, one with a beginning, a middle and a (positive) ending.

For example, Jane has a Bachelor of Arts in Accounting and is interviewing for a position as an accountant:

**Interviewer:** Jane, tell me about a time when there was a crisis in your last job and how you handled it.

**Jane:** I was working on an audit for a small business in the trucking industry. I was presented with a whole stack of parking ticket receipts. The president of the company had identified these receipts as a business expense. I wasn't sure whether he did this out of ignorance, by that I mean not knowing that these were not deductible expenses, or whether he knew that and wanted me to deduct them illegitimately. My first decision was whether to go to my supervisor or talk to the president directly. I decided to talk to the president because I felt I could handle the situation tactfully. I explained to him that these expenses were not deductible. He then pressed me to bury them in the return. I stood my ground and politely but firmly told him that as a professional I could not do that. He understood my position, apologized for putting me in that situation, and said that he admired my integrity.

Jane explains the situation

Then she identifies the crisis

Jane then describes the resolution of the problem

Jane tells how she takes initiative

She finished the story by stating her positive qualities

Here is another example of a behavioral question. Notice how the interviewee skillfully uses the same story to answer this question (of course, you would not repeat the same story twice in a single interview):

**Interviewer:** Jane, tell me about a time when you had to be assertive.

**Jane:** Well, I had to show a lot of assertiveness to confront a client of ours. I was working on an audit. . . see *previous example*.

*Hypothetical questions* set up a situation that you may have never encountered before. Your goal is to formulate an intelligent, reasonable response to the best of your ability.

For example, John is interviewing for a teaching position at a secondary school:

**Interviewer:** Imagine that you are faced with a situation in which a parent comes to you and accuses you of treating their child unfairly in class. What would you do?

**John:** I would immediately set up a meeting with the student and his or her parent. Before the meeting, I would review my interactions with this student over the term thus far. Any data that seemed relevant would be kept at hand for the meeting. I would then listen actively to the parent and student. I would try to consider whether I had indeed, albeit inadvertently, not been fair. I would summarize the main points of concern back to the parent and student to be sure they knew they had been heard. Then I would present my thinking about each point supporting them with any evidence. I would then ask the parent and student what they recommended as solutions, and try to find the common points. If the parent, the student, and I were unable to resolve the issue comfortably, I would invite an administrator to serve as a facilitator and mediator in a second meeting.

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The *controversial question* is a difficult question to answer. In this question, the interviewer will ask for your opinion about a current topic in your field. You need to make sure you are knowledgeable about the current events and issues in your field. Read professional journals or attend professional organization meetings to discover what is current and controversial.

The best way to handle a question like this is to acknowledge the sensitivity of the question then take a middle-of-the-road approach giving pros and cons of both sides of the issue. By doing this you avoid getting on the "wrong side" of the issue.

For example, Jennifer is interviewing for a spot in medical school:

**Interviewer:** Jennifer, what do you think about the endeavor taken up by Dr. Kevorkian?

**Jennifer:** Well, it certainly has been a controversial and complicated topic. The topic of assisted suicide can be argued in many different ways. I know that many people would rather end their life than suffer with a horrible illness. However, there is clearly a valid concern for misuse and wrongful death issues. My true hope is that medicine in the new millenium will be able to tackle chronic pain and terminal illness more effectively so that fewer people will need to consider these kinds of drastic measures.

Jennifer acknowledges the complexity of the issue

She then briefly gives attention to both sides of the issue

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*Technical questions* assess your theoretical knowledge of the field you would like to enter, or in which you already work. These questions can be about procedures, processes, or methodologies important to your chosen field. An accountant candidate may be asked about the way they would log a certain entry in a ledger. A psychologist candidate may be asked about handling a client in a particular theoretical framework. And a computer systems analyst candidate may be asked about certain servers.

For example, Jeanine is interviewing for a position in the computer industry:

**Interviewer:** Jeanine, please tell me about the software you are proficient with and what you have used each application for.

**Jeanine:** I am proficient in Microsoft Office and Windows NT. I used MS Access to develop a student database of pertinent information for a career development office I worked in. I have also used Access for SQL programming. Using Excel I was able to enter analytical data into spreadsheets for a research project. I also used Excel to create graphs for the same project. My proficiency with Windows NT allowed me to become the server administrator and information systems manager of a medium sized accounting firm.

Jeanine answers the question thoroughly yet concisely. She first identifies the applications she knows and then expands the answer.
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The final set of questions are *vague questions about your personality, skills, attributes*. These questions come in a variety of forms and certainly this information is also being collected through the questions identified above. Vague questions can leave a lot of room for you to show your stuff.

For example, Jimmy is interviewing for a photographer's position at a major metropolitan newspaper:

**Interviewer:** So, Jimmy, tell me about yourself.

**Jimmy:** Well, Mr. White, I love photography. My interest started when I was in my high school's photo club. I continued to take pictures for my university's newspaper and won an award among major universities for Best Photography on an expose I covered called "Real Life/Superheroes". In this expose, I photographed local firefighters and police officers in the line of duty. I went to the fires and rode with the police to get the pictures. I love taking pictures of people doing things and of major events. I am assertive and will do anything to get the shot needed for a piece. I like to take risks, so being in the center of the action to get the right shot is where I will be. My artistry allows me to take exciting, eye catching photographs, especially for a front page! Finally, I have been involved with both my high school and university newspapers in editing and know what it takes to put together a newspaper, including meeting deadlines and working late hours to complete an issue.

To start, Jimmy gives a *brief* history of his interest in photography

In preparing for this question, Jimmy decided what qualities and skills he would like to highlight (assertiveness, risk taking, artistry, and editing skills) and deliberately wove these words into his response

Jimmy also presented a major accomplishment that highlights the quality work he does



## **QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED...**

### **General Interview Questions**

1. What are your major strengths/weaknesses?
2. How is your previous experience applicable to the work we do here?
3. What are your long/short term goals/objectives? How are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
4. What are your interests outside of work?
5. Why do you want to work here?
6. Tell me about yourself.
7. What were some of the most important events or decisions in your life?
8. Tell me about a time when you had a crisis at work. How did you handle it?
9. What do you consider to be your major accomplishments?
10. Give me an example of your leadership ability.
11. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
12. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
13. How do you work under pressure?
14. What prompted you to choose your major?
15. What do you know about our organization?
16. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this job?
17. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to this organization?
18. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her?
19. What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
20. Define cooperation.
21. Describe your problem solving technique.
22. What have you learned from your mistakes?
23. How do you determine or evaluate success?
24. Do you have any questions?
25. What else can you tell me about you that will help in considering your application?

## **QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED...**

### **Teacher Candidate Interview Questions**

1. What influenced you most to become a teacher?
2. What are the three most important strengths you possess as a teacher?
3. Name one or two areas you discovered during your student teaching in which you would like to improve?
4. What do you think will make a good teacher at this school?
5. What class did you take in college that prepared you the most for a teaching career?
6. What are two or three of the most important things for children to learn in school?
7. Describe one teaching or learning activity that you have tried that you thought was especially effective.
8. During your student teaching, what did you discover about teaching that you were not aware of previously?
9. How important are daily or long range lesson plans?
10. How would you try to provide for individual differences among students in your class?
11. How would you deal with an irate parent who accused you of "picking on" their child or grading them unfairly?
12. Describe a difficult disciplinary situation you experienced and how you handled it.
13. What kind of help/support would you expect from your supervisor/principal?
14. How would you monitor homework to make certain that students are doing it and that the homework is worthwhile?
15. How would you deal with a situation where a student needed extra help after school but refused to come?
16. In what ways could you contribute to the school or district beyond your work in the classroom?
17. How would you motivate students toward active participation in the learning process?
18. How would you reinforce major concepts or ideas that you want the students to learn?
19. What are the characteristics of a well managed classroom?
20. In what ways would you be able to convey to the students that you are in charge of the class?
21. How would you handle a student who refused to work in your class?
22. What do you know about our district?

## **QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED...**

### **Guidance Counseling Interview**

1. What influenced you to become a counselor?
2. What is the role of the guidance counselor relative to teachers, parents, administration and other counselors?
3. What do you feel your priorities would be at the beginning of the school year?
4. Name three counseling skills essential to helping students.
5. Describe one or two good questioning techniques that you use with students.
6. What is your philosophy of counseling?
7. How are you able to make students feel at ease around you?
8. Since counselors support the administrators and school policy when dealing with parents and students, how will you go about learning school policy in this district?
9. What contributions can you make to an elementary or middle school setting?
10. A high school student's grades are plummeting. The student has a job after school, and the student indicates the family needs money. How would you counsel this student?
11. How would you handle a student who has behavioral problems with his teacher?
12. How would you deal with cultural differences?
13. What innovative ideas would you like to employ as a guidance counselor?
14. What kind of relationship would you like to have with your students?
15. What populations have you had experience with?
16. Describe your counseling internship(s).
17. What student activities do you feel qualified to coach or direct?
18. Describe a problem and the process you used to solve the problem.
19. What school to work initiatives would you like to implement?
20. Counseling means many things to many people. Tell me what it means to you.
21. Discuss your computer skills and knowledge of career guidance systems.
22. How can you identify violent tendencies in students?

## TYPICAL DISCRIMINATION QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

For the most part, good interviewers know not to ask these questions. However, sometimes interviewers are not aware that these types of questions may lead to perceived bias in the hiring process. In the event that you are asked one of these questions, it is best not to be argumentative and to respond to the question the best you can (possibly using some of the strategies indicated below), evaluating the organization if and when the position is offered.

### **Questions about your home/family life...**

#### **Do you have any plans for having children/ a family?**

I don't know at present. I plan on a career and believe my career will be successful with or without a family.

#### **What are your marriage plans?**

If you are concerned with my ability to travel or my commitment to employment, I can assure you that I have no problem meeting any of the job responsibilities.

#### **What does your husband/wife do?**

I am interested in working because... What my husband/wife does is not relevant to my career goals.

OR

My husband's/wife's career and mine dovetail. He/She has helped me become more effective as a ....., and I have helped him/her become better as a....

#### **What happens if your husband/wife gets transferred or needs to relocate?**

My husband's/wife's career will not interfere with my own career. OR

My husband/wife and I would discuss relocation at that time. At present our jobs are where we wish to live.

#### **Who will take care of your children while you are at work?**

I have made arrangements so that my family life will interfere as little as possible with my work.

#### **How do you feel about working for a woman/man?**

This would be no problem. I have effectively worked with both men and women in the past.

### **Questions about your age...**

#### **How old are you? OR What is your date of birth?**

I wish to be evaluated on my skills, competence and experience. Age is irrelevant.

#### **How would you feel working for a person younger than you?**

Age does not interfere with my ability to get along with others. I am adaptable and respect superiors who are knowledgeable and competent.

### **Questions about your national origin...**

**Where were you born? OR Where were your parents born? OR Of what country of origin are you a citizen?**

I am a permanent resident of the United States and have legal permission to work here.  
OR I am quite proud that my background is.... My heritage has helped me to deal effectively with people of various ethnic backgrounds.

### **Questions about a disability...**

**Do you have any disabilities? OR As a person with a disability, what help are you going to need in order to do your work? OR How severe is your disability?**

Any disabilities I may possess would in no way interfere with my ability to perform all aspect of this position. OR Actually, I don't need help doing my work because I have been adequately trained. What I need might be minor adaptations of the workstation.

*However, an interviewer can ask, "What accommodations will you need to perform this job?" This is different from the illegal question above as it does not call attention to the "disability."*

### **Questions about your religion...**

**What is your religion? OR What church do you attend?**

My religious preferences should have no relationship to my candidacy for this job.

**Do you hold any religious beliefs that would prevent you from working certain days of the week?**

No.

*or if your response is Yes.* Yes, I do, however, I am able to work other days of the week to make up for it.

### **Questions about your race or color...**

**Do you feel that your race/color will be a problem in your ability to perform this job? OR Are you of \_\_\_\_\_ heritage/race?**

I have extensive experience working with people from a variety of backgrounds. A person's race, whatever it may be should not interfere with the work environment. OR I do not feel I should be judged based on race or color.

## **THE PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO**

The portfolio gives the potential employer a means to view materials and information beyond those included in your resume or credential file. The portfolio will also give you the opportunity to visually highlight work you may be describing verbally. The portfolio can be as creative as you would like it but make sure it reflects who you are as a professional.

### **The Professional Portfolio for the Artist**

If you are an artist, you will want to have a variety of work represented in the portfolio. If appropriate, show work in as many different mediums as possible. These entries can be organized into subject matter categories or organized by art medium.

### **The Professional Portfolio for the Teacher**

Changes in teacher evaluation in New York State have influenced portfolio development to follow a set of standards known as *INTASC Standards*. To develop your portfolio according to these standards, speak to your student teaching supervisor and check out the book by Campbell, Cignetti, Melenzyer, Nettles, and Wyman called How to Develop a Professional Portfolio: a Manual for Teachers, Second Edition, published in 2001 by Allyn & Bacon, [www.abacon.com](http://www.abacon.com) (ISBN 0-205-31979-3).

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

The following tasks may mean the difference between receiving or not receiving an offer:

1. After the interview, make notes while the information is still fresh in your mind. Note the difficult questions you were asked, suggestions made by the interviewer, and any pertinent organizational information given by the interviewer.
2. Send a thank you letter within 48 hours after the interview. Not only will it appear thoughtful, but it will reiterate your interest in the position, and restate your qualifications.
3. If an employer asked you to call him/her back at a certain time -- DO IT! Don't ruin a possible opportunity by not following up.

### **Tips on writing a thank you letter**

This letter need not be long or formal. It should be addressed to the interviewer, or the head interviewer if you interviewed with more than one on the same day. The letter should:

- Thank the person for the interview
- Re-emphasize your interest in them and the position
- Rephrase your background and briefly explain how your experience can compliment the requirements of the job
- Indicate that you intend to follow-up the letter with a telephone call to determine if and when the employer wishes to see you again. This last point should be used with caution as this may not always be appropriate.

If the position for which you interviewed is not the position you really want, consider sending a thank you note anyway indicating that. A letter of this kind projects professionalism and politely helps the employers refocus their energies elsewhere. Let the organization know you would be interested in future positions more suited to your interests, skills and qualifications.

## THANK YOU LETTER

231 Libson Avenue  
Buffalo, New York 14214

January 12, 1999

Mr. Mike Charles, Manager  
General Switch Gear  
35 South Castle Rock Road  
Buffalo, New York 14260

A thank you for the interview

Dear Mr. Charles:

It was a pleasure to meet and talk with you on Tuesday morning regarding the engineering position available at your company. I appreciate the frank discussion we had about the company and the position.

I have given considerable thought to the problems you described and feel certain that I can produce the results you want in a short time period. My experience in production and design will be extremely valuable in this respect. The broad exposure I gained while assembling and designing relays, starters, motors, and control panels has enabled me to solve many problems requiring adaptations of standard products.

I am extremely interested in the job and convinced that this is just the opportunity I have been seeking. I plan to call you on Thursday afternoon to find out if a decision has been made regarding my candidacy. Again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Re-emphasis of the candidate's interest in the company and in the position

Re-emphasis of the candidate's skills and how they may fit the goals of the company

B.H. Lim

Probably appropriate in this case, the candidate informs of a follow-up