

The Interview

FINAL STAGE: THE INTERVIEW

The interview is the final stage in most job and internship searches. Employers place a great deal of importance on the interview because it is their best chance to get to know you. Each interviewer you encounter will have his or her own style of conducting an interview. Most interviews you have will probably involve a combination of four basic interviewing techniques.

The Typical Interview: You will find that most interviews follow this format. The interviewer asks specific questions that are directly related to the job requirements and your ability to fulfill them. He or she will ask questions as a prompt to seek clarification or more information.

The Structured Interview: This type of interview follows a previously prepared format or script. You are likely to experience a situation in which the interviewer has a prepared list of questions. The benefit of this process is that every candidate is asked to respond to the same questions, and the answers to each are written down for later review.

The Unstructured Interview: This type of interview is more free flowing. The interviewer tries not to influence your remarks and allows maximum freedom in the response. Commonly asked questions in this type of interview are “Tell me about yourself” or “Please tell me more about why you ...” and will include many one word questions like “Why?”

The Stress Interview: In the stress interview, the questions are asked in rapid-fire order by interviewers who appear to be unfriendly. It is unlikely that you will ever be subjected to this type of interview. The only justification for its use is to determine how well you perform under pressure.

INTERVIEW SITUATIONS

Telephone Interviews: Telephone interviews can be quite challenging because the caller will most likely catch you at a time when you are not adequately prepared. You can ask the person if you can call them back if you are caught off guard. Try to arrange to be in a quiet place and eliminate all distractions. Pay close attention to what the interviewer is saying and listen for any changes in the person’s voice, which may indicate a positive or negative response to what you have said. Make sure you take good notes.

Multiple Interviewers: In this situation, two or more individuals will review you. Each person may ask questions, however, it is possible that only one person will ask while the other takes notes.

Group Interview: This type of interview usually involves a presentation to many people at the same time. It typically includes situations where two to thirty people are “interviewed” at the same time. They are usually general in format and do not allow much, if any, time for questions. The recruiter will provide an overview of the company and the position and ask that those who are interested stay and interview on a more personal basis.

Interviews During a Meal: An interview during a meal could range from a very informal gathering of employees to a formal occasion. Whether you are told that you will be evaluated or not, be sure to stay in the “interview mode” throughout the meal. When it comes time to order, let the interviewer go first and follow his or her lead regarding price range, etc. Since you will be doing most of the talking, order something that is easy to eat. Try to avoid messy items such as spaghetti or large sandwiches. Remember, you are there to impress the people you are with so they will recommend you to the next level.

COMPONENTS OF THE INTERVIEW

	INTERVIEWER’S ROLE	YOUR ROLE
WARM UP	An interview usually begins with the greeting and handshake. The interviewer is already starting to evaluate you.	Make sure you smile, and have a firm handshake. Show the interviewer that you are friendly and confident. Be prepared for a few minutes of small talk after the introduction.
OVERVIEW	In this stage the interviewer will typically provide some structure to the interview process. He or she will briefly tell you about the organization, and about the position you are interviewing for.	Show your interest through body language and listening skills.
QUESTIONS	During this stage, the interviewer will ask you questions. They will be evaluating your answers and assessing your fit for the position.	Through your answers, you must provide the interviewer with information about yourself that will convince him or her that you have the skills and qualifications to be recommended for a second interview. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions.
CLOSING	In this stage, the interviewer will provide you with a rough timeline for their hiring process. He or she will tell you what the next step in the process is, and when they anticipate making a final decision.	If the interviewer does not provide you with this information, ask for it.
WRAP-UP	They are continuing to assess you.	The wrap-up stage is your responsibility. During this stage, you provide the interviewer with any information you didn’t have a chance to discuss during the questioning stage, thanking them for their time. Tell them that you are interested in the position! And remember to ask for a business card, or get their name and address for thank you notes.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

The first step is to take a close look at yourself! You must have a strong sense of your assets, strengths, interests and goals. It is up to you to communicate this information to the employer in an effective, efficient manner. Think about how you got where you are today. Some suggested questions to ask yourself are:

- Why did you get interested in art, biology, history, etc.?
- Why did you choose Lewis & Clark College?
- Why a degree in Communications, Philosophy, etc.?

- Will you really fit into the field you have chosen?
- What kind of contributions can you make to the field?
- What were the catalysts for major decisions you made?
- What are you proud of? What would you like to do better?

These can be difficult questions to answer. However, this kind of exploration requires getting to know yourself as well as possible so that you can clearly present yourself to an interviewer who makes judgments in a short amount of time, without the benefit of knowing you personally.

DRESSING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Traditional dress has changed dramatically over the past few years. When selecting clothes for an interview, keep your target audience in mind. There is greater flexibility than ever before in choice, ranging from very conservative to more fashion forward. However, this flexibility does not mean that anything goes.

Always be aware of what is considered appropriate for the industry you are trying to get into. For example, the banking and financial industries are still considered quite conservative, insurance and sales more moderate, real estate and advertising more flexible, education and non-profit direct service are often more casual. You should notice what is considered acceptable in specific organizations you are interested in and dress at or slightly above that level for your interview. Don't be too trendy, unless you are interviewing in the fashion industry or possibly the arts.

Avoid too much of anything. Be moderate in your attire, you want it to complement you, not overpower you. Hair should always be kept neat. Keep hands and nails well groomed. Never chew gum, twist your hair, or play with your jewelry or pen!

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The next step in preparing for the interview involves understanding the process. The key point is that both the interviewee and interviewer have a goal, as well as some fears. Your goal is to convince them that you would be an excellent fit for the job. The interviewer's goal is to find the best candidate. Your fear might be, "What if I mess up the interview?" The interviewer fears losing credibility as a recruiter if a recommended candidate doesn't work out on the job.

You should focus on preparing what you have to say during the interview, rather than on what you think the interviewer wants to hear. So don't waste energy trying to please with a seemingly appropriate response. Instead, spend time on clearly demonstrating why you are well suited for the position and then support your answer with specific behavioral examples of achievements, accomplishments and skills.

Keep in mind that, in the interviewers opinion, past performance usually determines future success. You may feel that you are repeating yourself at times during the interview, but it's important to realize that same basic answer but give different examples. You want to demonstrate a consistent pattern of leadership ability, quantitative skills, interpersonal expertise and so on.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What They May Ask

The list of questions at the end of this section provides an introduction to frequently asked questions. Many interviewers like to see you think on your feet. So you may be asked questions you are unprepared for. If you have prepared yourself well, you should be able to draw from that information and develop an answer.

Remember, most of these types of questions do not have a right or wrong answer. The employer is simply trying to determine how you handle the unknown or how you react in stressful situations.

If you are asked about salary, be prepared by knowing the salary range of the job you are interviewing for. You can search for current salary information in the library or on the Internet. If a book you use is a few years old, be sure to adjust the numbers for inflation. Also be sure to consider the differences in cost of living in other areas of the country.

Handling Illegal Questions

Be aware that there are questions that an employer may NOT ask you – citizenship, age, marital/family status, personal (height, weight, etc.) disability status, gender, race, religious preference. An employer's questions must be related to the job you are seeking and serve to determine that you can perform the functions of the job.

So what do you do if you are asked an illegal question? Basically, you have three options. First, you can answer the question. Just remember that if you answer an illegal question, you are providing information that isn't relevant to the job and it could cost you the job. Another option is to refuse to answer the question. The risk of this option is that you may appear to be uncooperative which could also harm your chances of getting the position. Your third option is to look for the intent of the question and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, if the employer asks, "Who is going to watch your children when you travel for this job?" you could respond, "I can easily meet the travel requirements for this position and will not have any problems with the required work schedule." You have addressed the employer's concerns by considering the intent of the question without providing any information irrelevant to the job you are seeking.

What You Should Ask

Develop questions that show you have researched the organization and have an understanding of who they are, what they do or whom they serve. You want to convey your understanding not only of the organization, but of the environment in which it operates. Ask questions on a combination of issues related to the nature of work you would be doing, as well as the overall organization direction. This is an excellent opportunity for you to make yourself stand out from the other candidates.

How to Ask Questions

There are two major categories of questions – *focusing questions* and *expansion questions*. Focusing questions are typically used to direct the topic of conversation or check your understanding of a comment. They usually elicit a relatively quick answer. Expansion questions are used to get the interviewer to expand on a topic so you can learn more about it. Expansion questions generally begin with "Who, what, where, when, why, how, tell me more about ..."

You will more likely follow a focusing question with an expansion question: "What do you think is the most important characteristic for a person to have in order to be successful in this position?" Follow this question up with: "Why is that?" Remember, you should create a list of questions for each interview that will help you get the information you will need in order to make an informed decision. Utilize job descriptions, organization information, newspaper articles and other resources to help you formulate your questions.

BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEWING (STAR)

The basis of Behavioral Based Interviewing is that your past performance will determine your future success. In other words, if you were successful in previous jobs, chances are you will be successful in the job the employer has to offer now. The interviewer is looking for examples and proof of a particular skill. “Tell me about a time when ...” is an example of this type of question. The interviewer will probe you and ask you to provide the details. You will be asked to describe previous situations in which you used desired behaviors.

The **STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) Technique** is excellent in behavioral based interview situations:

	What you need to include:	Interview Question Example: “Can you give me an example of a time when you served as the leader of a group?”
SITUATION	Briefly describe the situation you were in.	“As part of a communications class, we were divided into groups of four and given a project to complete.”
TASK	Describe what assignment you were given to complete. You might use examples from your education, work experience, or activities.	“We needed to develop a presentation for an organization in order to increase public awareness of the organization and its services. My group selected a small nonprofit organization that serves homebound seniors.”
ACTION	Actions are activities you engaged in to get the task accomplished.	“During our initial meeting, everyone just threw out ideas and talked a lot, but no one was taking charge to keep us focused. So, I stepped in and tried to provide some structure to the meeting and to keep us focused. The other members of the group responded favorably, so from then on I was looked at as the leader for the group. What we ended up doing was developing a multifaceted marketing campaign. Each of us was assigned a specific task each week. I made sure everyone knew what their responsibilities were and checked to make sure they were meeting the deadlines we agreed upon. Two people developed a radio spot; one person developed an ad that could be used in magazines, on billboards, etc., and another person developed a computer presentation.”
RESULT	This is the outcome of the task and action. Whenever possible, state the results in quantifiable terms.	“We had the opportunity to present our campaign to the managers of the organization. They ended up using parts of our presentation, which ultimately led to a 24% increase in the use of their services over a three-month period. Also, their name recognition increased by 17% based on surveys completed. Our group also received an award from the marketing club for creativity.”

Preparing for a Behavioral Interview

To prepare for a Behavioral Interview, prepare short descriptions of situations that demonstrate positive behaviors or actions. As with STAR, make sure every story has a beginning, middle, and an end. Also, be sure that the outcome or result reflects positively on you. Finally, be specific and provide as much detail as possible.

Potential Questions Requiring a STAR Response:

- Describe a time when something you were involved with didn’t turn out as you planned and how you handled it.
- Describe an experience you had with someone who was hard to get along with and how you handled it.

- Describe a time when you exhibited creativity.
- Describe a time when you did more than was expected.
- Describe the most important event in your life and why it is so important to you.
- Define leadership and describe a time when you feel that you were a leader.
- You are trying to sell a new idea to a group of individuals who prefer to keep things as they are. How do you convince them to adopt your idea?
- Describe an experience, personal or work related, where you had to make a decision regarding ethics.
- Describe a situation where you made a mistake that had a negative effect on others.

FIRST INTERVIEW PREPARATION: SUMMARY CHECKLIST

- Research the organization and position you are applying for prior to the interview.
- Based on your research and knowledge of yourself, be prepared to communicate your fit with the organization.
- Be prepared to ask and answer questions and to provide specific examples.
- Be prepared to provide references and to release transcript information if requested.
- Dress appropriately.
- Arrive early for all interviews.
- Practice initial greeting and handshake.
- Obtain a business card from each interviewer.
- Make sure you express your interest in the position and ask for the job!
- Write thank you letters immediately after your interviews.

THE SECOND INTERVIEW

In the first interview, your objective was to make a good impression, determine if you were interested in pursuing the position further, and ultimately receive an invitation for a second interview. The interviewer's objective was to obtain enough information about you to determine whether you had the skills and qualifications, as compared to other candidates, to invite you back for a second interview.

In the second interview, your goal is to impress the interviewers and receive a job offer. Your second objective is to obtain additional information regarding the organization and position to determine if you are interested in pursuing the job further. The interviewer's objective is to introduce you to other people to see if there is a fit between you and their organization and also to probe further into any areas where they may have had concerns or questions after the first interview. You may actually go through three, four or more rounds of interviews prior to receiving any job offers.

Points to Keep in Mind

- The skills that got you through the first interview (communication, confidence, enthusiasm) will be crucial in the second interview. The interviewers will also look for increased knowledge of the organization and the position for which you are interviewing.
- Two or more people on-site may interview you for a few hours or up to an entire day. It is appropriate to ask what the agenda will be for your second interview. This information will help you as you prepare. Treat each interview as if it were your first.
- You may be asked similar questions to the first interview. Don't worry about repeating some of the same information you presented in the first interview. The second interviewer may be looking for consistency.

- Your interviewers may be peers, supervisors or executives – each of whom has the task of determining your fit with the organization. Make sure you get a business card from the interviewers for writing thank you letters.
- The interview sessions may be very similar or different and the styles may range from very structured to casual.
- Don't be surprised when one interviewer is conversational and the next is very direct.
- The best questions are interesting questions, so think carefully about what and how to ask the kinds of questions that will make you stand out. The focus of your questions should change with the level of the person interviewing you.
- The second interview process is very tiring so make sure you get a good night's sleep the night before your interview.
- **ASK FOR THE JOB!! Don't assume the interviewer knows that you want the job.**

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWERS' QUESTIONS

Background/Educational Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about your liberal arts education.
- How did you decide on your career path?
- Describe the key events that led to your decision to get a BA degree.
- How did you decide to go to Lewis & Clark College?
- Why did you pick your major?
- What courses did you like best/least and why?
- How does your education in _____ relate specifically to this position?

Previous Experience or Employment

- Describe your best job and your worst.
- If I were to call your last employer what would they tell me?
- What is the most rewarding assignment you have completed?
- How have you motivated others to work with or for you?
- How did your position at _____ prepare you for this position?
- What did you learn in your last position that will help you in this job?

Skills

- Describe three skills you have that would benefit our organization.
- Give an example that demonstrates your ability to organize.
- Give an example of a time when you were the leader of a group.

Work Goals

- Where do you plan to be in three to five years?
- What are your short-term goals?
- What are your long-term goals?

Aspects of the Position

- Would you relocate?
- Are you able to work nights?
- Is travel a problem for you?
- What qualifies you for this position?
- If I'd never heard of this organization, what could you tell me about it?

- Why should I hire you?
- Why are you interested in joining us?
- How would you use your skill in sports on this job?
- What do you find most attractive about this position? Least attractive?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- What can you do for us that another candidate can't?

Communication Skills

- What kind of communication are you best at: formal presentation, informal presentation, written or interpersonal? Give an example. Which is your weakest area?
- What have you done to enhance your communication skills?
- Describe the correspondence you are experienced producing.

Working in Groups

- When working in a group, what factors do you think must be present for a group to accomplish its goal?
- Can you describe for me a group situation that you thought worked very well? Why did it work well? What role did you play?
- Can you describe a group situation that you thought did not work well? Why was it not successful? What was your role in the group? What did you do to try to keep the group on track? What would you do today in a similar situation?

Personal Traits, Character, Values

- At this time in your life, what do you value most?
- What characteristics or qualities do you value most in people?
- What is the most important lesson you have learned in life?
- Describe your personality to me.
- Give me an example that demonstrates your assertiveness.
- What one characteristic best describes you?
- How do you motivate people? Give me an example.
- Give me an example of a time that you demonstrated creativity.
- What motivates you?
- How do you handle pressure? Criticism?

Outside Interests, Hobbies

- How do you relax? What do you do in your leisure time?
- Are you active in any outside groups or organizations? What is your role in the group? What have you contributed to the organization?

Challenges, Strengths, Weaknesses

- Describe the most difficult situation you have been in and how you coped.
- Describe a goal you set for yourself and what you did to meet it.
- Can you give me an example where you successfully dealt with conflict?
- What has been your greatest accomplishment?
- Cite an example of a situation where you had to convince someone to do something.
- Tell me what you consider to be your greatest assets. Weaknesses?
- Can you describe for me a situation in which you failed to accomplish your objective? Why do you think you failed? What did you learn about yourself, or the situation, from this failure? Would you do anything differently?

- What was the biggest mistake you made?
- How will your major strengths help you in this position?
- What was your most satisfying success?

Questions for Teaching Candidates

- What is your philosophy of education?
- Describe your student teaching experiences.
- What are the qualities of an excellent teacher? Which of these qualities do you have?
- Describe your style of teaching.
- What three words would your students use to describe you as a teacher?
- How and when do you discipline a student?

CLOSE WITH YOUR OWN QUESTIONS

Questions You Might Ask

Show that you have prepared for the interview and are sincerely interested by asking questions specific to the organization. This will set you apart from the people who haven't taken the time to prepare.

Example: I understand your organization is trying to expand into the international market. Could you explain how this will affect the area I would be working in?

Most job candidates find that they ask better questions if they preface questions with an explanation of why the issue is important to them.

Example: Through one of my classes I became interested in abuse issues related to homeless women. Could you tell me about what your organization is doing to address these issues?

General First Interview Questions

- What types of challenges does this position offer?
- Could you tell me briefly about the people I would be working with?
- What is a typical day like in this position?
- What are the most important characteristics for people in this position?
- Could you describe the typical career path for this position?
- How would you describe the culture of the organization?
- What trends do you see affecting your organization?
- What do you find satisfying about this job?
- What type of person succeeds in this position? Organization?
- What are the organization's strengths? Weaknesses?
- How much of the time will I work independently and how much will I work as part of a team?
- What is the next step in your hiring/interview process?

General Second Interview Questions

- Has anything changed within the organization or department since we last talked?
- When will I hear from you regarding this position?
- What is the start date for this position?
- What do you think the most challenging aspects of the job would be for someone with my background just
 - starting out in the organization?
- Could you talk about the training program?

- What type of performance reviews can I expect? Frequency?
- What do you find most satisfying about the job and the organization?
- What, if anything, do you dislike about the organization?
- What do you consider the most important day-to-day activities or responsibilities of this position?
- What are the organization's goals for the next five years?

What NOT to ask

While most topics are appropriate, certain areas should be avoided. Do NOT ask about the salary or benefits. The interviewer will bring these topics up at the appropriate time. However, you should have done your research prior to the interview so you can discuss salary when appropriate.