



## HOW TO ACE THE INTERVIEW

Interviews help employers learn more about candidates' academic background, skills and work experience. The interview process is a two-way street in which the employer and candidate can learn more about each other and exchange information.

### **PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW**

Preparation is the key to a successful interview. There are many steps to take prior to your scheduled interview.

#### **Know Yourself**

- Identify your skills and abilities. Think about the items you listed on your resume: education, jobs, internships, sport activities, volunteering, and school projects. What skills and abilities have you developed? What obstacles have you overcome? How do your experiences relate to the position for which you are interviewing?
- Explore job or internship postings to determine what employers are seeking in candidates. Have examples for how your skills fit the position.
- Be prepared to identify a weakness but make sure you are able to show the interviewer how you are trying to improve in that area.

#### **Research the Industry and the Company**

- Visit the employer website to learn about the company mission statement, its history, products and services, and company culture.
- How does the company distinguish itself among its competitors within the industry?
- Review online information about the industry and be knowledgeable about current trends.
- Employer information sources: company websites, Google News, Glassdoor.com

#### **Research the Position**

- What are the key qualifications for the job?
- What are the characteristics that the employer is specifically looking for in candidates?
- Candidates should match their education and experience to the job description to qualify as a "good fit" for the organization.

#### **Utilize the Resources of the Career and Personal Development Office**

- Schedule an appointment with a counselor to seek advice about the interview process.
- Counselors can conduct practice or "mock" interviews to help you prepare.

### **DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

#### **BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS**

##### **Purpose of a behavioral interview**

Behavioral interviewing is one of the most popular types of interview styles. Employers prefer behavioral questions because your answers help them determine how you might handle various work-related situations, based on how you have handled similar situations in

the past. Behavioral questions invite you to tell a story about an experience you have had that will provide a concrete example of your skill(s). Questions that begin with “Tell me about a time when...” or something similar are behavioral. See the list of behavior-based interview questions at the end of this handout.

### **How to answer behavioral interview questions**

The **STAR Method** is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and the result of the situation you are describing.

- **Situation**—Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to perform. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a classroom assignment, or any relevant event.
- **Task**—What was the goal that you were trying to accomplish?
- **Action**—Describe the actions YOU took to address the situation. What steps did you take and what was your particular contribution?
- **Result**—Describe the outcome of your actions and take credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

## **TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

### **Purpose of a telephone interview**

Telephone interviews are pre-screening tools used to narrow the pool of applicants invited for in-person interviews. The telephone interview deserves just as much respect and preparation as a face-to-face interview. For job hunters, the objective of a phone interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer.

### **Preparing for a Telephone Interview**

- Research the organization.
- Be sure you have a clear phone line with consistent service. Cell phones are not always the best option for a phone interview; you do not want to have a dropped call with an employer. If you do not have a landline, you can use a landline in the Career and Personal Development Office. Simply contact the Office to arrange to do so.
- Turn off your TV, computer, other phone(s), and electronic equipment that may make noises in the room. For example, a friend may text you while you are on the phone with an employer. Even if they do not distract you, noises may indicate to the employer that you are not taking the interview seriously.
- Dress up. This can make you feel more professional and you will ultimately portray that image of professionalism in your speech.
- Keep a folder of important information near your phone. Items include a copy of your resume, a notepad and pen to take notes, and employer information and research material.
- Have a short list of accomplishments available to review.
- Prepare a short list of questions about the job and the organization.

### **During the Telephone Interview**

- Write down the recruiter’s name, including correct spelling.
- Have a glass of water by the phone in case your throat gets dry.
- Enunciate your words, use correct grammar, and speak in complete sentences.
- Speak slowly, clearly, and directly into the phone receiver.

- When speaking to a potential employer over the phone, stand up and smile, as this will affect your voice quality.
- Listen carefully to all questions and take your time as you respond. If you need clarification on a question, ask for it.
- Expect some silences as the employer takes notes.
- Reaffirm your qualifications and express interest in the job and organization.
- At the end of the conversation, ask what the next step will be in the process.

### **After the Telephone Interview**

- Take notes about questions the interviewer asked you and how you answered.
- Follow-up with a thank-you note and/or email within 24 hours of your interview.
- Send any requested material immediately.

## **GROUP INTERVIEWS**

### **Group interviews with other candidates.**

Interviewers judge how you get along with others or how well you handle yourself in a team. What role do you play in a group? Are you able to share your thoughts appropriately when there are multiple people present? Here are a few tips:

- Do not get distracted by questions that ask you why you are more qualified than others in the room are. You have no idea what the qualifications of the other candidates are.
- Do stick with what you know: your own skills. Focus on what you do well and avoid comparing yourself with others.
- Do not try to stand out as a leader so much that you become overbearing.
- Do use examples in your answers.
- Do familiarize yourself with their website, literature, and the job description so that you can respond to questions with answers that are specific to their needs.

### **Group interviews with multiple interviewers.**

These interviews allow multiple people in the organization to meet you and ask you questions. They can save time and help both you and the interviewers to get a feel for how well you would “fit” in the office (Do you get along with the group? Is it comfortable?). Here are a few tips:

- Pay close attention to the names and titles of each interviewer so that you can address your answers to the specific needs of each.
- Do not forget to collect business cards at the end of the interview so that you can follow up with thank you letters to each person.
- Do not just focus on the person who asked you the question. Look around the room at others when you are answering questions. This helps keep the group involved and engaged in your answers.

## **VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS**

Interviewing candidates virtually, most often with Skype, is becoming much more common. The purpose of interviewing virtually is much the same as phone interviews: it is a way for employers to screen candidates before bringing them to interview in person. The benefit of interviewing via Skype rather than the telephone is that employers can actually see the candidate.

**Before the interview:**

- Ensure that Skype is working properly. Check your microphone and webcam settings, do a test call through Echo/Sound Test service, and try a quick test call to a friend.
- Set up your laptop on a table—do not have it perched on your lap for the interview.
- Turn off your TV, music, phone(s), electronic equipment that may make noises in the room, and any pop-ups that you may get while online (IM, email, etc.). Even if they do not distract you, noises may indicate to the employer that you are not taking the interview seriously.
- Make sure the lighting is good, and that the webcam is at the appropriate angle. You should be visible from your shoulders up.
- Dress up, just as you would for an in-person interview.
- Have the following items on hand:
  - Your resume
  - Pen, paper, tissues and water
  - A prepared list of questions that you can ask the interviewers when they have completed their questioning
  - Calendar/planner – at the end of the virtual screen, the employer may want to schedule time for you to come for an in-person interview

**During the Interview:**

- Make sure the interviewer(s) can hear and see you clearly, and that you can hear and see them. Be sure to listen carefully and never interrupt the interviewer!
- Sit up straight and try not to move around too much, which can be dizzying for the person on the other end.
- Look into the camera when speaking to the interviewer, not at the image of the interviewer on your computer screen.
- At the conclusion of the interview, when you have the opportunity to ask questions, be sure to inquire about the next steps in the interviewing process.
- Do not inquire about salary during a virtual interview. The time to discuss salary is at the end of the interview process, not the beginning. If an employer asks you what your salary requirements are, tell them you do not know enough about the position to determine that, however you would be happy to discuss it later in the interview process. Not only is this a true statement, but it will also reinforce your interest in proceeding further in the process.

**TIPS FOR PRACTICING FOR AN INTERVIEW**

- Practice aloud. Hearing your answers in your head sounds a lot different from when the words are audible.
- Practice in front of a mirror. When you can see your face and your gestures, you are able to tell how you are coming across to an interviewer.
- Ask a friend or roommate to help. Give them a list of questions. Then have them give you feedback about your answers. Was your tone of voice appropriate? Did you demonstrate enthusiasm? How fast or slow did you speak? Did you use examples? Did you answer the question well? Was your answer too long or too short?
- Have an outline in your mind of the points you want to cover, but do not memorize your answers; answers that are too scripted sound fake.
- Practicing takes time! The more time you allow for practice, the more comfortable you will be with the process.

- Contact the Career and Personal Development Office to do a mock interview. If you agree, we can tape the interview. Hearing your responses and seeing your behavioral cues can help you to understand other ways to improve your interviewing skills.

### **THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW**

- Dress in business attire.
- Arrive five to ten minutes before the appointed time. If you find yourself getting to the building earlier than you thought, wait in your car until it is closer to your interview time.
- Turn all electronic devices off.
- Bring a padfolio to hold your resume (multiple copies), reference sheet, list of questions for the employer, and a pad of paper with a pen.
- Throughout your interview, be polite to everyone you meet.
- When you meet the interviewer(s), stand up, make eye contact, smile and give a firm handshake.
- Demonstrate interest in the employer and the position during the interview by asking relevant questions.
- Speak clearly and enthusiastically, keeping all your responses positive.
- Maintain eye contact as it portrays confidence in what you are saying.
- Prior to leaving the interview, obtain a business card or contact information from all the people with whom you interviewed.

### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

- Take notes immediately after the interview on both the positive and negative aspects. These notes will help you to prepare for a possible second interview with the organization and even interviews with other organizations.
- Send thank-you notes within 24 hours of your interview to each person with whom you interviewed. An example of a thank-you note is included in our Additional Business Correspondence handout.
- Follow up. If you have not heard from the organization within the period that they stipulated, or they did not indicate when they would be in touch and a week has gone by, it is appropriate to follow up with a phone call.

### **TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

There is no way to prepare for every possible question. Just remember to look at the job description – that will help you make educated guesses about the type of information they want to hear.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What is it about this position that interests you?
- What made you choose \_\_\_\_\_ as a major?
- Why did you choose to study at Neumann University?
- How has your college prepared you for this job?
- What do you know about our company?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why should we hire you?
- Why do you want to work for our organization?
- Tell me about your coursework. What courses did you like the best? Least? Why?
- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?

- What has been your best achievement? Why?
- What motivates you to put forth your best effort?
- How do your skills relate to our needs?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a position like this?
- How do you handle stress?
- What makes you think you can do this job?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and employee.
- What are your career goals?
- What have you learned from your participation in co-curricular activities?
- What are your long range and short-range goals?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Do you have any plans for continuing education?
- Explain what you found to be the most valuable part of your education.
- What qualities should a successful manager or supervisor have?
- What qualifications do you have that make you the most successful candidate?
- What part-time or summer jobs have you found interesting?

## **BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- Tell me about a time when you were highly motivated and your example inspired others.
- Describe a situation when an employer asked you to change the way you did your work. How did you react?
- Describe an example of a mistake you have made. How did you apply this experience to future situations?
- Tell me about a time you persuaded someone to do things your way.
- Tell me about a time when a calculated risk you took paid off. What were the benefits of your decision?
- Tell me about a time you saw a better way to do something. What did you do? How did you communicate your ideas?
- Tell me about a time you had to accomplish a task with no direct supervision. How did you organize your time? How did you motivate yourself?
- Tell me about a time when an employee, peer or boss came to you with a new idea that you knew would not work. How did you know, and what was your response?
- Tell me about a time when you took action to improve the quality of your work. What specifically did you do?
- Tell me about a time you were especially creative.
- Tell me about a time when you knew an extremely busy week was ahead. How did you plan for it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to look for external resources to get a job done. Where did you turn for assistance?
- Tell me about a situation where you were following a process that you did not agree with. What bothered you, and how would you have changed it?
- Describe a time when you recognized a problem in the way your group was doing work. How did you help correct it?
- Tell me about a time when you had difficulty reaching a goal due to poor planning. What do you think you could have done differently?

- Describe a time when you were working on a project and your boss asked you to change the way you were proceeding, yet you did not agree with him/her. How did you react?
- Tell me about a time you had a conflict with someone – a roommate, professor, co-worker, etc. – and how you handled it.
- Describe a project or idea that was a success primarily because of your efforts.
- Tell me about a large project that you had to plan for work or school. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you had several tasks to complete in a limited timeframe.
- Tell me about a time when you went above the call of duty in order to complete a project.
- Describe a time when you faced a stressful situation and had to demonstrate your coping skills.
- Give an example of an important goal that you achieved. Tell me about your path in reaching this goal.
- Describe an effective presentation that you have made. What was the topic? What made it effective? What was the outcome?
- Describe the most creative project that you have carried out.
- Tell me about a time when you were in a situation when events and circumstances changed rapidly.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a personality conflict.

### **SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES TO ASK**

Most interviewers will ask you if you have any questions for them. Asking questions shows that you are interested in the position; conversely, not asking questions shows an employer that you are uninterested.

Below are some ideas of questions you might ask—of course, you do not want to ask all of them. You might choose some that are of particular interest, or ask some of your own.

- Tell me about your career path, specifically within this organization
- How would you describe the company culture?
- How would you describe your supervisory style?
- What skills do you see as being the most important for success in this job?
- What professional development or training opportunities are available for employees?
- Are performance evaluations given? If so, how often?
- Can you describe the goals of this position within the first 90 days of employment?
- Are there additional expectations you have, beyond what you outlined in the job description?
- What kind of training do you provide for new employees?
- What does an individual need in order to be successful in this organization?
- Can you describe a typical first year on the job?
- When can I expect to hear from you?