General Tips on Interviewing

INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES

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INTERVIEWING

Interviews provide an opportunity for you and an employer to get to know each other. Additionally, you and the employer decide if the position is a mutually beneficial fit for you and the organization. The employer gets to decide if you have the skills, interests, and qualities needed to do the job. You have an opportunity to impress the employer with your knowledge of their organization and your ability to explain why you are right for the job. How can you make your interview go well? Preparation is the key!

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

WHY PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW
A good interview is a significant part of the process. The success of an interview can be directly related to the preparation time that has been invested. The person who gets hired for a position is not necessarily the one who can do the best job, but the one who knows how to get hired. Securing a job takes time, commitment, initiative and practice.

HOW DO I PREPARE

Know Yourself
Begin by developing a good understanding of your education, experience, skills, interests, and abilities. You want to be able to translate these characteristics about yourself to show how they would benefit the company/organization to which you are applying. There are exercises and tools available to help you as you consider your skills, interests, and abilities.

For example, think of three major accomplishments and answer the following questions:

- What did I actually do from start to finish?
- What special skills or abilities did I use?
- What knowledge or training did I gain as a result of this accomplishment?
- How would these characteristics transfer or relate to the job for which I am interviewing?

Develop Your STAR Response
The most common interview method used by employers is the behavioral-based interview model. Basically, the premise behind the model is that past behavior is an indication of future behavior as to how you will solve problems or deal with delicate interpersonal matters. This is how you are evaluated as a potential new employee. The STAR method is a simple three-step process that will enable you to focus on specific experiences to support your responses to a behavioral-based interview question.
Situation or Task: Describe a task or project for which you had responsibility.

Action: Talk about the approach you took to deal with the situation.

Result: Discuss the outcome of your action, making sure to mention accomplishments or improvements made as a result of your action. Emphasize the most relevant aspects of your background and qualifications (including paid and volunteer work). Stress that the skills you have developed in the past are transferable to the employer’s organization. If possible, include an example (either extracurricular or in a work situation) of your ability to work as part of a team.

Practice Interviewing

Once you have reflected upon your skills and abilities, it’s time to practice articulating them. Go through the following list of interview questions and answer them based on your self-knowledge. You may not be asked these exact questions, but having thought through them will definitely help you answer other related questions. Note that these steps are not meant to give you ‘pat’ answers. This preparation is meant to help you give organized and concise answers that reflect thought.

Potential Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your short and long-term career plans?
- Why are you interested in this organization?
- How did you choose your major and university?
- How would a friend or professor describe you?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Have you any plans for graduate study?
- Discuss a special project you completed.
- What goals other than those related to work have you established for yourself in the next five years?
- What major problems have you encountered and how did you deal with them?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable working?
- When have you been the most productive, and what were your motivations?
- Why should I hire you?
- What school activities have you participated? Why did you choose those activities?
- What qualifications do you have that you feel will lead to success in your career?
- What kind of boss do you prefer?
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- How do you work under pressure?
- In what significant ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
- What three factors are most important to you in your job?
- If you were hiring a recent graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- In what ways has your college career prepared you for this position?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?
HOW DO I ANSWER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
The lists of possible interview questions are endless, but they often come down to asking the same thing in different ways. Remember that questions about your past are really about your future. When asked about past experience, emphasize skills and achievements, giving specific examples of what you did. The following are a few of the most typically asked questions and some suggestions for effective responses.

“Tell me about yourself.”
This is a typical opener through which they may gain insight into you. In your mind consider the questions in relation to the job for which you are applying. Personal, job related, or academic experiences are all fine as long as they relate directly to how you will perform the job.

“Why do you want this job?”
Be honest about your skills and experience. Rely upon research you have conducted on the employer.

“What do you know about this position or employer?”
It is crucial here to have done your homework. You must know about the employer, but it is even more important to know about the position itself.

“What are your weaknesses?”
Here you should either identify a weakness that does not directly relate to the position or identify a weakness that does and explain how you are working on it.

“Where do you see yourself in two years? Five? Ten?”
Rely on your research about the organization to describe how you plan to develop your skills within the typical career ladder of this organization. Avoid identifying goals which will not benefit the employer.

“We have interviewed 10 candidates equally qualified to you. Why should we select you?”
Again, the most powerful information you can offer is a restatement of your best skills to perform the job. Realize that your enthusiasm and desire for the position are also important.

“Do you have any questions?”
Prepare questions ahead of time. Asking intelligent questions reflects the depth of your research and the clarity of your thinking. When you say, “No, my questions have all been answered,” you forfeit an opportunity to sell yourself to the employer through the caliber of the question you ask.

“What salary are you looking for?”
Do not inquire about the salary during the initial interview. Delay salary negotiation until the employer is convinced they must have you. Ask to discuss the salary when you are both certain you are right for the job. If pressed for an amount it is best to talk about the salary range.
QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

- To whom will I report? Will I get the opportunity to meet that person?
- Where is the job located? What are the travel requirements, if any?
- How regularly do performance evaluations occur?
- In researching the position, I discovered that your company/department has been working on [name] project. Can you tell me more about this?
- What will the first assignment be?
- Can you give me an idea of when you expect to make a decision?
- What have been some of the best results produced by people in this job?
- Could you tell me about the people I would be dealing with?
- What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
- What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?
- Please describe the duties of the job for me.
- What is the usual promotional time frame?
- What kinds of assignments might I expect during the first six months on the job?
- What products or services are in the developmental stage right now?
- Do you have plans for expansion?
- What are your growth projections for the next year?
- How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
- Is your company environmentally conscious? In what ways?
- In what ways is a career with your company better than a career with your competitors?
- Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
- What is the single largest problem facing your staff/department right now?
- What kinds of training can I expect in the first three months?
- What do you (the interviewer) like best about your job/company?
- Has there been much turnover in this job area?
- Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?

THE INTERVIEW DAY

TIME AND PLACE
Be sure to confirm the time and place of your interview. Obtain directions and give yourself adequate travel time, including traffic and parking. Arrive 15 minutes early, but do not go to the actual office until 3-5 minutes before the actual interview.

DRESS
Depending upon your fashion style, whether it is the latest trends for the club scene or merely college senior casual, a job interview may be cause for some drastic wardrobe augmentation.

For your interviews, some of your individualism might have to be shelved or kept in the closet.
In most business and technical job interviews, when it comes to your appearance, conservatism and conformity are in order. While many companies have adopted the “office casual” dress code, don’t try to set new standards in the interview. When in doubt, it is better to be too conservative than to be too flashy. For men and women, a suit is the best bet. Here are some guidelines:

**Men**
- A two-piece suit will suffice in most instances.
- Solid colors and tighter-woven fabrics are safer than bold prints or patterns.
- Bright ties bring focus to the face, but a simple pattern is best for an interview.
- Wear polished shoes with socks high enough so no skin is visible when you sit down and cross your legs.

**Women**
- A suit with a knee-length skirt and a tailored blouse is most appropriate.
- Although even the most conservative organizations allow more feminine looks these days, accessories should be kept simple. Basic pumps and modest jewelry and makeup help to present a professional look.
- Pants are more acceptable now but are not recommended for interviews.

**WHAT TO BRING**
Small portfolio/briefcase with interview information (name, address, phone), and several copies of your resume.

**WHAT TO EXPECT IN AN INTERVIEW**

**BEFORE YOU SAY “HELLO”**
The typical interview starts before you even get into the inner sanctum. The recruiter begins to evaluate you the minute you are identified. You are expected to shake the recruiter’s hand upon being introduced. Don’t be afraid to extend your hand first. This shows assertiveness.

**GETTING ACQUAINTED**
This is the time for small talk. The interviewer may ask you about some interest area on your resume. The purpose is to set you at ease and develop rapport.

**EMPLOYER QUESTIONS**
During this phase of the interview, the employer may give a brief, informative description about the organization, department, and job. You will then be asked a series of questions about your education, skills, and experience. You may be asked specific and/or hypothetical questions. Answer thoughtfully, concisely, and do not ramble!
INTERVIEWEE QUESTIONS
This is your opportunity to ask the employer relevant questions. You should come prepared with several questions that will demonstrate your familiarity with the functions of the organization. If questions have occurred to you as a result of the interview, ask them. However, do not ask about salary or benefits in the first interview. There will be a time for that later. Do not ask redundant or basic questions that you should have known or researched prior to the interview. You will want to ask about the decision making timeline and when you can expect to hear from the employer.

INTERVIEW CLOSING
The employer will let you know when they are ready to wrap up by verbal and non-verbal signals. Closing a file or pushing back a chair are clues. As you finish, reiterate your interest in the position, smile, make eye-contact, and shake hands.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

THANK YOU LETTER
The first thing you do upon leaving the interview is breathe a sigh of relief. The second is to make sure that “out of sight, out of mind” will not apply to you. You do this by starting a follow-up procedure immediately after the interview. Sitting in your car, on the bus, train, or plane, do a written recap of the interview while it’s still fresh on your mind. Answer these questions:

- Whom did you meet?
- What aspects of the interview went poorly? Why?
- What is the agreed-upon next step?
- What was said during the last few minutes of the interview?

Probably the most difficult and most important thing to do is analyze what aspects of the interview went poorly. A person does not get offered a job based solely on strengths. On the contrary, many people get new jobs based on their relative lack of negatives as compared to the other applicants. So, it is mandatory that you look for and recognize any negatives from your performance. This is the only way you will have an opportunity to package and overcome those negatives in your follow-up procedure and during subsequent interviews.

Your follow-up letter will be addressed to the main interviewer. Whenever possible and appropriate, mention the names of the people you met at the interview. Draw attention to one of the topics that was of general interest to the interviewer(s). When writing the thank you letter, you want to convey three key things:
• Confidence: There is a job to be done and a challenge to be met. Let the interviewer know you are confident of doing both well.
• Interest: If you want the job/next interview, say so. As this stage, the company is buying and you are selling. Ask for the job in a positive and enthusiastic manner.
• Appreciation: As a courtesy and mark of professional manners, you must express appreciation for the time the interviewer took out of her/his busy schedule.

Send the letter within 24 hours of the interview. If you do not hear anything after five days, which is quite normal, call the company/representative.

THE ART OF NEGOTIATING

Once you have been offered a job, you have the opportunity to discuss the terms of your employment. Negotiations may be uncomfortable because we tend to approach them with a winner-take-all attitude that is counterproductive to the concept of negotiations. Negotiating with your potential employer can make your job one that best meets your own needs as well as those of your employer.

RESEARCH
Gather as much factual information as you can to back up the case you want to make. For example, if most entering employees cannot negotiate salary, you may be jeopardizing the offer by focusing on that aspect of the package. Turn your attention to other parts of the offer such as their health and dental plans, retirement package, the type of schedule you prefer, etc.

PRACTICE
Rehearse the presentation in advance using another person as the employer. If you make mistakes in rehearsal, chances are that you will not repeat them during the actual negotiations. A friend can critique your reasoning and help you prepare for questions. If this all seems like a lot of work, remember that if something is worth negotiating for, it is worth preparing for.

DOLLARS AND SENSE
Always begin by expressing genuine interest in the position and the organization, emphasizing the areas of agreement but allowing “wiggle room” to compromise on other areas. Be prepared to support your points of disagreement, outlining the parts you would like to alter, your suggestions on how this can be done, and why it would serve the company’s best interests to accommodate your request.

Be prepared to defend your proposal. Back up your reasons for wanting to change the offer with meaningful, work-related skills and positive benefits to the employer. Requesting a salary increase because you are a fast learner or have a high GPA are usually not justifiable reasons in
the eyes of the employer. Meaningful work experience or internships that have demonstrated or tested your professional skills are things that will make an employer stop and take notice.

It is sometimes more comfortable for job-seekers to make this initial request in writing and plan to meet later to hash out the differences. You will need to be fairly direct and assertive at this point even though you may feel extremely vulnerable. Keep in mind that the employer has chosen you from a pool of qualified applicants, so you are not as powerless as you think. Stand firm, but encourage the employer to think about it for a day or two at which time you will discuss the details of your proposal with him/her. Do not rush the process because you are uncomfortable.

Once you have reached a conclusion with which you are both relatively comfortable, present in writing your interpretation of the agreement so that if there is any question, it will be addressed immediately. Negotiation, by definition, implies that each side will give. Do not perceive it as an ultimatum.

If the employer chooses not to grant any of your requests— and realistically, he or she can do that—you will still have the option of accepting the original offer provided you have maintained a positive, productive and friendly atmosphere during your exchanges. You can always re-enter negotiations after you have demonstrated your worth to the organization.

**MONEY ISN’T EVERYTHING**

There are many things you can negotiate besides salary. For example, benefits can add thousands of dollars to the compensation package. Benefits can range from paid personal leave to discounts on the company’s products and services. They constitute more than just icing on the cake; they may be better than the cake itself. Traditional benefits packages include health insurance, paid vacation and personal/sick days. Companies may offer such benefits as child care, elder care or use of the company jet for family emergencies. Other lucrative benefits could include disability and life insurance and a variety of retirement plans. Some organizations offer investment and stock options as well as relocation reimbursement and tuition credits for continued education.
TEN RULES OF INTERVIEWING

1. **Keep your answers brief and concise.** Unless asked to give more detail, limit your answers from two to three minutes per question. Tape yourself and see how long it takes you to fully answer a question.

2. **Include concrete, quantifiable data.** Interviewees tend to talk in generalities. Unfortunately, generalities often fail to convince interviewers that the applicant has assets. Include measurable information and provide details about specific accomplishments when discussing your strengths.

3. **Repeat your key strengths three times.** It’s essential that you comfortably and confidently articulate your strengths. Explain how the strengths relate to the company’s or department’s goals and how they might benefit the potential employer. If you repeat your strengths then they will be remembered and—if supported with specific accomplishments—they will more likely be believed.

4. **Prepare five or more success stories.** In preparing for interviews make a list of your skills and key assets. Reflect on past experiences and pick out instances when you used those skills successfully.

5. **Put yourself on their team.** Align yourself with the prospective employer by using the employer’s name and products or services. For example, “As a member of XYZ Company, I would carefully analyze …”, show that you are thinking like a member of the team and will fit in with the existing environment.

6. **Image is often as important as content.** What you look like and how you say something are just as important as what you say. Studies have shown that 65 percent of the conveyed message is nonverbal; gestures, physical appearance and attire are highly influential during job interviews.

7. **Ask questions.** The types of questions you ask and the way you ask them can make a tremendous impression on the interviewer. Prepare in advance, write out specific questions, and then look for opportunities to ask them during the interview. The interview process is a two-way street whereby you and the interviewer assess each other to determine if there is an appropriate match.

8. **Maintain a conversational flow.** By consciously maintaining a conversational flow—a dialogue instead of a monologue—you will be perceived more positively. Use feedback questions and use body language and voice intonation to create a dynamic interchange.

9. **Research the company, product lines and competitors.** Research will provide information to help you decide whether you’re interested in the company and important data to refer to during the interview.

10. **Keep an interview journal.** As soon as possible, write a brief summary of what happened. Note any follow-up action you should take and put it in your calendar. Review your presentation. Prepare and send a brief, concise thank-you letter. Restate your skills and stress what you can do for the company.
Hire A Bear

WHAT IS HIRE A BEAR

Hire A Bear is your online connection to many resources, including:

My Account
- Manage your career-related documents including resume, cover letter, and transcript.

Employer Directory
- Identify contacts for over 5,000 potential employers nationally and internationally.

Job Search
- Apply for jobs.
- Search for off-campus part-time, summer work, research opportunities, internship, and full-time employment job listings.
- Create job search agents if you would like to be emailed when a new job meets your search criteria.

On-Campus Interview Schedules
- Submit resume for on-campus interviews for full-time jobs and internships.

Career Events
- RSVP to employer presentations, workshops, career fairs, and information tables.

Career Tools
- Access premium resources, such as Bizjournal, CareerInsider, Going Global, InterviewStream, and WetFeet.

HOW DO I GET STARTED

1. Go to the Career and Professional Development website at www.hireabear.com
2. Click on the “HireABear for Students & Alumni” bar, then click the Login button.
3. Hire A Bear is not the same as your BearWeb account. Hire A Bear is a unique career and professional development system with a different user name and password.
4. Enter your full Baylor email address as your User Name.
5. Click “Forgot your password”
   - Enter your full Baylor email address as your User Name
   - The system will reset your password and email it to you
6. Be sure to add Hireabear@baylor.edu to your contacts list in Outlook so email messages are successfully delivered to your inbox and not your Junk E-mail folder.
7. If you have any problems logging in, contact The Office of Career and Professional Development at (254) 710-3771 for assistance.

10