

Effective Interviewing Skills: A Career Service Guide

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Characteristics Interviewers Typically Seek in Candidates

Self Confidence, Initiative, Motivation, Enthusiasm, Interpersonal Skills, Organizational Skills, Assertiveness, Intelligence, Ability to Handle Pressure, Flexibility, Leadership potential, Oral and Written Communication Skills

Reasons Why Interviewers Reject Applicants

Poor personal appearance.

Lack of interest and enthusiasm.

Lack of solid career planning. Goals and objectives are vague. No insight into the nature of the organization or graduate school. Failure to maintain appropriate eye contact with the interviewer while conversing.

Being late for the interview.

Lack of questions about the job or organization. Overbearing, overaggressive, "know-it-all" attitude. Inability to express oneself clearly. Poor volume, diction, or grammar. Little understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses. Unwilling to start at the bottom--expects too much too soon.

Lack of confidence and poise.

Overemphasis on salary and money.

Lack of tact, maturity.

Little sense of humor.

Lack of knowledge of field.

Low moral standards.

Lazy.

Intolerant. Has strong prejudices.

Narrow interests.

Inability to take criticism.

Complains or speaks poorly about past employers/positions.

"WHY SHOULD I SELECT YOU?"

Before the Interview!

Preparation is critical for strong performance in any interview. Be prepared to convince the interviewer that you should be hired or accepted into the graduate school and also plan to provide solid reasons why you want to join the organization. Prior to the actual interview, you should:

?? Self-Assessment

- A. Reflect on your skills and abilities which are valuable to the employer or graduate program.
- B. Practice by using the videotaped mock interview available for students in the Career Services office. Review the sample list of questions prior to participating in the mock interview and think of specific examples to demonstrate your skills.

?? Research the Employer/Graduate School

- A. Research the employer/graduate program to learn about the products, philosophies, reputation of the program, current events. Prepare a few questions to ask the interviewer once reviewing information to learn more about the organization.

?? Logistics

- A. Verify basics: time, date, location, and directions for your interview.
- B. Stock your portfolio with extra copies of your [resume](#) on bond paper, a list of your references with contact information, examples of your work (possibly your Independent Study).
- C. Plan what you will wear and ask for advice if uncertain about appropriate professional attire.
- D. Arrive early and take care of a few basics: go to the restroom, get a drink, and dry your hands if you have sweaty palms.

During the Interview!

Opportunity knocks and now is your chance to market yourself! Remember that there are three parts of the actual interview and that this is a two-way exchange of information and decision making. The interviewer decides whether or not to make you an offer, but you also will then have a decision to make. Therefore, it is important to evaluate whether or not this is a fit for you too.

?? Introduction

- A. Greet your interviewer(s) with a firm handshake, good eye contact, and a smile.
- B. Wait until you are asked to be seated and then sit
- C. Let the interviewer lead you into the process: usually a question or comment about your trip or the weather will be used to help you get comfortable and relax. The interviewer then may explain how he/she plans to conduct the interview.

?? Body

- A. The interviewer will ask you questions regarding your interests, skills, and abilities. Use specific examples when responding to these inquiries because past behaviors are an indicator of future performance!
- B. The interviewer will also evaluate your nonverbal communication, so maintain good eye contact, listen closely to the question, don't move nervously (such as shifting in your seat, playing with a ring on your finger, tapping your foot).
- C. You will probably be given an opportunity to ask questions. DO NOT ask something that you should have known from doing some basic research on the company.

DO NOT ask WIIFM (What's in it for me) questions until you have an offer! (Examples include: salary, benefits, vacation).

?? Closing

- A. The interviewer might tell you what the next step in the process is and when you can expect to hear from them again. If not, ask "what is the next step in your selection process?"
- B. Again a firm handshake to conclude the interview and thank the interviewer for his/her time and request a business card.

After the Interview

Many candidates believe that once the interview has occurred that there is nothing left to do except wait to hear of the decision about their status. However, there are a few things that one should do after every interview.

?? Self Analysis

A. Reflect on the interview. What did you do well? What do you want to improve on in your next interview?

?? Follow Up With Employer/Graduate School

A. Write a thank you letter to the interviewer(s) which is personalized recalling something the interviewer shared with you that you appreciated. Again, express your interest in the organization and mention the skills that you would contribute if you became part of the team.

B. If you have not heard from the employer/graduate school within the time frame mentioned during the interview, recontact the interviewer by letter. Express your continued interest and indicate that you are looking forward to hearing from them again soon.

C. If you receive a rejection and you were very interested in the organization, a follow up letter expressing disappointment is appropriate. Also express your continued interest and emphasize skills you could contribute if openings suitable for your qualifications become available in the future.

Independent Study and its Value for Employment

Although Independent Study is sometimes thought of in terms of the pressures to produce, students who complete this project gain skills that will not only be valued by employers but throughout life.

The Other Side of That Monster

- ?? Skills Gained Through Independent Study
 - A. Time Management Strategies
 - B. Decision Making Capabilities
 - C. Critical Thinking Skills
 - D. Organizational Experience
 - E. Research Techniques
 - F. Presentation Skills
 - G. Writing Skills
 - H. Creativity
 - I. Stress Management
- ?? Utilizing Independent Study as an Example of Your Work
 - A. [Cover Letters/Resume](#): You can mention Independent Study in your application for employment as a project which has prepared you to perform the responsibilities of a specific position.
 - B. Formal and Informal Interviews: In conversations with employers and professionals working in organization of interest, it can be helpful to discuss your Independent Study project and the extent of involvement required of Wooster students to complete this requirement.
- ?? Tips for Explaining Your Independent Study to Others
 - A. For people who are not familiar with Independent Study they might be surprised at the scope of this academic requirement.
 - B. Explain your project in a logical fashion: start at the beginning and explain your activities sequentially. Emphasize specific skills gained and results found during this process.

For example:

Independent Study is required of all seniors at the College of Wooster for graduation.

I chose _____ as my topic of study and prepared a detailed outline planning my project which included targeted completion dates for each phase of the project. Realizing that I would need monetary support to travel to New Mexico to interview members of the Native American population I wanted to study, I contacted various professional organizations and submitted grant proposals to secure \$_____ of funding toward my efforts. I then conducted research using the World Wide Web and _____ databases to identify sources for additional information relevant to the topic. I prepared a draft of interview questions to be used with participants and discussed my strategies for completing interviews with my advisor. I made travel arrangements and flew to New Mexico to interview the Native Americans. Upon my return, I transcribed the qualitative portion of the interviews and entered the quantitative data into _____ Statistical program to complete an analysis. Once the findings had been determined, I wrote an 80 page thesis describing my study and used Microsoft Excel to create a variety of graphs for presenting the numerical results. I then presented my Independent Study to members of my academic department.

Career Library Resources

Available in the Career Services Library for your review in preparing for interviews are a number of resources including the following:

- ?? Knock 'Em Dead: Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions by Martin Yate
- ?? Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed by H. Anthony Medley
- ?? Successful Interviewing for College Seniors by John D. Shingleton
- ?? A Funny Thing Happened at the Interview by Gregory F. Farrell
- ?? The 1997 What Color is Your Parachute? by Richard Nelson Bolles

Also available in the Career Library are employer files which include annual reports on a variety of organizations. To further research employers, surf the World Wide Web to find out if they have a web site. In addition, the following directories can also provide some information which is helpful when learning more about a company. It can also be helpful to conduct a current event search in some of the larger newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal and New York Times.

- ?? Hoover's Handbook of American Business 1996
- ?? The Almanac of American Employers 1996-97
- ?? 150 Best Companies for Liberal Arts Graduates
- ?? The Best Companies for Women
- ?? The Best Companies for Minorities
- ?? The 100 Best Companies for Gay Men and Lesbians
- ?? The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America
- ?? Companies that Care

Resources available which provide examples of job search correspondence (including thank you letters):

- ?? Job Search Letters That Get Results
- ?? The Perfect Follow Up Method to Get the Job

Questions Commonly Asked by Employers/Graduate Schools

1. Tell me about yourself
2. What are your short and long range goals and objective? How do you plan to achieve them?
3. Why did you choose to attend The College of Wooster? A major in _____?
4. Tell me more about your Independent Study. What class has been the most rewarding and why? (Independent Study is a class to feature!)
5. How did you become interested in the career for which you are preparing?
6. How do you think a professor would describe your academic ability and work ethic?
7. How has your college experience prepared you for opportunities with our organization?
8. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction and why?
9. What changes would you make in your college or university?
10. What have you learned from your participation in _____ student organization, athletics?
11. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
12. Describe what you learned from one mistake that you have made in a job.
13. What is your greatest weakness?
14. Tell me about a project you initiated.
15. What was the most useful criticism that you have received?
16. Give me an example of a problem that you solved and the process that you used.
17. Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual. How did you deal with it.
18. Give me an example of a group in which you emerged as a leader. What is your style?
19. What idea have you developed and implemented that was creative or innovative.
20. What types of situations put you under pressure and how do you deal with pressure.
21. Give me an example of a situation in which you failed.
22. Why do you want to join this company/attend this graduate school?
23. What features of our organization are the most attractive to you in your search?
24. Do you have a geographical preference?
25. Why should I select you?

Questions to Ask the Employer/Graduate School

1. I noticed from my research that a current accomplishment that _____ is proud of is _____. What do you see as the main advantages of this for someone at my level?
2. What major challenges is the company/graduate program facing?
3. Where do people go when they leave the company or finish their graduate studies?
4. What are the challenges, positive and negative aspects of this position or for graduate students?
5. What do you enjoy the most about this company or graduate program?
6. What are the growth plans for the future both short and long range?
7. Upon what criteria will my performance be evaluated?
8. What commitment does the company/graduate school have to the career development of its members?
9. What are the opportunities for progression and further involvement in the company/program?
10. How would you describe the work atmosphere/learning environment here?
11. What is the next step in the selection process?

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What motivated you to become a teacher?
2. How was your student teaching experience? How did that experience impact your expectations of the profession?
3. What is your role, as a teacher, in the learning process?
4. How do you grade? Why?
5. What methods would you use to individualize instruction?
6. How would you motivate a student who expresses little or no desire to learn?
7. What are some ways you plan to maintain your enthusiasm about your class and elicit the same from your students?
8. How would you evaluate your students' reactions to you and your classroom?
9. Would you become involved in extracurricular activities? Why?
10. Do you think it is important for students to like you?
11. What are some qualities/skills a 'good' teacher might have?
12. Explain your experiences demonstrating your organizational skills.
13. What personal values do you think will be reflected in your teaching?
14. How do you feel about being observed by your building principal or other administrators?
15. What expectations do you have for your building principal and other administrators?
16. How would you help a struggling student succeed?
17. What is the most rewarding outcome for you as a teacher?
18. What is the most exciting thing that happened in your area of study?
19. What have you found to be the most difficult aspect of discipline?
20. If you could choose to teach any concept in your area, which would you select?
21. What is your greatest strength as a teacher?
22. In what area do you believe you need improvement?
23. How have you communicated student progress to parents?
24. What is the role of the student within your classroom?
25. Describe a lesson plan that you developed. What were the objectives, the format, and what type of evaluation did you use to see if your goals were met?
26. What should your students have gained from taking your courses?
27. What do you like most/least about being a teacher?
28. If you could, what would you change about the education profession?
29. What books/people/concepts/experiences have influenced you the most in your professional development?
30. Tell me about your favorite teacher.
31. How do you view discipline, motivation, planning, and classroom control in the learning process?
32. What is your position on competency-based instruction?
33. What interests you about this particular school system?
34. What is your philosophy of education?
35. What do you believe to be the most challenging issue facing educators today?

Questions you might ask of your interviewers

1. What is the size of the average class?
2. How are extracurricular activities organized?
3. What kind of text books, technology, etc. are used in the classroom?
4. How are teachers evaluated?
5. What changes is the school currently undergoing?
6. What is the relationship between the community and the school system?
7. What is the record of the community in passing levies and bond issues?
8. What kind of support could I expect from fellow teachers, the principal and the superintendent?
9. What specific issues are of major concern to parents and/or the school board?

Phone Interviews

?? Reasons for a Phone Interview

1. Companies reduce expenses by conducting phone interviews before inviting candidates on-site.
2. Provides another method of screening candidates.
3. Gives the recruiter a chance to analyze your communication skills.
4. Allows the interviewer to evaluate your ability to convey ideas or concepts effectively.
5. Provides a quicker, less formal interaction.

?? Challenges Specific to a Phone Interview

1. It is not possible to read or convey body language.
2. Prevents you from making a positive impression through physical appearance, posture, firm handshake, and direct eye contact.
3. Makes it more difficult to assess the way the interview is going by noticing visual cues to your responses.
4. Increases the need to acknowledge understanding/agreement through verbal communication, as opposed to visual/physical expression.
5. Makes it easy to slip into an informal mode of expression during the interview.

?? Advantages of a Phone Interview

1. You can refer to your notes and [resume](#) during the interview.
2. You can wear comfortable clothes that help you relax, or dress up to be in the interview mind-set.
3. Familiar surroundings help you focus better.
4. Allows you to demonstrate your verbal communication (telephone) skills.

?? Tips to Help You With the Interview

1. Ensure that the recording on your answering machine does not cause you embarrassment.
2. Be concise. You have less time to talk.
3. Prepare for the interview. You can conduct a mock interview with an advisor in Career Services.
4. Try to schedule a future time for the interview rather than doing it when initially contacted.
5. Be aware of your voice, your language, and the way you phrase your sentences.
6. Avoid the use of words such as "like, yaa, aaa, ummm, you know." Be direct in conveying what you mean.
7. Remember to ask for the name and contact information of the interviewer. * Send the interviewer a thank you letter the next day, referring to details from the conversation you had and reinforcing your interest in the position/program.

On-Site Interviews

If a company or graduate school invites you for an interview "to see their organization or program", they are very interested in you as a candidate. Be confident that you have made a positive impression in your written application and any previous conversations or interviews and continue to market your strengths.

?? Arrangements

- A. Get the details in writing: name, title, business address, phone number of trip coordinator.
- B. Details of travel arrangements (sometimes you will have to locate your own lodging).
- C. WHERE you are supposed to be, WHEN, and WHO you should ask to see upon arrival (Be sure to obtain accurate directions to the location).

?? Interview Preparation

- A. Refresh your memory of early interviews and conduct more research on the organization.
- B. Practice your interviewing skills again.
- C. Stock your briefcase with examples of your work, transcripts, references.
- D. Never forget to pack your itinerary and information outlining the details of your visit.

?? What Can You Expect?

- A. Dress professionally as if you were part of the environment (including for graduate school).
- B. Everyone you meet is interviewing you. Even the secretaries will give feedback.
- C. Be aware of your table manners during meals.
- D. When making small talk, try to avoid controversial topics such as politics or religion.

?? Things to Look For

- A. What is the impression that you receive regarding the morale of the people there?
- B. Are they genuinely glad to meet you and do they make you feel welcome?
- C. Do you feel comfortable in this environment?
- D. Are your questions answered honestly, avoided, or with conflicting responses?

?? Trip Expenses

- 1. Every organization has different policies relevant to providing monetary support for your visit. Obtain the details from the person who invited you for the interview.

?? After the Visit

- . Send thank you letter even if you have decided that the place is not a "fit" for you.

A. If you need to know where you stand in order to respond to other offers, do not hesitate to call and explain that you are still interested in this organization, but need to respond to pending offers.

?? An Offer During the Visit

- . Even if you really want the offer, do not say "yes" until you've had more time to think about it. Be gracious in your thanks for the offer and request a little time to make your decision.