INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Prepared for School of Management students by:
The Frank L. Ciminelli Family
Career Resource Center
308 Alfiero Center
(716) 645-3232
mgt.buffalo.edu/career
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Background Information

The purpose of the job interview is two-fold: (1) to allow the interviewer to determine how well-suited you are for the job, and (2) to learn as much about the position and employer as you can. This meeting gives you the opportunity to summarize the assets you have to offer an organization—specifically knowledge, skills, experience and, to demonstrate your interest. Each interview is different. In order for you to present yourself and your qualifications in the most effective manner, you must prepare for each interview.

Planning, Preparation & Practice

The results of planning, preparation and practice will enable you to make a better presentation to the interviewer which demonstrates your thoroughness, competence, emotional readiness, and enthusiasm to work for that organization. The effort you put into your preparation for an interview will distinguish you from the other candidates. Your task in planning, preparing and practicing for an interview is threefold:

1. Know your product (yourself) inside and out.
2. Research customers (employers) who are most likely to buy that product.
3. Present your product as something that can really add value to the organization.

The CRC’s Interviewing Skills Workshop will introduce you to the fundamentals of interviewing. You can check workshop dates at mgt.buffalo.edu/CRC/workshops.shtm. Once you’ve completed the Interviewing Skills Workshop, be sure to stop by the CRC to sign up for your practice interview! The CRC’s Practice Interview Program will provide you with a realistic interview experience, gaining knowledge in how to behave in a behavior-based interview. (Refer to “Behaving in a Behavior-Based Interview” section for an explanation of this methodology.) Volunteer interviewers who have been trained by human resource professionals in behavior-based interview techniques conduct the practice interview. It is videotaped for your future reference, and lasts approximately 40 minutes. About half of the 40 minutes is devoted to providing you feedback and answering any questions you might have about interviewing.

Researching the Position, Company & Industry

It’s smart to know about the position, company, and industry you are applying for before you interview. If you have researched and can ask knowledgeable questions about organizational structure, activities, and your role in the company, your interviewer will take notice. Your effort will display intelligence, resourcefulness, diligence, and most of all, interest. Employers are not just looking for candidates with great skills; they are just as much interested in candidates that demonstrate interest in the job. Why? Because interested employees work harder, show more initiative and enthusiasm, and have lower turnover rates. Therefore, you should always come prepared to ask questions of the interviewer. Refer to “Questions to Ask the Interviewer” section for examples.

Once you have conducted thorough research of the position, the company and the industry, you can prepare by practicing responses in advance for questions the interviewer is likely to ask, given your background, the career position for which you are interviewing, and the listed items on your résumé. Company or industry-specific questions are often simple tests by interviewers to see if you have “done your homework” in preparing for the interview. If you haven’t prepared for the interview, you are unlikely to have coherent responses to why you are interested in XYZ company. Interviewers look for your answer, how well you organize your response and how you articulate your response or express yourself. By practicing your responses to possible questions, you will be able to communicate your skills, experience and enthusiasm in an organized fashion. Refer to “Common Interview Questions” Section for sample company and industry specific questions.
Some of the areas you may want to research include:

- Type of company, locations, number of employees
- Profits, revenues, and sales
- Structures and divisions
- Competitors within the industry
- Past history or growth
- Past history or growth
- Present market situation for the company’s products
- Future growth potential
- Reputation of the company
- Affiliates and subsidiaries
- Products and services
- Types of entry-level positions and their associated qualifications and responsibilities
- Internal professional development, training, and career paths

Data sources for finding the above include (resources will vary depending on the size and nature of the company):

**Company and Industry Research**

- Company web sites*: background info, activities, size, annual report, etc.
- Company research web sites: Hoovers Online, WetFeet, Vault Reports
- SEC data: annual report, prospectus, 10K, 10Q, proxy statement, etc.
- Directories: Corptech, Wards, S&P, Moody’s Manuals, Thomas Register, etc.
- Lockwood Library on-line services: “Steps in Researching a Company” at [http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/asl/guides/bus/steps.html](http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/asl/guides/bus/steps.html)
- Personnel departments: company newsletters, e.g.

*Be aware that what a company presents on their web site is limited to what they want you to know. It is therefore imperative that you conduct external research to ensure you are getting a more complete picture of the company.

**Position Research**

- Informational interviews: employees, former employees, telementors, alumni, faculty, competitors, suppliers, etc.
- Job descriptions: *Occupational Outlook Handbook for College Graduates*, personnel departments, job search engines, employment databases

You may still have difficulty finding information on smaller or non-publicly traded firms after you’ve used the resources noted above. Try contacting the company’s recruiter directly. Individuals who supervise the hiring process know that potential employees will be looking for information. They may be able to answer your questions regarding company structure, activity, size, and scope.
Giving Employers What They Are Seeking

Recruiters are most impressed with candidates who demonstrate good communication skills, consistently maintain good grades, and pursue an internship or co-op in their field of study. Candidates who have taken the time to do research on the company and can ask pertinent questions that show they’ve done their homework will further impress a recruiter. But no matter what qualifications you possess, no matter how stellar your GPA, there are some skills that can make or break your candidacy.

Surveys conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) indicated that employers, whether they’re looking for computer programmers, retail managers, or accountants, desire well-rounded employees able to interact appropriately, effectively, and efficiently in the workplace. In other words, candidates with proven technical and “people” skills/qualities are most desired. The lists below show how employers ranked specific skills and personal characteristics (notice the overlap!)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Skills</th>
<th>Desired Personal Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>1. Honesty/Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teamwork skills</td>
<td>2. Motivation/Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Analytical skills</td>
<td>3. Communication Skills</td>
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<td>4. Oral Communication skills</td>
<td>4. Self-confidence</td>
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<td>5. Flexibility</td>
<td>5. Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Computer skills</td>
<td>6. Interpersonal skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Written Communication skills</td>
<td>7. Strong work ethic</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Leadership skills</td>
<td>8. Teamwork skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Work experience</td>
<td>9. Leadership skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Internship/Co-op experience</td>
<td>10. Enthusiasm</td>
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# Techniques to Demonstrate Skills/Personal Qualities

Your ability to **demonstrate** to an employer that you have these qualities and skills is just as important as actually possessing them. The following techniques can be used to help the interviewer make an evaluation in your favor when assessing your qualities and skills:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality/Skill</th>
<th>Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Provide examples* of how well you have handled student and co-worker relationships, both in individual and group situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Provide examples* of how you (not the whole team) were able to contribute to a project/situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Provide examples* of how you were able to gather and analyze relevant facts, use those facts to identify alternative courses of action, and determine the risks/benefits of the possible alternatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Demonstrate strong verbal skills during the interview (concise, articulate and to the point). Provide writing samples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Provide examples* of positive reactions to your changing environment, such as responding to unexpected work or school experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Discuss your accomplishments/contributions with student organizations, class projects, work projects, and other extra-curricular activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty/Integrity</td>
<td>Show through your answers during the interview and in reporting your GPA accurately. (Most employers verify GPA as a condition of employment.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/Initiative</td>
<td>Provide examples* of how you have a strong drive to achieve and can be optimistic, even in the face of failure. Cite examples where you exceeded expectations in work or school situations. Can also be shown on your résumé by the quality of your GPA combined with leadership roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Confidence</td>
<td>Best shown through your confident responses to questions, your eye contact with the interviewer, and your poised and professional demeanor during the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Best shown through your voice, arm gestures and body language during the interview.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*When providing examples, utilize the **STAR technique** discussed in the following section to positively emphasize your valuable characteristics. The above qualities/skills are just a sample of “competencies” that employers are looking for. Other competencies employers may be seeking are creativity, decision making, assertiveness, time management, etc. Which competencies an employer will be seeking will depend upon the skills and qualities required for the position. It is therefore **imperative that you first learn of the skills and qualities required for the position when preparing for the interview.** This can be accomplished by analyzing the detailed job posting. An informational interview is another excellent means in which to learn about the key competencies of the job. Please refer to the CRC web site for further information on informational interviewing.*)
Behaving in a Behavior-Based Interview Using the STAR Technique

One of the most effective means for a recruiter to evaluate a candidate's competencies is through behavior-based interviewing. Behavior-based interviewing is built on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior. Thus, an interviewer will ask you questions about your past and will be looking for specific examples of your performance. To be successful in this type of an interview, YOU MUST PREPARE. Preparation includes:

- Identifying the skills/qualities (i.e., key competencies) of the position
- Thinking about your past experiences which demonstrate a clear link between your behaviors and the competencies required for the job. You can do this by recalling any successes and difficulties encountered in summer and part-time jobs, steps you took to successfully complete school projects both independently and as a team member, etc.
- Building your answer to interview questions by using the STAR technique:
  - Define the Situation or Task
  - Describe the Action that you took
  - Present the Results of your actions

Be as specific as possible, including names (if appropriate) and dates. When describing actions taken, be sure you include the actions that you took, not just others.

- Creating a “tool box” of answers for each of the competencies (teamwork, analytical, leadership, etc.). As you prepare for one job interview to the next, you are actually filling a box of “tools”. You can then easily pull from your toolbox when a behavior-based question is presented in the future. For example:

**Teamwork**
**Potential Question:** Tell me about a time when you worked with a group that was particularly successful in completing a project or assignment.

**Response:** I have worked on several team projects throughout business school, but one team project I am most proud of is my Oracle Database class project from last semester. With a team of seven people, we were charged with designing an enterprise-wide financial system for a restaurant chain. The project required a significant amount of in-depth, detailed work in a short period of time. [Situation/Task]

Drawing upon my experiences from previous team projects, I suggested that we assign specific roles and assign those roles based on people’s strengths. (Since I had worked with many of these classmates before, I paid particular attention to their strengths.) Everyone agreed to my suggestion, and the roles of project manager, technical analysts, non-technical analysts, floater (team member who can assist any assigned role as needed), editor, and presenters were assigned. I also suggested, and the team agreed, that conference calls and emails would be used to track progress whenever it was impossible for all team members to meet in one location at the same time. [Action]

The project was completed on time, we received an “A” grade, and I received positive feedback from my team members on my contributions. Specifically, they commented that my work was on-target, comprehensive, and that I was a strong team player, because I offered to serve as an additional floater once my portion of the project was completed. [Result]

The STAR Technique can be applied to both behavior-based and traditional-type questions. Refer to “Common Interview Questions” section for samples of these types of questions.
The Big Day

Scheduling and Other Tips

When the company’s interviewer calls you to schedule an appointment, follow these tips:

- Ask the person who calls you for the name and position of the interviewer, the exact location, and expected duration of the interview. Also confirm the position, division, and geographic location you will be interviewing for.
- Schedule the interview when you know that you can make it on time comfortably.
- Write the date and time where you will notice it.
- Write the name of your contact person and the telephone number next to the time and date in case you need to reach that person for any reason.
- For off-campus interviews, be sure to ask the caller for detailed instructions to the interview location if you have never been there. If possible, do a dry run to confirm directions, parking, travel time, etc.

Your interview begins the moment you are in sight!

- **Attend to every detail of hygiene and attire (refer to “Dress for Interview Success" section)**
- **Try to RELAX, but be aware that a little nervousness is o.k.**
- Bring a couple extra résumés and reference sheets (on bond paper), pen, notepad (preferably in a leather portfolio), directions, name, title, and address of interviewer.
- **Arrive 10 – 15 minutes early!**
- Always shake hands, introduce yourself, and be pleasant to everyone, even the receptionist or secretary.
- During the interview, sit erect, maintain good eye contact, project confidence and enthusiasm.
Dressing for Interview Success

As Will Rogers said, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” Your personal image extends well beyond the interview. Every contact with the interviewer (résumé, cover letter, phone calls, information sessions, etc.) must reflect your professional image. Your appearance tells people how you feel about yourself as an applicant, as well as how you feel about the interviewer(s), the company, and the process of interviewing itself. The correct image at an interview will give you a real edge over your competition, and it will add to your own sense of self-esteem and confidence.

Within the first five seconds of meeting someone, you are generally evaluated on your appearance. It is important that your appearance matches the culture of the company. One way to do this is to visit the company to see how people who work there are dressed or ask people that you know in the professional workplace. For example, in most public and private accounting firms women wear skirted suits. Therefore, interviewing in a pantsuit would most likely be unacceptable for such accounting positions. Many companies do have business casual dress one or more days a week. Business casual dress is still inappropriate for interviewing.

Invest in your interviews as you have invested in your education. If you need a book for a class, you buy it. If you need a suit for interviewing, buy it. Buy the highest quality suit you can afford. We recommend a lined, all-season wool suit. It will pay off in the long run.

Below are a few interview dressing tips for your reference. For additional tips, you can refer to http://members.aol.com/mbastyle/index.html.

**General**
- You can never go wrong if you dress conservatively
- Clothes should be wrinkle-free and clean
- All tags should be removed from clothing, including manufacturers label sewn to outside of sleeve
- Make sure your clothes are lint-free
- Jewelry should be kept to a minimum, wear only gold or silver.
- Wear a dress watch, not a plastic band watch
- Always have fresh breath, do not keep gum or mints in your mouth
- Avoid having smoker’s breath or smoker’s clothing
- Do not wear perfume or cologne
- Wear deodorant
- Refrain from bringing backpacks into the interview
Men
● Wear a navy or dark gray suit for the first interview
● The jacket should match the pants
● Wear a pressed and starched white or ivory long-sleeved shirt; 100% cotton is recommended, but a 65/35 cotton/polyester blend is acceptable
● Shirt cuffs should extend ½ inch below the jacket sleeve
● The tie should be conservative; avoid a distracting eye-catching tie
● The tie should reach right above your belt buckle
● Do not wear a lot of jewelry, such as, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets
● Always wear a belt if the pant has belt loops; a black or brown leather belt is recommended
● Wear black or brown shoes that do not have scuff marks or a worn heel; tie shoes portray a more conservative image than tassel loafers
● Wear black or brown calf length socks
● Always button your jacket; it’s o.k. to unbutton when you sit down
● Shave before the interview

Women
● Wear a navy or other dark colored suit for the first interview
● In most first interviews, pantsuits are unacceptable
● The jacket and skirt should match; same color is recommended
● The skirt length should be at least to the knee
● Wear a non-wrinkled blouse that complements your suit; cotton or silk is recommended
● Wear closed-toe leather classic pumps with heels no higher than 3” and no scuff marks
● If you bring a purse, it should be compact and match the color of your shoes
● No more than six pieces of jewelry (2 rings, 2 earrings, 1 watch, and 1 bracelet) should be worn; earrings should be small
● Get a hair cut one month before interviewing to make sure you are comfortable with the cut. Short hair is recommended for business, however, if your hair is longer pull it back or put it up. If you dye your hair, make sure that your roots are not showing.
● Makeup should be minimal and in neutral colors
● Hands should be manicured; clear or neutral nail polish is recommended
● Wear skin-tone hosiery (your hosiery should not be darker than your shoes); patterned hosiery is not appropriate
Interview Formats/Styles

The format and style of the interviews you will experience in your job hunting will vary widely; usually this is a reflection of the individual and company conducting the interview.

Most first interviews last about 30 - 45 minutes and occur face-to-face--but don’t be surprised if an employer decides to conduct a first interview or “pre-screen” on the telephone or via videoconference. Keep in mind that you need to be just as prepared for these types of interviews as you would a face-to-face interview. Be careful not to let your guard down because of the lack of physical presence.

Interviewers may use behavior-based questions, traditional questions, case questions, or any combination, during an interview. Behavior-based questions focus on the results or outcomes based upon your past performance in a particular situation. Example:

“Tell me about a time when you had an extremely difficult project assignment. How did you handle the pressure?”

Traditional questions focus more on your background, interests, goals, etc. Example:

“How did you select your college and how did you choose your major?”

Case questions are increasingly being used by interviewers (particularly for consulting positions) to analyze your logic and thinking process. The focus on this type of question is the method that you use to reach a conclusion. A sample question for a “mergers & acquisitions case” might be:

“Club Med is considering the acquisition of a major cruise line. Describe the way you might consider assessing the viability of this decision.”

The interviewer is looking to see if you apply useful concepts such as market assessment, supply chain analysis, competitor analysis, structural analysis, etc. The CRC Library maintains the book Case in Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation should you require further information on case interviews.

Refer to “Common Interview Questions” section for sample behavior-based, traditional, and case questions.
Parts of the Interview

The standard on-campus interview is typically 30-45 minutes, depending on the company. For off-campus interviews, the timing will be more flexible, but you should normally expect to spend less than an hour.

Be sure to come to the interview prepared with additional résumés, a list of references (which includes name, address, phone number and relationship to interviewee), both on bond paper, a pen and notepad. Make sure you have an idea of how long the interview will be so that you can prioritize the information that you wish to convey to the interviewer. The phases of the interview are:

1. **Ice Breaking** (2 - 5 minutes) - Always shake hands and introduce yourself. Relax. This part of the interview normally includes small talk. Be friendly and responsive. Portray confidence through your posture, voice and eye contact. Try to notice your surroundings and anything that might identify the interviewer as an individual. If nothing else, you could talk about very general topics such as the weather or travel, or comment on an interesting photo or object in the office.

2. **Interviewer’s Questions: General Information Sharing** (10 - 15 minutes) - This is a major part of the interview and it usually serves as general information sharing. The interviewer will typically use your résumé as an outline of your experiences. In this phase, the interviewer gives the applicant the opportunity to fill in gaps and provide details. You will be asked questions about your education and training, your work experience, and the skills that you have attained from work and interests. It is essential that you have a good idea what skills or qualities that you want to stress. Whenever possible be behaviorally specific in your responses to questions and use the **STAR** (situation/task-action-result) format discussed in the “Behaving in a Behavior-Based Interview” section when organizing your response. This format will allow you to emphasize valued characteristics by describing school or work-related situations, during which you displayed positive characteristics through proactive behaviors or actions you took toward a desired result. If the result was positive: Great! If not, make sure you explain what you learned in the process and what you might do differently in the future. **Under no circumstances should you try to fool an interviewer with a stretched truth!**

3. **Interviewer’s Questions: Probing of Key Characteristics** (5 - 10 minutes) - The job for which you are interviewing has certain characteristics and requirements. The interviewer is looking for a candidate who understands what these are and who can relate past experience and skills to what will be required in the new position. Understanding what these are can come from reviewing the job posting/description in detail, your research on the position and company, and/or an informational interview. Questions asked will be more specific than those in the “general information sharing” component above. The interviewer will be trying to gain a clearer understanding of your style and your potential for blending with the company.

Expect questions that ask: how? why? and what did you do? For example, if the job posting is for a position that requires strong oral communication skills, you may be asked to give a specific example of when you were particularly effective in explaining something to someone on a one-to-
one basis. After citing your example using the STAR technique, you should be prepared to answer such probing questions as, “How did you know you were understood?” and “What other situations like this have occurred in the past three months?”

4. **Applicant’s Questions** (5 minutes) - Remember, an interview is a two-way process in which both interviewer and interviewee gather information and form impressions. Certainly there are questions that you will need to ask in order to clarify your understanding of the job and company. If you have an urgent question earlier in the interview, ask it. Generally, however, it is a good idea to wait to ask your questions until you are invited to ask them. **Always have questions to ask!** A lack of questions implies that you are not interested enough or alert enough to be inquisitive. Do not ask questions concerning things that you could have learned through your research of the company. Do not ask about salary in an initial interview. If you are not invited to ask questions, you should politely ask if you may. See Appendix C for sample Questions to Ask the Interviewer.

5. **Closing** (2 – 3 minutes) - Make sure you have a strong close that sells your skills, education, experience, and “fit” for the job. Ask what the timing will be for the second interviews or decisions, if the interviewer has not already provided that information. Ask if you can call and check on any additional questions not covered in the interview, and ask for a business card. Address any loose ends, or cover any areas that you feel need to be mentioned.
Interview Follow Up

Write a thank you letter right after the interview and mail it that day if at all possible. The thank you letter is another opportunity to sell yourself and cover any areas that you don’t feel were adequately addressed during the interview. (It could also be that during the excitement of the interview, you had forgotten a great response to a question.) After a company visit where you may have interviewed with more than one person, it is a good idea to send a thank-you letter to each individual who interviewed you. This means you must get the names and titles of all who interviewed you. This is where requesting a business card from each interviewer comes in handy. Suggested format:

1. Thank the employer for his/her time, letting the interviewer know how much you enjoyed meeting.
2. Identify the specific position for which you were interviewed and the date/place of the interview.
3. Mention a key point of your conversation with the interviewer. When writing letters to multiple interviewers, differentiate letters by referring to something specific you learned from the interviewer.
4. Express enthusiasm for the job/company and reiterate why you fit well with the organization.
5. Close with your telephone number and indicate that you look forward to hearing from the employer at the time they specified during the interview.

If you haven’t heard anything from the interviewer after the time frame for follow up discussed in the interview, make a telephone call to the interviewer to inquire on the progress of the search and about your current status. If you don’t get the job, ask for some feedback. Suggestions from past interviewers can help you strengthen weak areas and polish up for future interviews.

Second Interviews

Second interviews generally occur at the company’s place of business. If you are invited back for a second interview, you clearly did something right the first time around—were well prepared, well mannered, and well dressed. You now need to give a repeat performance. This time, however, you will be meeting with more people and for a longer period of time, perhaps over the course of the day. A series of individual interviews is the most common format, usually comprised of your prospective peers and superiors. They are looking to see if you can explain how your abilities and experiences would qualify and enable you to do the job. They are also trying to determine whether you would be a “good fit” with the company. The second interview is also an opportunity for the recruiter to further educate you about what the company has to offer.
Dining Tips

During the second interview process (or perhaps even the first, if an off-campus interview), you may be invited to lunch or dinner with the recruiter and others from the company. General rules of thumb for dining:

**DO**
- Wear what you would wear to the interview (See “Dressing for Interview Success” section)
- Use caution about discussing personal information
- Come across friendly, relaxed, and interested in the company
- Show off your good communication and interpersonal skills!

**DON’T**
- Order the most expensive item on the menu
- Order sloppy or hard to handle foods
- Order alcohol
- Bring up politics, religion, or other controversial topics

For further information on business dining etiquette, refer to “Don’t Slurp Your Soup” by Elizabeth Craig in the CRC Library.

Interview Expenses

Some interviews may require out-of-town travel. If the company does not communicate its expectations about who will bear the expenses (e.g., airfare, hotel, meals), it is perfectly acceptable for you to ask the recruiter. A good way to broach the subject is to ask who will make the travel arrangements. At this point, the recruiter will talk about expenses. For those expenses the company has agreed to reimburse, keep accurate records. How you report your expenses will also leave an impression on the employer—make the impression a good one.

**DO**
- Seek reimbursement only for actual expenses related to your trip
- Obtain receipts for hotel, transportation costs, and meals
- Keep track of your mileage if you drive your own car
- Use good judgment in spending

**DON’T**
- Seek reimbursement for personal items, entertainment, or alcohol
Interview Ethics

**DO**
- Pursue only those interviews that sincerely interest you
- Present relevant data (both oral and written) honestly. Falsifying data such as GPA, graduation date, concentrations, institutions attended, and work eligibility is unacceptable (and could be grounds for dismissal). It is very easy for an employer to verify your data through reference checks, transcript requests, and many other sources of information.
- Promptly notify employers that you are accepting or rejecting an offer as soon as your decision has been made
- Discontinue interviewing after accepting an offer

**DON’T**
*Renege on an offer!* Accept an offer in good faith and honor the commitment.
COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Whether behavior-based or traditional, remember to use the STAR Technique whenever possible in answering interview questions!! Refer to “Behaving in a Behavior-Based Interview Using the STAR Technique” section for guidance.

Behavior-Based Interview Questions

Tell me about a time when you...

- Sold your supervisor or professor on an idea or concept.
- Came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company or class was facing.
- Were able to get co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together.
- Failed to meet a deadline.
- Were particularly effective in explaining something on a one-to-one basis.
- Disagreed with your supervisor. What did you do?
- Had difficulty getting (a peer/subordinate/boss) to see your point of view. What steps did you take to get them to understand your viewpoint?
- Were tolerant of an opinion that was different than yours.
- Delegated a project effectively.
- Were disappointed with your behavior.
- Missed an obvious solution to a problem.

Please describe a situation where you had...

- An opportunity to demonstrate innovation.
- An assignment that required you to apply your analytical skills.
- To work without direct supervision. What difficulties did you encounter?
- To make an important decision with limited facts.
Traditional Interview Questions

Introductory Questions

- *How is the weather?*
- *Did you find the office easily? How were the directions?*

Introductory questions are usually asked to put you at ease and provide a start for the interview.

“I have always loved volleyball, ever since I was on the all-city team in high school. Since entering UB, I learned that there was a lot more work required to be on a competitive NCAA team, but I believe that this has helped me develop my time management skills and...”

Assessment Questions

- *Tell me about yourself.*
- *What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?*
- *What qualities should a manager have? Do you possess those qualities?*

These questions give you the green light to sell your skills! Prepare each of the above questions, and answer in positive terms when possible. It is important here to know the skills and qualities the employer is looking for by analyzing the job posting. When asked to tell about yourself, tell about your background, experience, choices about education, etc., which will lead the interviewer to conclude that you are right for the job. Provide a couple of examples that demonstrate your skills and abilities as they relate to the job. Use the STAR Technique when providing your examples.

When asked about your strengths, select one or two strengths that are most relevant to the position. When asked about a weakness, avoid mentioning a weakness that is important to the job. Tell how you are working to overcome that weakness or how it has been of benefit in some situations. Do not mention “killer” weaknesses like, “I’m not very punctual” or “I have difficulty dealing with others.”
Experience and Goal Questions

- What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives? How are you preparing to achieve them?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- Who will you be using for references? What do you feel that they would say about you?
- Why did you choose your career path?
- How do you evaluate success? What examples of success do you have in your working background?

The goal of this type of question is to evaluate your motivation. Will you get along with the present team or not? Always put previous work experiences in the best possible light, especially if using the employer as a reference. By preparing these questions in advance, you will be ready to sell yourself to the interviewer.

When given career goal-related questions, always ensure that you have a positive answer. The answer to career goal questions should never be “I don’t know.” These questions are an opportunity to relate your career goals to the job and to sell your skills to the interviewer.

Education Questions

- Why did you decide to attend UB?
- Do you plan on furthering your education?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What college subjects did you like the most? The least? Why?
- Do you feel that your GPA adequately reflects your performance at school?

Questions regarding academics are crucial for students who have little to no work experience. For these individuals, selling academic achievements is an important part of the overall interview process. Besides the “A” you got in accounting, make sure that you emphasize leadership and team-building skills that you developed through group projects. Use specific examples whenever possible.

In addition, you must “accentuate the positive” when discussing your academic experience. By denigrating a particular class or professor in any response, you are in fact putting the whole value of your education in doubt in the interviewer’s mind. Ensure that you understand this and prepare your answers that will put your school in a positive light, which will also reflect favorably on you. For candidates with a strong GPA, questions regarding your GPA are an opportunity to sell your strengths to the interviewer. Although GPA isn’t a crucial factor in all fields (with a notable exception of accounting), a poor GPA is certainly a stumbling block when competing against stellar academic performers. Remember, most recruiters will accept a reasonable explanation, so think of one! Be proactive and use truthful explanations that help advance your candidacy. For example:

- The class was outside my major (and somehow enriched you).
- You changed majors (and presumably your grades are higher in your present major).
- Your grades have since improved (a trend in the right direction).
- Stress your strengths in non-academic areas (academics is not the only part of the college environment; extra-curricular, especially sports and leadership roles are important in personal development as well and can be communicated to the interviewer).
Company and Industry Specific Questions

- Why do you want to work for our firm?
- What do you know about our company’s business?
- Why should we hire you?
- In what ways do you think that you can make a contribution to our company?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?

This is where your company, industry, and position research pays off. Recruiters look for candidates who understand how their business operates and how the candidate will fit into the organization. Effectively communicating your knowledge of the company’s business and the position you are interviewing for will convince a recruiter that you have a strong desire to work for them.

Reward Questions

- What are the most important rewards you expect from your career?
- Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
- What are your ideas on salary?

First rule of thumb: you should never bring up salary-related questions. In general, salary questions are viewed as inappropriate during an initial interview, mainly because both the company and the interviewee do not yet know enough about each other to determine whether an appropriate “match” exists. (The interviewee does not know enough about what the exact job requirements/responsibilities/work environments, etc. are, so cannot completely gauge what the position is worth to the company, and the interviewer has not checked references, discussed the candidate with co-workers, etc.). Although salary discussions generally aren’t brought up by an interviewer in first interviews, you should still be prepared with an answer. In these cases, the interviewee should show strong interest in the position (if that is the case), and state something to the effect of paying a competitive salary as compared to other firms in their industry. You will need to do salary research before you can make this comment, however.

To prepare for salary questions in second or third interviews, the interviewee must conduct research (CRC salary surveys are a good start) on salaries to determine if the position makes sense given the interviewee’s personal requirements. Remember that the initial salary is not the only element in a compensation package. The insurance, retirement plans, flex time, childcare, bonuses, and future pay increases are all elements of compensation. Refer to the CRC’s web-based workshops on “Compensation Negotiation” and “Managing Job Offers” at www.mgt.buffalo.edu/crc/negotiations.html and www.mgt.buffalo.edu/crc/mjoboffers.html, respectively, for further assistance.
Closing Questions

- Do you feel you would be interested in a position with our firm?
- Is there anything else I should know about you?
- When could you start work?
- Would you be available for a second interview? Would you be interested in coming to our main plant in (Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Boston, Massachusetts, etc.)?
- Do you have any questions for me?

If you are at all interested in the job, ensure that the interviewer understands this through your response. You should respond positively and with some enthusiasm so that the interviewer believes that you are truly interested in the position. Part of the close is an additional sales pitch to emphasize your strengths and show how you would be a good match for the position. Be sure to ask for a business card! Not only does it show interest, but also it provides you with an accurate name and title reference for preparing your thank-you letter and for any follow-up questions you might have.

Case Interview Questions

- **Question:** How many gas stations are there in the U.S.?
  
  **Response:** I live in a town with a population of 30,000. There are six gas stations serving our town. Therefore, I’ll assume that each gas station serves about 5,000 customers. If the population of the U.S. is 250 million, I’ll just divide 250 million by 5,000 and get 50,000 gas stations in the U.S.

  There is no right answer. The interviewer wants to see how logically you answer the question. Even if you had just read a *Forbes* article on the number of gas stations and knew the exact total, the interviewer won’t care.

- **Question:** A credit card company wants to market a prepaid phone card to its customers. Is this a good idea?
  
  **Response:** Before making a recommendation, I would examine: (1) what all the costs and benefits are of this marketing program, (2) what is the expected return on the marketing program, (3) what is the company’s cost of capital, (4) whether there are synergies to be gained from marketing the phone card to existing customers in their monthly credit card statements, etc.

  Again, there is no right answer. The interviewer is looking to see how you draw upon your analytical abilities, business experience, and deductive reasoning to arrive at an answer to the case.

For more information on case interview questions, refer to the book “*Case in Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation*” in the CRC Library.
QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

The questions that you ask do as much to differentiate you from the competition as the ones you answer. Questions related to the industry, company, and/or position are a great way to demonstrate your knowledge and interest in the firm.

While it is important for your questions to occur spontaneously and appropriately in each specific interview conversation, it is helpful to think through and plan out some questions ahead of time. The purpose of these questions is to help you assess whether you really want the job, to help you understand what the employer needs, and to build a working relationship grounded in give-and-take communication. Research and preparation are required for asking questions as well as answering them. For small and private companies, very little public information is available, so that asking questions is a crucial component of determining your own interest in working for a company.

Sample questions include:

- What industry trends will affect this company in the coming years?
- What are the company’s plans for future growth?
- Can you give me a more specific job description?
- How was this position created? Was this a long-standing position, or has it been newly created? What is the person who was previously in the position presently doing?
- Can you explain your training program?
- How is superior performance noted?
- When will I be notified of your decision?
- What are the three things you find hardest about your job?
- What might the person in this position like most? Least?
- What is the company culture like?
- What are the priorities for the job right now: the top five things you’d like to accomplish in the next six months?
- How do people do things? Is it a team-oriented place?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- Could you describe typical first-year assignments?
- What are the challenging facets of the job?
- How has this company fared during recent economic cycles?
- What are the company’s strengths and weaknesses?
- Is it company policy to promote from within?
- What kinds of career opportunities are currently available for someone with my degree and skills?
- What are the company’s expectations for new hires?
- What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?
- What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
- What characteristics does a successful person have at this company?
**ILLEGAL QUESTIONS**

Under federal laws, certain personal questions relating to sex, age, race, national origin, religion, marital status, are illegal for interviewers to ask. The purpose of the law is to protect certain classes of people from discrimination. Sample illegal questions include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry Area</th>
<th>Illegal</th>
<th>Legal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>Are you over the age of 18? (Any inquiry limited to establishing applicant meets any minimum required by law)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your birth date?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Affiliations</strong></td>
<td>What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?</td>
<td>A request to list any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrest Record</strong></td>
<td>Have you ever been arrested?</td>
<td>Have you ever been convicted (the crime named should be related to performance of the job)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Birthplace/National Origin/Citizenship</strong></td>
<td>Are you a U.S. citizen?</td>
<td>Are you authorized to work in U.S.?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Where were your parents born?</td>
<td>What languages do you read/speak/write fluently? (The questions is ok only if this ability is relevant for the job)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What is your native tongue?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Disabilities</strong></td>
<td>Do you have any disabilities?</td>
<td>Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job? (This question is ok only if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Please complete the following medical history</td>
<td>After a job offer has been made you will be required to undergo a medical exam.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How is your family’s health?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital/Family Status</td>
<td>What's your marital status?</td>
<td>Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do you plan to have a family?</td>
<td>Would you be willing to travel as needed by the job? (only ok if asked of all applicants for the job)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many children do you have?</td>
<td>Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? (only ok if asked of all applicants for the job)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?</td>
<td>In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Questions about height and weight, unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of the job.</td>
<td>Are you able to lift a 50-lb weight and carry it 100 yards, as part of the job?</td>
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If you are asked an illegal question, you have three options:

1. You can answer the question—however, you are then giving information that isn’t related to the job and could harm your chances of getting the job.
2. You can refuse to answer the question—however, you are running the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational.
3. You can respond with an answer based on the intent of the question. This is your best bet, as you can structure your answer to how it relates to the job. For example, if you are asked, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” or “What country are you from?”, you can respond with, “I believe your concern is whether or not I am authorized to work in the U.S. I am in fact authorized to work in the United States.”
References:


