

# Basic Interview Guidelines

G1

It's finally here. This is the event you have worked so hard to achieve, the job interview. The interview is your greatest opportunity to sell the skills and qualities that you have to offer an employer. Doing well in your coursework, being involved in activities, building a strong network and developing a sound and effective résumé and cover letter are all very important in conducting the job search. However, the job interview is the most critical link in the hiring process. Learn to use it to your advantage by following the guidelines in this ready reference.

## Three Simple Steps to a Successful Interview

1. Prepare
2. Practice
3. Sell

### 1. Prepare

- Understand and know yourself. What are your strengths and development areas? What are your career and life goals? Self-assessment is a highly valued skill in today's job work environment. If you need help with this step, consult the Self Evaluation ready references.
- Understand and be prepared for the interpersonal dynamics of the job interview. Look at the job interview as an open exchange of information between you and the interviewer. They are as interested in your interpersonal skills as in the qualifications you bring to the interview.
- Be reasonably knowledgeable about the position, organization and community before you go into the interview. A little research will go a long way in the job interview.
- Adjust your e-mail address and voice mail messages. You are now moving from a college environment to a professional environment. The rules are different. "Hey dude, leave a message when you hear that machine do its thing" and "wildbeast@nomail.com" are not appropriate when an employer wants to contact you.

✓ **HOT TIP:** In an interview, the "winner" exhibits confidence and enthusiasm about the career opportunity. Through words and behavior, he or she demonstrates self-confidence and a strong work ethic. Interviewers are convinced that the candidate is capable of doing the job with little or no supervision.

### 2. Practice

- Participate in mock interviews. Complete the Mock Interview Preparation Ready Reference and schedule a mock interview appointment with CASNR Career Services. Also, participate in university- or college-wide mock interview days.
- Tape record and/or videotape mock interviews, noting annoying verbal or body language habits.
- Practice your responses. Although every interview is different, anticipate the routine questions you will be asked in an interview, and practice your responses in advance.

✓ **HOT TIP:** About 95 percent of students could benefit from mock interviews, yet only 5 percent participate in these activities.

### 3. Sell

- Most interviews begin with the question, "Tell me a little about yourself." Use this open-ended question to sell your skills, abilities and qualifications to the interviewer.
- Demonstrate enthusiasm, a positive

attitude and a strong interest in the position. There can be no substitute for these first impression qualities in an interview.

- Show what you can do for the organization beyond your qualifications or your “hard skills.” Employers are increasingly interested in candidates with a high EQ (Emotional Quotient). High EQ people exhibit strengths in five areas: self-awareness, ability to manage emotions, motivating oneself, empathy and social competence. Exhibiting and discussing these qualities throughout the interview process will give you an important edge.

✓ **HOT TIP:** 60 percent of people don't get the job they want because they don't sell themselves in the interview.

- Listen for “trick questions” such as “What’s your greatest weakness or development area?” First and foremost, be honest. We all have development areas. Be specific in terms of how you are working to improve these areas.

### **First Impressions are Critical**

- Dress appropriately.
- Be early. Plan your trip and parking arrangements in advance.
- Turn off your cell phone.
- Make all correspondence neat and error free. Have all your documents proofread by CASNR Career Services.
- Make small talk. Look for a connection to the interviewer, such as a common interest.
- Treat the receptionist or administrative assistant with the same respect you would the interviewer.

✓ **HOT TIP:** According to a recent survey, 91 percent of executives from the nation's largest companies consider their administrative assistant’s opinions of candidates an important part of the selection process.

### **The Art of Answering Questions Effectively**

- Take your time. Use pauses and silence to formulate your answers.
- Don’t wing it. Prepare in advance.
- Answer the questions directly and concisely.
- Back up your assertions with concrete, real-life examples.

### **Your Turn to Ask Questions**

- In advance, write down big-picture questions that address large organizational issues, such as company goals, educational philosophy, etc. Refer to these as necessary.
- Do not, in the first interview, ask any questions related to salary, vacation, holidays, or other benefits. These kinds of questions are best addressed at the point of the job hire. See the Asking Questions in the Job Interview Ready Reference for more suggestions on taking your turn in the interview.

### **Team Interviews: When You’re Interviewed by More Than One Person**

- Respond to each member of the group on an individual basis. Refer to each person by name whenever possible.
- Don’t ignore anyone. Give good eye contact to all members of the team.
- Take your time, just as you would in a 1-on-1 interview.

### **The Follow-Up**

- Send a thank you note to each person in the interview.
- The note can be handwritten on a thank you card or a standard typed letter.

### **Make the Difference!**

Given two candidates with similar qualifications, the candidate that demonstrates good grooming, direct eye contact, courtesy, enthusiasm, confidence and a down-to-earth, positive attitude will always be hired first. Remember to be yourself and enjoy the experience.

✓ **HOT TIP:** Qualities Valued in a Job Interview

- \*Honesty/Integrity
- \*Enthusiasm
- \*Verbal Skills
- \*Sense of Humor