

IV. Interviews

{Main Entry: in-ter.view Pronunciation: 'in-t&r-'vju Function: noun Etymology: Middle French entrevue, from (s')entrevoir to see one another, meet, from entre-+inter-+voir (to see): A formal consultation usually to evaluate qualifications (as of a prospective student or employee) 2 a: a meeting at which information is obtained (as by a reporter, television commentor, or pollster) from a person b: a report or reproduction of information so obtained.

Preparing for an Interview

The secret to successful employment interviews is a sound presentation; which requires preparation. Self-assessment and thoroughly researched potential employers.

Analyze your strengths and Weaknesses

Make some decisions about what you want to do, why you want to do it, and where you want to do it. Prepare yourself to discuss those work experiences, academic projects, or extracurricular activities that are related to the position you are seeking. Determine whether or not there are aspects of the work environment that are very important to you.

Researching some potential employers will be easier than others, but every effort should be made to do the job as thoroughly as possible. You will want to know:

The types positions and/ or training programs available

The products or services the employer provides

How long the organization has been in existence

The number of people it employs

Where its facilities are located

What the organization's future looks like

Other facts about the organization (see "Analyzing Your Potential Employer")

This information can be acquired through directories and periodicals held by the library, faculty, alumni and others who are presently employed by the organization; company home pages, the Better Business Bureau, chambers of commerce, professional associations, and employer literature such as that located in the Cooperative Education office, as well as at the UCC Student Employment Center.

The Routine of an Interview

Most interviews can be divided into four major sections: the introduction, the employer sell, the candidate, and the closing. Both the employer and you should use the introduction, or first few minutes of the interview, to create a comfortable, friendly environment so that a meaningful conversation can follow. A mutual topic of discussion such as the weather, sports, or a major new story, etc., will normally be pursued. The "employer sell" will cover organizational structure, products or services, geographical location(s), specifies on the position under consideration, salary (**usually not discussed during an initial interview**) benefits, etc.. The "candidate sell" is the time spent elaborating on your goals and qualifications and demonstrating your poise and

communication skills. During the "closing", both parties should indicate their level of interest in the other and understand what the next steps to be taken, if any, will be. It should also be pointed out that the employer will usually control the flow of the interview while you should be trying to control the content.

Analyzing Your Potential Employer

There are many important areas of preparation to deal with prior to the interview. By thoroughly preparing, you increase your chances of making a positive impression. One of the important steps involves researching the company.

It is annoying for a recruiter to talk with a candidate who doesn't have any knowledge about the company. A favorite question asked is "Why are you interested in the organization?" If you don't know anything about the employer, you won't be able to answer the question intelligently.

Researching the organization also helps determine whether your goals fit the promotional structures defined by that employer. For example, there are some employers who have a reputation for being conservative and if you cannot fit with this type of work environment, you know that talking to the recruiter would be a waste of time.

It is wise to begin researching days or weeks before your interview. You may find reams of information and you must be able to sort out the pertinent information and retain the key facts. Additionally, it may be difficult to find some information and some digging will be required.

If you are interviewing with a number of different employers, it's smart to keep a file on each one. As you do more research, the file will help you keep facts more organized, making the preparation easier.

The information in each file should include articles from periodicals or newspapers, tips and comments from others and annual reports. When it is time to prepare for the interview, you can organize the information in a way that will impress the recruiter during the interview.

It's a mistake to assume you know enough about the organization without doing any research. For example, you may know that Ralston Purina makes pet food, but are you aware that the company also makes breakfast cereal, owns a major tuna fish company, and owns and operates a restaurant? You may be talking with a subsidiary of a much larger company and not realize it if you don't do your research.

Facts to Know about the Organization

Size of organization in industry
Potential growth
Annual sales growth for past five years
Complete product line or services
Potential new products or services
Competition
Age of top management and their backgrounds
Geographical locations
Location of corporate headquarters
Number of plants, mills, labs, and offices
Organizational structure
Type of training program
Promotional path
Recent developments via news stories
Relocation policies
Typical career path in your field
Name and correct spelling of recruiter
History of organization

Information Sources Available

Company web sites
LinkedIn Company Profiles
News Articles
Sector web sites (i.e. tourism sector, banking sector, HR sector, non-profit sector)

Is it Really Necessary?

This may seem like a lot of trouble to go through just to be prepared for the interview. Finding the right job is hard work and should be approached in such a manner as to stack the odds in your favor.

There is keen competition and you're trying to market a product- yourself-successfully!
There is rarely a professional position open that does not draw at least five qualified applicants.

Remember that you are trying to create a positive impression by appearing informed and goal-directed. One way to demonstrate your goals is to indicate during the interview what interest you in that specific organization and how your goals, qualifications, and personality fit that employer's opportunities.

You only get one chance to leave the right impression; so take the time to do your homework and research the organization, and you will increase your chances of leaving a positive impression.

Employment Interviews

Do:

- ⊙ *Research the company*
- ⊙ *Practice, practice, practice: set up a mock interview with your co-op coordinator, or practice with a friend, in front of a mirror, or into a tape recorder.*
- ⊙ *Look professional*
- ⊙ *Know yourself-your strengths, weaknesses, skills, etc.*
- ⊙ *Articulate your key strengths, and explain how they relate to the company's needs and goals*
- ⊙ *Be enthusiastic and sincere*
- ⊙ *Be prepared with well thought-out questions for the interviewer*
- ⊙ *Keep your answers concise and to the point, not long and rambling*
- ⊙ *Use success stories, or experiences that describe your skills and assets, in your own answers*
- ⊙ *Make the interview a dialogue, not a monologue-maintain a two-way conversation flow*
- ⊙ *Follow up after the interview*

Don't:

- ⊙ *Be late*
- ⊙ *Smoke, eat, or chew gum*
- ⊙ *Ask questions that could have been easily answered from basic company research on your part*
- ⊙ *Be dishonest-lie about any aspect of your experience or education*
- ⊙ *Give a simple “yes” or “no” answer-give responses with descriptive examples*
- ⊙ *Speak negatively of your past employers*
- ⊙ *Leave the interview without a clear understanding of what the next step will be*

Employment interviews are screening devices for both the employer and you, the candidate. When you are granted an interview, it normally means that the employer has decided that you have the qualifications for the position. The interview will provide the company with additional input on your personality, professional skills, motivation, ability to communicate, experience, and growth potential with the organization. Your primary motivation for accepting the interview is to convince the employer that you are, in fact, the best candidate and to further evaluate what the organization can offer you in terms of career potential and growth.

Interview Styles

There are three basic types of interview used by employers

The directed interview/ behavioral, through which the employer works from an outline and asks specific questions within a certain time frame.

The non-directed interview, which follows a loosely structured format; employers will use broad or general questions which will allow you to talk you wish.

The stress interview, which generally consists of long periods of silence, the challenging of opinions, seeming to be unfriendly or brusque, and other attitudes directed toward making you feel uncomfortable.

Are You Ready for a Behavioral Interview?

“Tell me about a time when you were on a team, and one of the members wasn’t carrying his or her weight.” If this is one of the leading questions in your job interview, you could be in for a behavioral interview. Based on the premise that the best way to predict the future behavior is to determine past behavior, this style of interviewing is gaining wide acceptance among recruiters.

Barb Scott Zowty, manager of staff planning for Ministry of Forestry in Williams Lake, says, “Although we have not conducted any formal studies to determine whether retention or success on the job here has been affected, I feel our move to behavioral

interviewing has been successful. It helps concentrate recruiters' questions on areas important to our candidates' success within the ministry."

Behavioral vs. Traditional Interviews

If you have training or experience with traditional interviewing techniques, you may find the behavioral interview quite different in several ways:

Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave.

Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion").

The interviewer will ask you provide details and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about certain events.

The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important.

You may not get a chance to deliver any prepared stories.

Most interviewers will be taking copious notes throughout the interview.

The behavioral interviewer has been trained to objectively collect and evaluate information, and works from a profile of desired behaviors that are needed for success on the job. Because of the behaviors a candidate has demonstrated in previous similar positions are likely to be repeated, you will be asked to share situations in which you may or may not be asked exhibited these behaviors. Your answers will be tested for accuracy and consistency.

If you are an entry-level candidate with no previous related experience, the interviewer will look for behaviors in situations similar to those of the target position.

"Describe a major problem you have faced and how have you dealt with it?"

"Give an example of when you had to work with your hands"

"What class did you like the most? What did you like about it?"

Follow-up questions will test for consistency and determine if you exhibited the desired behavior in that situation:

“Can you give me an example”

“What did you do?”

“What did you say?”

“What were you thinking?”

“What was your role?”

“What was the result?”

You will notice an absence of such questions as, “Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses.”

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.
- Be sure each story has a beginning, middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result.
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Don’t embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- Be specific. Don’t generalize about and several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

A possible response for the question, “Tell me about a time you were on a team and a member wasn’t pulling his or her weight” might go as follows:

“I had been assigned to a team to design a new social child integration system. One of our team members wasn’t showing up for our lab sessions or doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn’t passing, so I found someone to help him with the other course. He

not only was able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a 'B' on it."

The interviewer might then probe: "How did you feel when you confronted this person? Exactly what was the nature of the project?" "What was his responsibility as a team member?" "What was your role?" "At what point did you take upon yourself to confront him?" You can see it is important that you do not make up or "shade" information, and why you should have a clear memory of the entire incident.

Don't forget the Basics

Instead of feeling anxious or threatened by the prospect of a behavioral interview, remember the essential difference between the traditional interview and the behavioral interview: The traditional interviewer may allow you to project what you might or should do in a given situation, whereas the behavioral interviewer is looking for the past actions only. It will always be important to put your best foot forward and make a good impression on the interviewer with the appropriate attire, good grooming, and a firm handshake and direct eye contact. There is no substitute for promptness, courtesy, preparation, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions **Asked by Employers**

Below are questions designed to learn about an applicant's behavior in the following categories:

LEADERSHIP

Give an example of your ability to build motivation in your co-workers, classmates, and even if on a volunteer committee.

What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?
Describe how you handled it? What was the outcome?

Have you ever been a member of a group where two of the members did not work well together? What did you do to get them to do so?

Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.

Tell me about an important goal that you set in the past. Were you successful? Why?

Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the action of others.

How would you define "success" for someone in your chosen career?

PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION

What have you done in order to be effective in your organization and planning?

How do you schedule your time? Set priorities? How do you handle doing twenty things at once?

What do you do when your time schedule or project is upset by unforeseen circumstances? Give an example.

Describe how you develop a project team's goals and project plan?

DECISION MAKING

Give an example of a time you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

What was your most difficult decision in the last 6 months? What made it difficult?

What kind of decisions do you make rapidly? What kind takes more time? Give examples.

COMMUNICATION

Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.

Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation, which you had to complete.

Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person, even when that individual may not have personally liked you.

Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers, classmates, or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively "read" another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their needs and values.

What have you done in past situations to contribute toward a teamwork environment?

Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.

Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual that you've ever worked with, and how you managed to work with them.

INITIATIVE

Give me an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Give me examples of projects/ tasks you started on your own.

Give me some instances in which you anticipated problems and were able to influence a new direction.

TEAMWORK

Describe the types of teams you've been involved with. What were your roles?

Describe a team experience you found rewarding.

Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What would you have done to prevent this?

Interview Follow-up

If you are interested in working for the organization after the interview, write to the employer representative stating this fact and thank him/ her for the time spent together.

If the employer requests additional materials, such as a completed application, transcript, or references, see that they are sent in as soon as possible.

If you do not hear from an employer within a reasonable time after your last contact, feel free to call inquiring about the status of your application.

How Candidates are Evaluated

When asked what they look for in potential employers, many respond by mentioning all or most of the following eight traits:

- ⊙ An ability to communicate effectively, both orally and writing.
- ⊙ A sense of responsibility for carrying out assignments.
- ⊙ An ability to follow directions.
- ⊙ An ability and willingness to work with others.
- ⊙ An interest in continuing to learn through both formal programs and informal opportunities.
- ⊙ An ability to deal with technology of the specific field.
- ⊙ An ability to solve problems.

In determining the level to which you have developed these traits. Employers will use interviews and the documents that you submit during the application process to take a hard look at what you have done with your life to date (your successes and failures); how you are presenting yourself now; and your goals or the direction your career seems to be headed. You will learn then to be evaluated against criteria established for the job and the other candidates under consideration. The ironic aspect of this whole process is that, according to research findings, no matter how much logic is used, no matter how reasonable the person making the decision, the deciding factor will invariably be based upon emotion, a feeling.

It is extremely important, therefore, that you make a good first impression. Your appearance, manners, general bearing, speech, and knowledge of the type of work for which you are applying will determine how successful you are in this regard. **Keep in mind that employers are not interested in individuals who look and act like students, but instead those who look and act like professionals.**

You should acknowledge receipt of all job offers and promptly inform the employer of your plans to accept the position, reject the offer, or specify a decision date. If an employer extends you an offer and asks you to respond before you have heard from other companies, write or call asking for more time. Carefully weigh all the important factors in considering the offer and don't hesitate to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with a friend or career counselor.

Promptly inform the employer of your decision and, if you are accepting the offer, notify all other companies whose offers are being rejected. Remember that you have an obligation to the employer whose offer you have accepted. It is unprofessional and unethical to renege on an acceptance.

V. Evaluating an Offer of Employment

Congratulations! You've successfully managed your interviews and have been offered a job! Perhaps you've even received offers from more than one employer. Whether it's one offer or more, your euphoria is sometimes quickly replaced by anxiety about decisions, which lie ahead. You may be wondering, "Is this the right job for me?" or "Am I going to be happy in this job, or should I just take it because I need a job, period?" Careful evaluation of your job offer and some serious thought as to how well the position and organization meet your needs can enable you to make the best choice for yourself.

In evaluating your job offer, there are three critical factors you should address:

How closely does the offer match your career goal? Think back to when you started your job search. What was important to you? What factors regarding a job, organization, or work environment were on your "wish list?" Have they changed? How well does this position fit these factors? Below are some factors you may want to consider in evaluating your offer. Some of these may not be important to you, and there may be other factors not listed which are extremely important in your decision.

Do you need additional information about the offer (or anything) in order to make your decision? It is not unusual to discover, as you're weighing different factors about the offer, that you have additional questions, lack some factual data, or simply need a better sense of what the job and the organization are like

If this is the case, STOP! Don't go any further in your deliberations until you address these issues. You may need to call one of your interviewers and ask additional questions, or contact alumni who work for the organization. If you need a better understanding of what it would be like during a day on the job, call the employer (if they are local) and ask to spend an afternoon observing an entry-level job employee in the job you're considering. Most employers will be willing to accommodate you. If you have other questions or concerns, which impact your decision, you should discuss them with a representative from our office.

Are there issues you may want to negotiate, which would bring the offer closer to your goal? Perhaps the issues, which concern you about the offer, can be changed. If the job seems ideal except for location, then you might want to raise the issue with the employer. Some start dates are non-negotiable because training classes must begin together. In some instances, however, the start date can be adjusted.

Factors for Consideration

<i>Nature of the work</i>	<i>Organizational culture</i>
<i>Level of autonomy</i>	<i>Travel</i>
<i>Salary</i>	<i>Mentoring</i>
<i>Lifestyles of employees</i>	<i>Stability of organization</i>
<i>Quality of higher management</i>	<i>Support for continuing education/advancement degree</i>
<i>Level of responsibility</i>	<i>Location</i>
<i>Work hours</i>	<i>Benefits</i>
<i>Variety of work</i>	<i>Stability of industry</i>
<i>Prestige of job or organization</i>	<i>Training and development opportunities</i>
<i>Advancement opportunities</i>	<i>Transferability of skills/ experience from job</i>
<i>Opportunities to learn and grow in job/ company</i>	

VI. Conclusion:

The last thing we can tell you is not to fear the working world. Sometimes it may seem that the worst part of graduation is finding a job. Just remember no position is for life, working is not a jail sentence, if you find yourself in a position that is not for you, get out before it gets worse. By doing your research and making informed decisions regarding who you will work for, your chances for a meaningful working environment are increased 100%. Good luck in your life, we leave you with these words.

***You have brains in your head you have feet in your shoes you can steer yourself
Any direction you choose***

Dr. Seuss, "Oh, the Places You'll Go!"