
University Advising & Career Center

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Interviewing Tips

In a job interview, an employer will try to learn if you have the skills, experience, knowledge, and personal qualities to do the job in question. Your objective is to convince the interviewer that your abilities, background, and personality will make you more successful at the job than any other candidate being considered. By the time the interview ends, you want your potential employer to know clearly how you will help the organization and why you want to work there.

There are three key points the employer is most interested in:

- “*Why do you want to work for us?*” (Why are you interested in us?)
- “*Why should we hire you?*” (What can you do for us? What are your skills?)
- “*What are you like as a person?*” (Personal qualities, strengths, weaknesses, motivation)

Almost all interview questions are designed to address one of these three concerns. With a little practice you will be able to determine which piece of information the employer is looking for and craft your answer accordingly.

Preparing for the Interview

Self-Evaluate: Evaluate your skills, interests, strengths/weaknesses, and past successes/failures to determine what you are looking for and how that translates to the employer’s needs. To assist you in this process, see a University Advising & Career Center (UACC) career counselor and ask about one of our assessment tools.

Research the Organization: Research helps you to be knowledgeable and confident in the interview. In addition, it helps you see how your abilities, skills, interests, and experience apply to this organization and this job.

- Start with the organization’s website. Other sites (such as www.vault.com, and for publicly held companies, the stock quotes link on www.yahoo.com) may provide more objective information.
- Use the UACC’s Career Mentor Network to seek contacts in the organization.
- The Dimond Library has extensive resource information (www.reference.unh.edu/guides/business.html).
- You can also call the organization and ask them to send you company literature and any other information about the job in question.

Practice: A good interview is often the key to getting hired. Be prepared to sell your experience, abilities, and personal attributes to the employer who has a need for “your product.” There are many ways you can perform a practice interview:

- Make an appointment with a career advisor at the UACC for a practice interview.
- Practice answering questions on your own, out loud.
- Ask a roommate, family member, or friend to perform a practice interview with you. Be sure to choose someone who will take on the interviewer role in a serious fashion.

Traditional Interview Questions: Interviewers will ask you both traditional and behavioral-based questions. Traditional questions may be “*Why have you chosen to seek a position with our company?*” or “*How would you describe yourself?*” Here are some common traditional interview questions:

- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- What is the salary range you are seeking? What do you expect to be earning in five years?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a career in this industry?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you determine/evaluate success? Describe one of your accomplishments.
- What are your short-range and long-range career goals?
- What specific skills can you bring to this job?
- Why should I hire you?

Behavioral Interview Questions: For behavioral-based questions, the interviewer will be operating under the premise that “past behavior in a similar setting is the best predictor of future behavior.” Be ready to provide specific examples of past situations and your involvement. One effective response method is to frame your example by stating: the **situation** or **task** you are involved in (set up the story), your **actions**, and the **results** or outcomes of your actions.

Companies are looking for individuals with great transferable skills. These skill sets may include: decision making and problem solving, leadership, communication, interpersonal skills, planning and organization, critical thinking skills, ability to work effectively with diverse people and situations, team building, and the ability to influence others. You should provide detailed responses giving examples that show you have the specific skills they are seeking. Here are some common behavioral-based interview questions:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you’ve completed.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Have you ever had to “sell” an idea to your coworkers? How did you do it? Did they “buy” it?
- Which accomplishment on the job gave you more satisfaction than any other?
- What is your commitment to diversity? Tell me about a time when you demonstrated this commitment.
- What experiences have you had at UNH that exposed you to diversity?
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you dealt with a very upset customer or coworker.
- Tell me about a job experience in which you had to be assertive in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.

To see a longer list of potential interview questions, visit: <http://www.quintcareers.com/intvres.html>

Case Interview Questions: These types of questions are being used by employers more frequently. Case study questions, though often hypothetical and focused on the future, are based on real problems or situations encountered in the particular field of the organization interviewing you. By using case study questions, employers can get a sense of your analytical and reasoning skills, problem solving abilities, and your ability to organize and present information. Though there may be many ‘right’ answers to case study questions, your goal is to maintain your composure, be articulate, and show that you can think on your feet.

For more information and examples of case study questions, visit:
http://www.quintcareers.com/case_interviews.html or
<http://content.monster.com/articles/3479/16982/1/default.aspx>

Ways to Handle Some Typical Questions:

- “*Tell me about yourself.*” A warm-up question which calls for a very short response. A quick formula: spend a few seconds on your schooling/studies and what you’re looking for right now in terms of employment (of course, all related to this job).
- “*What are your weaknesses?*” Pick one rather harmless problem from the past that you’re now overcoming. Some people describe a strength that’s gone a bit overboard, such as a tendency toward overwork or perfectionism. Be sure to finish your answer with how you’re making it better.

Prepare Your Own Questions: An employer will expect you to have a few questions of your own about the company and/or your role there. Examples:

- What are the attributes of your most successful employees in this position?
- Why did you choose to work for this company?
- What kind of internal and external training do you provide new employees?
- How would you describe your company culture?
- What are the performance expectations for this job and what is the time frame for advancement?
- What are your organization’s goals for the next 3 – 5 years?

Handling Illegal Interview Questions: There are laws that restrict and regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you as a job candidate. Questions asked of you must relate to the job you are seeking and whether or not you can perform the essential functions of the job.

If asked an illegal question, you can:

- Answer the question. However, if you choose to do so and are giving information that isn’t related to the job, you might be giving the “wrong” answer thereby harming your chances of getting the job.
- Refuse to answer the question. Choose your words carefully if this is the option you decide on. You do not want to appear uncooperative or confrontational.
- You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, you’ve been asked an illegal question if the interviewer asks “*Are you a U.S. citizen?*” You could respond with “I am authorized to work in the United States.”

For a more complete list of illegal questions, please visit:

http://www.jobweb.com/resources/library/Interviews/Handling_Illegal_46_02.htm

What to Wear: The way you are dressed is only one factor that will be evaluated during your interview. However, your appearance is important because it’s the first impression the interviewer receives about you. What you “say” about yourself by how you look will influence the interviewer’s perception of everything that follows in the interview. Fortunately, your appearance is something you can plan for in advance.

- Be neat, clean, and well-groomed; clothes should be clean and wrinkle free
- Wear deodorant, but avoid wearing perfume or cologne
- “Test-drive” your outfit to ensure you are comfortable walking, sitting, and standing

Dress code varies based on the type job, however, it is expected in most professions that you wear a business suit. If you are applying for work as a camp counselor, a casual, active look would be acceptable. Some employers’ adoption of “business casual” dress policies makes interview-wear decisions more difficult. As a general rule, unless you’ve received clear messages that the interviewer expects you to dress casually, you should wear a suit.

For women: In general, the “business uniform” that would work in most corporate settings:

- A two-piece, conservative suit of wool or wool-blend fabric with a neutral-colored blouse that complements the suit
- If wearing a skirt, opt to wear knee-length or a bit longer
- Neutral or dark hosiery that complements the outfit
- Dark brown or black leather heels in a conservative style (no open toes or spike heels)
- Minimal jewelry (nothing that jingles, dangles, or is at all flashy) and minimal make-up

For men: In general, the “business uniform” that would work in most corporate settings:

- A two-piece, conservative suit of wool or wool-blend fabric - dark colors are best
- A white or light blue long-sleeve shirt
- A matching necktie with a subtle pattern
- Dark socks, mid-calf length that match the suit
- Dark leather shoes, preferably black with laces

During the Interview

- Arrive 5-10 minutes early so you have time to collect your thoughts. If you are unfamiliar with the location or commute to the interview site, do a “dry run” a day or so ahead to be sure of the route, location and timing.
- Bring extra copies of your resume and a list of references. If applicable, you may also want to take along a professional-looking portfolio to visually represent your previous work, honors, and abilities.
- Be aware of your first impression. Smile, offer a firm handshake, make eye contact, and introduce yourself using both first and last name. Establish yourself immediately as prepared and confident.
- If you lack experience in an area the interviewer asks about, say so, but go on to describe similar experiences or examples indicating your willingness and ability to learn new things.
- Try to keep your answers brief and to the point. If in doubt about whether you’ve said enough, you can always ask, “Does that fully answer your question?”
- Never bad-mouth previous employers or co-workers.
- Your interviewer may ask if you have any final questions or comments. Take that opportunity to ask well thought out questions or make a final, compelling personal sales pitch. Express confidence in your ability to succeed at the job and your excitement about the opportunity to put your skills to work for this organization.
- At the close of the interview, get the interviewer’s business card and offer another firm handshake. Ask about the next steps in the interview process. Above all: show interest, be pleasant, and express enthusiasm.

After the Interview

Always send a thank-you letter within 24 hours, using the information on the interviewer’s business card to ensure your letter is received. E-mail letters are acceptable as long as they follow a formal format. A handwritten letter is acceptable only if it is neat and legible. Express appreciation and interest. Make or remake a key point(s). If appropriate, say something like, “I’ll contact you in the next week to see how the process is going.” Make your own notes about the interview; they may be useful for future contacts.

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