

HOW TO INTERVIEW FOR A JOB

Part Three of a Three Part Job Hunting Series



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HOW TO INTERVIEW FOR A JOB

Congratulations!! You've made it to the interviewing stage of job hunting. This means that in all likelihood you have already done a lot of things right. You have done your research, written your resumes and cover letters, contacted employers, etc. Usually there are many more applicants than there are jobs, so you have probably already outdistanced most of your competition. You are coming down the home stretch, don't mess up now!

Remember, the resume gets you the interview... but the interview gets you the job!

How to prepare for the interview!

- A. **Self Analysis:** By this time, most job seekers have already done an analysis of what they have to offer. Review the following information:

Who am I?
Where do I want to go?
How do I intend to go about getting there?
Why do I want this job?
Why do I think I'm qualified?
What are my interests? Abilities? Skills? Goals?
What are my strengths? Weaknesses?

Review the resume that got you the interview. Also review your educational background, your experience, and your activities.

After careful review of who you are and what you have to offer, you will be in a better position to match your qualifications with the needs of the employer.

- B. **Have knowledge of the organization:** Employers will expect that you have knowledge of their organization. The employer will sometimes supply his/her own literature for the purpose of giving you an overview of the organization. Be sure you read this literature. If they don't provide it, research the organization on your own. More and more company literature is available on the internet.
- C. **Be prepared:** This is your chance to sell yourself to the potential employer. They will be asking you questions. Think about potential questions ahead of time. Be prepared to give intelligent, organized responses. You should also be prepared to ask questions. Normally, near the end of the interview you will be given your chance. Don't ask questions just for the sake of asking. Always have several questions prepared in case some are answered in the normal course of the interview. Stay away from questions that relate to salary and benefits. (A list of questions an employer may ask you and those you may ask the employer is listed on page 7.)

Before Your Interview Remember...

1. **Know Yourself.** The main topic of discussion in the interview will be you. Therefore, you need to know yourself. Examine your background, what you have accomplished, what goals you have set for yourself, what you want in a job.
2. **Know your interviewer.** You need to know your employer. Read recruiting literature, annual reports, or check out a web page if they have one. Employers expect that you will research their company. They will know if you have not.
3. **Dress appropriately for the interview.** Women should wear business suits or long dresses. Men should wear a suit with a tie and dress shoes. Conservative colors (black, navy, and gray) are still best, especially for those entering the business field. White shirts and blouses are preferable. Good grooming is essential. (More detailed description on page 8.)
4. **Be early for your appointment.** It is extremely important that you arrive for your interview at least 10-15 min early. Not only does this give you a chance to relax and gather your thoughts; it is what the interviewer expects of you. Showing up late or right on time leaves a bad first impression for the interviewer. Also, be aware that they may have literature that you are expected to read before the interview.
5. **Know the interviewer's name and how to pronounce it.** Before the interview, try to find the interviewer's name and use it.

Resources on Interviewing

A variety of helpful materials are available in Career Services. These include:

INFORMATION INTERVIEWING

THE NEW PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

OUT INTERVIEWING THE INTERVIEWER

THE NEGLECTED ART OF BEING INTERVIEWED

THE 101 TOUGHEST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS...& ANSWERS THAT WIN THE JOB

ADAMS JOB INTERVIEW ALMANAC

INTERVIEW MASTERY 2.0 (DVD)

INTERVIEWING SKILLS FOR BEGINNERS (DVD)

Be sure to read the last section of this booklet. It is taken from The Berkeley Guide to Employment. It may give you additional information and insight into the art of interviewing.

The Interview!

1. **Introduction:** When you first meet the employer, remember that the first impression is very important. Smile, make eye contact, give a firm handshake, and greet the interviewer by using his/her name. Remember, the recruiter is evaluating you from the moment you are greeted. Follow the lead of the interviewer. Do not have a seat until he/she tells you where to sit down. You will most likely be nervous. A certain degree of nervousness is normal. The first few minutes will probably be used to help you relax. Many interviewers ask you to tell them about yourself. Give a brief personal background without giving too much detail. **Don't forget the first five minutes, where first impressions are established, are very important.**
2. **Eye Contact:** It is very important to have eye contact throughout the whole interview. That does not mean to stare at the employer the entire time, but keep normal eye contact. Don't look down at your hands or at the floor.
3. **Questions:** The interviewer will normally spend much of the interview asking you questions. Be a good listener. Speak slowly and confidently. Your answers should not be too short and not so long that you are rambling. When possible, provide specific examples when answering questions. Make sure the answers are well thought out and formulated before you speak. Have confidence in your abilities without being arrogant. This is your chance to sell yourself to the employer.
4. **Closing:** After the questioning is over, you will have your turn to ask questions. They can display your interest in the interviewer. Your questions should be upbeat and positive. Also, questions should convey your interest in and your knowledge of the organization. In closing the interview, remember to sum up your qualifications and interest in the position for which you are applying. Also, determine how the interviewer will follow-up. What is the next step – will the interviewer contact you or should you contact him/her? Keep in mind that the interview is not over until you walk out the door. Stay enthusiastic and courteous the entire time. The last five minutes is where your overall performance is being assessed. Usually the interviewer will stand up to indicate the end of the interview. Shake the interviewer's hand and thank him/her for considering you.
5. **Thank-You Letter:** Once you leave the interview room, the process is not over. Within a day or two, type a short, business-like letter thanking the interviewer for his/her time. If you have decided not to pursue the position, be tactful and courteous in saying so. If you still want the position, reaffirm your interest. Mention a few points you covered in your conversation which demonstrate how you would be good in this position. This may also be an opportunity to provide information that may have been overlooked during the interview. (A sample thank-you letter is on page 9.)

All students have the opportunity to practice their interviewing skills by participating in a practice interview. By simulating an actual interview situation and recording it on the videotape, the student has the chance to observe his/her performance. Interested students can schedule a practice interview session in the Career Services office. Please call 269-7120 to set up an appointment.

How to be an “IDEAL” Candidate Even if You’re Not

Employers hope to hire applicants that seem to be nearly a perfect match for their open positions. Yet the screening process looks first for reasons to eliminate applicants. This is done in order to arrive at a manageable number to interview for each position (usually 3 to 7 individuals).

This means that the screening process is likely to be very general in order to exclude broad categories of candidates. This is why seemingly small factors, such as a misspelled word on your resume, can have a significant effect on your chances of success. The same is true for other details throughout your interactions with a potential employer. Your job is to try not to give the employer a good reason for eliminating you from consideration. Here are some of the guidelines for how to be the best candidate you are capable of being.

Be Dynamic

Convey a strong sense of self-confidence.

Ask yourself what makes you more unique than other applicants and focus and expand on these qualities.

Be persuasive. Sell yourself.

Relate Past Experience and Future Plans to the Position

Show how your work/life experience has prepared you for the position.

Explain why you and the position seem perfect for each other.

Give examples of previous experiences and accomplishments to support your answers to questions.

Avoid Being Negative

Be careful not to project any insecurity you may feel about your qualifications.

Do not dwell on your shortcomings or the shortcomings of those for whom you have worked.

Be honest about answers, but not blunt.

Some evaluations made by interviewers according to Erwin S. Stanton, author of Successful Personnel Recruiting and Selection.

1. How mentally alert and responsive is the job candidate?
2. Is the candidate able to draw proper inferences and conclusions during the course of the interview?
3. Does the candidate show a degree of intellectual depth when communicating or is his/her thinking shallow and lacking depth?
4. Has the candidate used good judgment and common sense regarding life planning up to this point?
5. What is the applicant’s capacity for problem solving activities?
6. How well does the candidate respond to stress and pressure?

Professional Attire for Interviews

A job interview is not the time to make an individual fashion statement. Make choices of clothing, fragrances, jewelry, hairstyle, etc. that are not distracting and do not call attention to themselves. Whether you are interviewing with a trendy advertising agency, a public accounting firm, internship or for a seasonal job, stick with conservative attire and make sure your clothing and accessories project a professional image.



Men

- *A dark suit is a good choice for business organizations. Colors: Blue, gray, dark brown. A conservative jacket with tailored slacks can also be appropriate.
- *Neatly ironed, long sleeved white shirt is preferred.
- *Avoid flashy ties; a subtle design is usually suitable.
- *Jewelry should be kept to a minimum; watch and a single finger ring is acceptable. Removing any body piercing is advised.
- *Color coordinate socks with black polished shoes are recommended. Casual or tennis shoes are inappropriate.
- *Hair should be neat and clean. A conservative hairstyle communicates a professional look. Facial hair should be groomed daily.

Women

- *A conservative dress or suit with knee-length skirt tends to be most appropriate. Avoid wearing pants to the interview.
- *Hose should not be darker than the skirt. A neutral tone is the safest choice. Take an extra pair just in case!
- *Accessorize with subtle jewelry and stick with natural looking make-up and nail polish. Avoid dangling earrings and bracelets. Removing any body piercing is advised.
- *Close-toed shoes that coordinate with the suit or dress are appropriate. High heels should be avoided.
- *Hair should be neat and clean. Long hair should be pulled away from the face for a more professional look.

Do's in an Interview

Review your resume and be prepared to answer specific questions about the information you have included in it.

Arrive about 15 minutes ahead of time. Give yourself a chance to relax.

Learn about the firm or organization beforehand.

Be positive, pleasant and friendly, but businesslike.

Watch your posture. Sit up straight in your chair.

Ask questions, but only if they are relevant.

Dress appropriately. Use a firm handshake.

Show enthusiasm and interest.

Use examples when appropriate.

Don'ts in an Interview

Don't ask about salary or benefits, wait until the employer brings it up or let it go until later.

Don't name drop or bad mouth your former employers/professors.

Don't drink alcohol if the interview is over a meal.

Don't sit down until asked to do so.

Don't chew gum or smoke.

Don't interrupt.

Don't discuss personal problems.

Don't try to be funny or crack jokes.

Don't present an extreme appearance.

Don't use flattery (the interviewer can see through that).

Don't use poor grammar or slang ("ain't", "yeah", "kinda", "like", "hum", "youns").

Questions Potential Employers May Ask You

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you decide to seek a position with our company?
- What do you know about our company?
- Where do you see yourself in five (ten) years?
- Why did you choose this major?
- What do you feel are your greatest strengths (weaknesses)?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- Are you willing to travel?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a quick decision.
- How do you handle stress?
- How do you handle criticism?
- How do you work under pressure?
- How have your classes prepared you for this type of job?
- What have you learned from your participation in extra-curricular activities?
- Where did you hear about our company?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- How (or when) did you become interested in this field?

Questions You May Want To Ask Potential Employers

- What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
- What are some of the daily duties of this job?
- How is success on this job measured and rewarded?
- Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within?
- Has there been much turnover among your recently hired college graduates?
- Is there a lot of team/project work?
- Where does this position fit in the organizational structure?
- After five years, how far have people with my kind of background normally progressed in your company?

Stress Interview Questions

Tell us about yourself.

Why do you want to work for us?

What other types of jobs are you considering? What companies?

What are your short-range objectives/goals?

What are your long-range objectives/goals?

Why are you leaving your present position?

What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?

Why should we hire you?

Can you work under pressure?

What is your philosophy of management?

What kind of salary are you worth?

What are your five biggest accomplishments in:
your present or last job?
your career so far?

What is your biggest strength/weakness?

How long would it take you to make a contribution to our firm?

How long would you stay with us?

How would you evaluate your present firm?

Do you generally speak to people before they speak to you?

How would you describe the essence of success?

What was the last book you read? Movie you saw? Sporting event you attended?

In your present job, what problems have you identified that had been overlooked?

What interests you the most/least about the position we have?

Don't you feel you might be better off in a different sized company?

Don't you feel you might be better off in a different type of company?

Why aren't you earning more at your age?

Will you be out to take your boss's job?

Are you creative? – give an example

Are you analytical? – give an example

Stress Interview Questions [cont'd]

Are you a good manager? – give an example

How would you best describe your own personality?

If you could start again, what would you do differently?

What new goals or objectives have you established recently?

How have you changed the nature of your job?

What position do you expect to have in five years?

What do you think of your boss?

Why haven't you obtained a job so far?

What features of your previous jobs have you disliked?

Would you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized?

Have you helped reduce costs? How?

What do your subordinates think of you?

Have you fired people before?

Have you hired people before? What do you look for?

Why do you feel you have top management potential?

If you had your choice of jobs and companies, where would you go?

Can You Handle the Behavioral Interview?

Some employers are starting to use the behavioral interview to evaluate their candidates. This type of interview is still not very common, but a little thought will help keep you from being caught by surprise. Here are some differences between the behavioral interview and a traditional interview:

- The interviewer will ask for specific details rather than let you generalize about certain events.
- Instead of asking how you would behave in a situation, they will ask you to describe how you did behave.
- Most interviewers will take a lot of notes throughout the behavioral interview.

How can you Prepare?

- Recall recent situations where you demonstrated good behaviors or actions. It could be involving course work, leadership abilities, teamwork abilities, etc.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation and be ready to give details.
An easy way to remember is to use the **STAR** technique:
S (Situation) Think of the specific situation
T (Task) What was the task you needed to accomplish
A (Action) What action did you take to accomplish your task
R (Result) What was the end result of your action
If you include these four components, it will help you to think of a behavioral situation and you will include the components necessary to describe what the interviewer is looking for.
- Make sure that you use a situation in which the result reflects favorably on you.
- Be honest about your story and be specific. The interviewer will be able to tell if your story has weaknesses. Also, be detailed in your descriptions and do not generalize.

***** Do not get too nervous about a behavioral interview. The major difference is that a behavioral interview will concentrate on past actions where as a traditional interview may allow you to explore how you will behave in a future situation. *****

Typical questions for a behavioral interview begin with phrases such as: "Give an example when..." or "Describe a situation where..."

TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – HOW TO TAKE THEM IN STRIDE

Situation I

THIS INTERVIEWER DEALS EXCLUSIVELY WITH ONE SUBJECT: THE COMPANY. THIS REPRESENTATIVE STARTS ASKING YOU WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THE COMPANY. SHE SKIMS OVER YOUR EXPERIENCE. HER PRIMARY FOCUS IS ON HER COMPANY AND HOW YOU RELATE TO IT.

Suggestion

The one thing the interviewer may care more about than anything else when she selects someone to work for her is the candidate's interest in or enthusiasm for the company. It isn't a terribly difficult task to learn about a company for which you may work for the rest of your life. Let the interviewer know that you are also enthusiastic about the company.

But in this instance, the interviewer is probably seeking more than a playback of what you know about the company from last year's annual report. The single best chance you have to separate yourself from the competition is when the interviewer asks if you have any questions about the company. If you want to be the one who gets the job, you should have several, well thought out, pertinent questions on the tip of your tongue. Your questions should show your interest in the company. The interviewer will probably respond very favorably.

When it comes time for you to ask your thoughtful questions, use your own experience as a frame of reference. For example: "You mentioned that one of the major areas of importance for your organization is its relations with the public. As my resume states, I have a significant amount of experience in working with the public on a voluntary as well as on a paid basis. How has your company dealt with public opinion as it pertains to consumer protection?"

Questions as specific as these can do a lot to make you stand out favorably. First, they demonstrate genuine interest in your prospective employer's problems. Second, they relate your experience and background to those specific areas in which the company may need assistance.

Remember: What may appear to be a liability can usually be converted into an asset if you prepared by anticipating potentially difficult questions.

Situation II

YOUR INTERVIEWER WON'T STOP TALKING. SHE TALKS ABOUT HERSELF. SHE TALKS ABOUT THE PROBLEMS HER COMPANY NOW FACES. SHE TALKS ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE. ONE THING SEEMS FOR SURE – SHE DOESN'T GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO OPEN YOUR MOUTH.

Suggestion

This kind of interview presents both an opportunity and a challenge. An opportunity, since it provides you with insight about the company and the person for whom you may be working. This is the real bonus of such an interview. A challenge, because you know if you want this job, you have to make your prospective boss believe you are the exceptional candidate among the many he/she has interviewed. This interview is the only time you have in which to do it. The question is how, when the interviewer won't seem to stop talking. One way is to ask for an opportunity to spend a few minutes talking about yourself. The key is to know when and how to ask. Many professionals feel the best time is after you have given the interviewer a chance to talk themselves out, and after you have given yourself a chance to make mental notes on problems or future opportunities that the interviewer shared with you. Then wait for a pause and seize your opportunity. Ask for a few minutes to talk about your accomplishments. Here's how you might do it. "Two of the areas you described interested

me most. May I take a few minutes to tell you about several accomplishments of mine in areas that seem to be of relevance and hopefully of real interest to you?" Assert yourself, you have nothing to lose.

Situation III

THE INTERVIEWER STARTS THE INTERVIEW BY QUICKLY LOOKING OVER YOUR RESUME. THEN HE PROCEEDS TO ASK YOU AN ENDLESS LIST OF QUESTION, MANY OF WHICH ARE DIFFICULT. YOUR PALMS START TO GET SWEATY. YOU WEREN'T QUITE PREPARED FOR THE RAPIDITY WITH WHICH THESE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED, NOR FOR THE DIFFICULTY OF PROVIDING SINGLE, CLEAR ANSWERS TO THEM.

Suggestion

While the rapid fire questioning technique is tough on you, it undoubtedly provides a benefit to your interviewer. It lets him/her know which of the candidates are able to think on their feet and to think calmly under pressure. Your knowledge of some of the more difficult questions asked by interviewers will make it easier for you. There will, of course, be questions thrown at you for which you don't have the answer. When this happens, keep the following thoughts in mind:

- A. Answer questions by referring to specific accomplishments.
- B. If you don't know the answer to a particular question, say you don't know. You will at least be thought of as honest. That may be better than the next candidate.
- C. Don't get flustered. If the rapid-fire questions start to unnerve you, remember that they will unnerve the other candidates as well.

If you keep your cool while others can't, you will be the standout candidate by default. The interviewer may be trying to find out if you can be yourself. No matter how frustrated you feel, don't panic. Remain honest and calm. Keep in mind the most important things you have to offer: your education, skills, talents, and abilities. No one can take them away from you. Remember that the interviewer who tries to unnerve you is probably looking for someone who knows how to stay calm.

Situation IV

THIS INTERVIEWER DOESN'T OPEN HER MOUTH. THE PERSON YOU THOUGHT WOULD KEEP THE INTERVIEW GOING LEAVES IT ALL UP TO YOU. THE SILENCE IS DEAFENING. YOU ANSWER THE QUESTION BUT THERE IS A LONG PAUSE BETWEEN YOUR ANSWER TO THE LAST QUESTION AND THE INTERVIEWER'S NEXT QUESTION. YOU COME AWAY DISAPPOINTED WITH YOUR PERFORMANCE. YOU DIDN'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO ESTABLISH RAPPORT.

Suggestion

It shouldn't take more than one long pause for you to know the interview is not pacing itself as it should. After more than one seemingly endless pause, prepare yourself to carry the conversation, to take the interviewer off the hook. Suggest to the representative that you would like to review for her the accomplishments in your background that you think qualify you for the position. Your interviewer may be inexperienced and may not know how to keep the conversation going. If this is the case, she will be truly grateful to you for making the interview a success. Not only will your accomplishments be remembered, but also your ability to convey a sense of warmth to a slow moving interview situation.

"Tough Interview Sessions" Adapted from the Univ. of California–Davis, Career Planning & Placement

Suggested Format for a Thank-you/Follow-up Letter

Your Present Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date of Writing

Ms./Mr. (name of recruiter)
Title
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Ms./Mr. (name of recruiter)

To begin you should express your appreciation for the interview opportunity. Mention the date and location of the interview. Show your interest in the company/organization.

The next paragraph should contain a specific example that will make you stand out in the employer's mind. Also, give any relevant information that may have not been brought up in the interview. If you think you made a mistake or gave a poor answer to a question, this may be your chance to make a correction or give a better response.

Finally, close with another statement of appreciation and relay a positive statement about your qualifications for the position.

Sincerely,

(your hand written signature)

Type your name

* A Variety of materials covering thank you notes and other types of job hunting letters is available in the Career Services office.

The Berkeley Guide to Employment

The Interview

The personal interview is a structured exchange of information between two or more people for the purpose of further communicating qualifications for a position. It is also an opportunity for you to assess your desire to work for a specific employer. As employers interview job applicants, they are looking for evidence that a candidate can perform the tasks of the positions and fit in with the organization and the department. In addition to specific qualifications, the interviewer is often influenced by the personal qualities of the applicant as detected in the interview. The interviewer in general will be looking for:

- Self-concept – the candidate’s ability to display self-confidence, goal setting, realistic assessment of strengths and limitations.
- Maturity and judgement.
- Communication skills, including the ability to interact effectively with others.
- Leadership potential – such as demonstrated in extracurricular activities or previous jobs.
- Personality – enthusiasm, poise, cheerfulness, flexibility, and a sense of humor.
- Patterns of accomplishment.
- Problem solving and analytical abilities.
- Interest in and knowledge of the career field.
- Work ethic – acceptance of responsibility and ability to keep commitments.
- Appearance – dress and grooming.
- Level of skill and knowledge appropriate to particular job functions.

These items will be assessed in a structured interview that usually follows a fairly standard pattern. The interview begins with an introduction and exchange of small talk to put both individuals at ease. These first few minutes can be important to your success. The process usually includes a discussion of your background, including your work experience, education, extra-curricular activities, etc...; a discussion of the skills and related abilities you have to offer; a discussion about the available position, work environment, organization, etc.; an opportunity for questions; and closing.

Preparing for an Interview

You can best prepare for an interview by doing some research on the organization and the specific job opening. Then review your background, especially as it relates to the requirements of this particular position. Be able to clearly explain your career goals and how you arrived at them. Analyze your strengths and weaknesses and be able to give examples of each. Know what you want to communicate and how you want to communicate it. Role-play a practice interview with a friend.

When you research an employer, learn as much as you can about the organization’s history and background: what it does, the services and products it offers, where its branches are, what its future prospects are, etc. Read any of the organization’s brochures and past annual reports. Consult a reference librarian for ways to find additional information. Be sure to check the internet. In today’s world there is a great deal of information on-line. If you cannot find much information about a specific organization, at least learn as much as you can about the industry in general. A useful reference for this purpose is the *U.S. Industrial Outlook* published by the U.S. Government Printing Office. Do not expect employers to educate you about their organizations.

At the Interview

At the risk of stating the obvious, here are some generally accepted ground rules for the interview. Unfortunately, they include many mistakes commonly made by students.

Give yourself enough time to arrive at least 15 minutes early for the interview.

Dress appropriately. Use a firm handshake.

Be enthusiastic and interested about the occasion.

Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer.

Avoid smoking or chewing gum.

Introduce examples of your work experience into the conversation as appropriate.

Focus on positive aspects of your previous jobs.

Do not belittle yourself or any of your previous employers.

Listen to the question before answering it.

Avoid answering with a yes or no.

After you answer a question, you may want to pursue a related point by asking a question of your own so that the interview does not become one sided.

Below are some common interview questions with some suggestions for developing responses:

What are your career plans?

This question is asked to see how your future plans mesh with those of the company. The interviewer wants to know if the job under discussion meets your short-range goals or fits well with your future career goals.

Why are you interested in this organization?

The employer is asking this question to determine: (1) How much you know about the industry and (2) How much research you have done about the specific company's reputation in their industry. More importantly, you should be able to articulate how your career plans are compatible with the organization with which you are interviewing.

How did you choose your major and this university?

Employers are trying to determine your decision making process. Tell about the thoughts that went into your decision and the factors you considered in making it. Employers are interested in learning how you make decisions and what you consider important.

Tell me about yourself.

The employer is asking you for a profile about yourself in order to compare it with profiles of successful company employees. Be factual. Discuss the qualifications that make you feel that you will be successful in your career. Indicate how you have developed these qualifications and talk about the people, things, and ideas that have motivated you to pursue your chosen career path.

With what other employers do you plan to interview?

The employer asks this question to determine how interested you are in their particular industry or related industries. Tell which comparable organizations and similar types of jobs you have investigated.

What are your greatest strengths? What are your chief weaknesses?

The employer asks these questions to determine what your self-image is. This is an opportunity to point out all of the strengths acquired through your past jobs and campus and community activities, and relate them to the employer's needs. Do not dwell on negative terms. Briefly mention a weakness that you are taking steps to overcome or have already overcome. Employers look for the ability to overcome difficulties. Concentrate on strengths and weaknesses related to the work environment.

Handling Discriminatory Questions

In the past when you encountered what you felt to be a discriminatory question in a job interview, you had to decide whether you wanted to answer the question and feel uncomfortable, or refuse to answer the question and possibly lose your chance for the job.

It may help to know a little bit about the kinds of questions that can be considered discriminatory, and the reasons why they have often been asked. Having this information will help you think about how you might respond.

CAUTION: We make no pretense of being lawyers. Detailed information on applicable laws may be sought through the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), the Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC), or an attorney. Your Career Planning and Placement advisor may have additional information.

Questions such as the following can, in some instance, be considered discriminatory when asked of a female applicant seeking a similar job. Questions about: marital status, marital plans, plans to have children, or child care arrangements. Understanding why these questions have been asked in the past can provide clues about how to deal with them now.

Traditional sex-role stereotypes:

Is the question relevant to the position at hand? Ask why the individual needs to know, and if the need is legitimate, attempt to accommodate it.

Legitimate need for information:

For example, questions regarding marital plans and/or status often have been aimed at determining the degree of long-term career commitment. The underlying questions in these examples are legitimate, but overt questions are not.

Do not try to make an issue of the questions (even though they may be irrelevant and discriminatory). Make your answer concise; such as, "I have given my career plans much thought and preparation. I am confident that my personal plans will not interfere with my job (career plans)." This type of response answers the interviewer's question: However, it makes it clear that your personal life will not interfere with your work performance.

More frequently asked interview questions:

In what school activities have you participated? Why? Which did you enjoy the most?

Do you feel you have done the best scholastic work of which you are capable?

Why did you go to college?

What qualifications do you have that will lead to success in your career?

What have you learned from past jobs you have had?

What kind of boss do you prefer?

How did previous employers treat you?

What kind of work interests you?

Are you willing to travel?

Are you willing to work overtime?

With what kinds of people do you work best?

Interviewing role-play. Practice interviewing with a friend. Ask your friend to critique your performance based upon the following questions:

Are your entrance and handshake positive?

Do you appear to be poised and self-assured?

Is your grooming up to standards?

Do you think you project a positive image of yourself?

What does your body language say?

Are you establishing good eye contact?

Could you have answered more effectively when asked questions?

Are you communicating in complete sentences?

Are you a good listener?

Does your exit leave a positive impression?

Questions You May Ask

An interview should be an exchange of information. You should have questions formulated to ask an interviewer so that you can make an intelligent decision about accepting the position if offered. If you do not get a chance to ask questions during the main portion of the interview you will likely have a chance at the end of your discussion. Be sure to ask questions that focus on the job. Salary and benefits are better left until subsequent interviews or a job has been offered.

Questions to ask in interviews:

What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?

Do you have a formal training program? If yes, how long is it and could you describe it to me?

How will my performance be evaluated, and how often?

To whom would I report? Under whose supervision would I be assigned?

Would I be responsible for supervising other staff? If so, how many and what positions?

Closing the Interview

- Do not linger when the interview is over.
- Ask if there is anything else the interviewer wants to know.
- Reiterate your interest in the position.
- Ask what the next step is and if you should contact the person.
- Ask when you may expect a decision.
- Be sure you have the interviewer's name and business address.
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time.

Using References

When an employer becomes interested in you, they will likely want one or more references they can contact. References are used to confirm the things you have said about yourself and your background. The ones that have the most important impact are those from previous supervisors, especially the supervisor from your last job. If you have recently been a student, professors who know you well should be used. Avoid using individuals who have not seen you in a work setting or cannot attest to your academic performance. Do not use relatives, friends, etc.

Line up your references in advance. Ask those you are considering if they would be a reference for you. Most people will accept. Help your references by briefing them on the specifics of the position, the organization, and the aspects of your background in which the employer is most likely to be interested. Give them a copy of your resume. Type your list of references beforehand and have a copy ready to give to the interviewer.

As a courtesy to your references, don't give out their names to more people than necessary.

Handling A Panel Interview

Panel interviews are those conducted by a group of three to fifteen people. They are common with positions in government and educational institutions.

Be a good listener, answer questions, and let the panel determine the course of the interview. Panel interviews are often conducted under tight time constraints. When asked questions by several members at once, pause, think and respond to one question at a time. You may need to ask that a question be restated. Begin and end your response by directly addressing the person who asked the question. If it is a long response, try to establish eye contact with as many people on the panel as possible.