

Enhancing Professional and Personal Development

# KEYS TO INTERVIEWING SUCCESS



Lower Level, A.C. Buehler Library | (630) 617-3460 | [cpeinfo@elmhurst.edu](mailto:cpeinfo@elmhurst.edu)



**CAREER** Education. **CAREER** Experiences. **PRE-PROFESSIONAL** Advising.

# Interviews

In today's job market, employers are seeking the most highly qualified candidates to fill a limited number of openings. Because competition is fierce, simply being qualified may not be sufficient to land the job. You must also have the ability to effectively communicate your skills, abilities, and experiences in a fluent, concise and confident manner. The job interview is typically the first time you have direct contact with the employer. Words and actions, once delivered, cannot be recalled. There is “no tomorrow”. Either you will successfully convince the employer that you have the required qualifications they are seeking, or you won't.



However, an interview should be a mutual exchange of information. Just as the interviewer will gather job-related information about you, evaluate your skills and qualifications in line with a particular position or training program, you need to be prepared with your own questions for the interviewer to evaluate the company, its management philosophy, work environment, growth opportunities, etc.

All your efforts in resume writing, research, and job search strategy are directed towards obtaining an interview in an organization. Because most decisions to hire an applicant rest upon an interview, it is essential that you know what to expect in an interview and how to prepare yourself for it. If you are like most people you will be nervous during the interview. **Preparation** and **practice** are the keys to interviewing success!

## ***Preparation:***

Have a basic understanding of yourself. Identify your values, strengths, skills, and accomplishments.

- What experiences and achievements set you apart from other candidates?
- What contribution can you make to the organization?
- What do you hope to accomplish from the interview?

The more you know about yourself, the more comfortable you're likely to be when responding to questions.

Learn about the job, the company and the industry.

- What are the desired qualifications and responsibilities?
- Research the company to determine it's philosophy, products, competition, size, structure, and culture.

Employers look for someone who is genuinely interested in the position and the company.

## ***Practice:***

- Develop your active listening skills so you can determine what the interviewer is asking and request clarification if necessary.
- Review sample interview questions and formulate confident responses giving specific examples from your experience.
- Videotape or get feedback after a mock interview. Pay attention to your posture, eye contact, pace of your answers, distracting physical (foot tapping, overusing your hands) and verbal (using “um, ‘cuz, yea, you know, like”) mannerisms.

## ***How the Center for Professional Excellence can help you:***

- Attend an interviewing skills workshop
- Arrange for a mock interview with a career advisor
- Use LinkedIn/Internet to research an employer

## **Behavioral Interviews**

This type of interviewing is a new style becoming more common in the hiring process. The goal of behavioral interview questions is to determine how you've behaved in past situations, as this is the best predictor of how you will behave in the future. As a result, you need to listen to the question carefully and respond with a specific and detailed situation that relates to the question.

Your response should follow the **S.T.A.R.** rule:

### ***Situation:***

- Briefly describe the circumstances of the experience. i.e. college association, job, athletic event, etc.

### ***Task:***

- Concisely, describe the task or event that you had to handle. i.e.- A difficult co-worker, being president, organizing an event , etc.

### ***Action:***

- Succinctly, talk about what skills and steps you took to complete your task.

### ***Result:***

- In a few words, state the result.

### **Sample Behavioral Interview Questions**

1. Give me a specific example of a time when you were able to persuade someone to see things your way.
2. Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
3. Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects, how do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines and stay focused?
4. Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
5. Tell me about a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when the individual may not have personally liked you.
6. Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline, what things did you fail to do and what you learned.

### **Additional Sample Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
3. What has been your greatest challenge?
4. What challenges are you looking for in a position?
5. What makes you think you can handle this position?
6. What can you contribute to this company?
7. What work experiences have been most valuable to you and why?
8. What goals have you set for yourself? How are you planning to achieve them?
9. What interests or concerns do you have about the position or company?
10. What is your most significant accomplishment to date?
11. If I asked the people who know you for one reason I shouldn't hire you, what would they say?
12. We are looking at a lot of great candidates; why are you the best person for this position?
13. What two or three things are most important to you in a position?



### **Questions for you to ask the employer**

- Avoid asking questions regarding salary, benefits, or vacation time during the first interview
1. What are the major responsibilities of this position?
  2. What are the greatest challenges facing the person in this position?
  3. How would my performance be measured?
  4. Can you tell me why the position is open?

**For more sample interview questions, visit these websites:**

[http://www.western.edu/career/Interview\\_virtual/Virtual\\_interview.htm](http://www.western.edu/career/Interview_virtual/Virtual_interview.htm)

[http://www.quintcareers.com/interview\\_question\\_database/](http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/)

### *Things to remember.....*

- Be punctual, at least ten minutes early.
- Smile! Show your enthusiasm and motivation.
- Bring extra copies of your resume, list of references and recommendation letters.
- Get a business card from everyone who interviews you.

### *Professional Dress*

It is better to be overdressed than underdressed. Always dress conservatively and ask yourself, 'Will what I am wearing cause me to be passed over for this job?' What you wear will affect your attitude and confidence!



#### Women

Conservative, tailored suit  
White blouse  
Medium-heeled pump, polished  
Skin-colored hose  
Moderate use of jewelry, make-up, perfume  
Neatly styled hair

#### Men

Conservative, tailored suit  
White oxford shirt, pressed  
Dark dress shoes, polished  
Dark dress socks  
Conservative jewelry, minimal cologne  
Neatly trimmed hair



### *After the interview.....*

- As soon as you leave the interview, make some notes about what was discussed during the interview.
- Use these notes to reemphasize your strengths as a candidate for the position in a **thank you letter**. The letter should be short, and should be e-mailed within 24 hours following the interview.

---

### *Sample thank you letter*

Jane Doe  
190 Prospect Ave. #123  
Elmhurst, IL 60126  
Date

Mr. John Brown  
CDX International  
655 Davis Ave.  
Elmhurst, IL 60126

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview for the Financial Analyst position with CDX International. I enjoyed meeting with you and appreciate the opportunity to learn more about your company and the position you are seeking to fill.

As discussed in our meeting, I believe that my education and practical work experiences have provided a solid foundation of skills in finance. I have had the opportunity to collaborate with a team in evaluating financial information and providing recommendations for more effective cost management as part of a class project. In addition, I have been responsible for maintaining the accuracy of financial reports prepared on a daily basis during my work with Harris Bank.

I would like to reiterate my strong interest in working for your company and know that I would be able to make a significant contribution. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

**\*\*For additional assistance, please contact the WCPE at (630) 617-3460\*\***