

# How to Handle the Interview

In a job interview, you have two objectives: to convince the employer that you are the best candidate, and to gather information to assist you in deciding whether the position is the best choice for you. An interview should be a two-way communication between the candidate and the interviewer.

## Before the Interview

Doing your homework before the day of the interview is an important key to success during the actual interview.

- **Values:** What you want from a career and what you are willing to give up to get it?
- **Interests:** What field excites you and where can you make the most contribution?
- **Strengths:** What skills you bring to the market as a worker.
- **Weaknesses:** What skills and or personal characteristics need to be improved?

## Analyze the Position

Research the specific position you are applying to. If there is a job description provided, that is an excellent starting point. If not, think what typical entry-level positions in your field involve. Read job descriptions of similar positions at other employers. Some skills and personality traits commonly sought by employers include: initiative, maturity, the ability to work as part of a team, computer literacy, problem solving, written and verbal communication skills, and flexibility.

Think through your background and note instances, examples, or experiences you can share to prove that you have the required skills and/or traits.

## Research the Organization

It is vital that you know as much as possible about the company or organization before your interview. You want to make the best possible impression on the employer and demonstrate your interest in their organization. Read recruitment brochures, newspapers, magazine articles, promotional materials, annual reports and websites to maximize your research efforts.

## Compile a List of Questions You Want to Ask the Employer

Keep in mind that you are interviewing each potential employer to see if it is a good fit for you; at the same time they are determining your fit within their organization. So, to be effective, you need to have a list of questions prepared that you want to ask the interviewer. Be sure not to ask questions already addressed in company literature, an information session, or earlier in the interview.

### *Some possible questions may include:*

- Will I be working independently or as part of a team?
- Who would be my immediate supervisor? What is his/her background?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the company in the near future?
- What major projects could I expect in my first six months or first year on the job?
- Are there any new initiatives or developments in the company?
- What do you see as the strengths of this department?
- How are market trends such as \_\_\_\_\_ affecting the company's growth?
- How will my performance be evaluated? By whom? How often?
- How much travel is required?

### Dress

- Unless you are told otherwise, you should dress in a conservative two-piece suit for any interview. For men, this means matching jacket and pants, a long-sleeve shirt (white is best) and dark shoes. For women, wear a suit with a jacket (skirted or pant suits are recommended); low heeled shoes/pumps; minimal make-up.
- Clean and press both your suit and shirt; shine your shoes; avoid flashy jewelry; use minimal perfume or cologne, comb your hair, trim your nails and remove visible body piercing.
- When in doubt, opt for a conservative style of dress.
- In some cases (for example, if you are interviewing at a manufacturing facility), you may be asked to dress in "business casual" for both men and women. This means you should wear slacks and a nice shirt or sweater.
- Remember to carry a notepad or portfolio and a pen.
- **Clothes Closet:** The RPI Clothes Closet is a new resource on campus for students to find appropriate professional attire. The clothes closet consists of men's and women's professional and business casual clothing and accessories. There will be no fees charged to the student for using the closet. The Clothes Closet is located in DCC 252.

## Arrival

- You should arrive ten minutes before your scheduled appointment.
- If you are traveling to the interview location, be sure you allow plenty of time for unexpected traffic or other obstacles. Take a practice trip to the interview location a few days before your interview.
- Be friendly to all the people you meet; you may not be aware of who provides input for a hiring decision.
- Introduce yourself in a professional manner, e.g., "Hello, I am Sue Smith and I have a 10 o'clock appointment with Ms. Brown."

## Structure of the Interview

### Introduction

- Greet the interviewer by his or her proper name (Mr. Brown, not Bob), shake hands, and make eye contact. Be sure you know how to pronounce the interviewer's name.
- The interviewer will usually start with some small talk (weather, sports, etc.) to try to relax you.

### Information Sharing

- Let the interviewer take the initiative and guide the interview.
- Show a sincere interest in the organization and the position (let your research show!)
- Listen to the interviewer! Be sure you are answering the questions asked.
- Show enthusiasm
- Maintain eye contact
- Remember to ask questions from your prepared list.
- Avoid "um," "like," and "okay."

### Closing

- Watch the interviewer's body language for clues that it is time to end the interview.
- Ask the interviewer when you can expect to hear from him or her about the next step in the process.
- Don't discuss salary or benefits in the first interview unless addressed by the employer first.
- Thank the interviewer for taking time to meet with you.

## Answering Interview Questions

- The questions you may encounter in an interview are as varied as the interviewers. You may be asked open-ended questions, very specific questions about details of your past accomplishments or be asked to provide a solution to technical questions.
- A good approach to answering any interview questions is the **BAR** (background, actions, results) approach. Provide specific examples to illustrate your skills utilizing this formula:

**Background** - Explain a specific situation in which you utilized a skill. "*I am Membership Chair of the Ski Club.*" **Action** - Provide specific actions you took in this situation. "*This past year, the club set a goal of increasing membership by 10%. I developed a marketing campaign which included creating fliers and brochures and I organized a group of volunteers to make presentations to groups on campus.*" **Results** - Describe the results of your actions. "*After this three-month campaign, our membership increased by 12%.*"

## Types of Interviews

**Traditional:** Although this type of interview can be varied, it typically involves the employer asking a series of questions about your skills, experiences, interests and goals.

**Behavioral:** "The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior." You will be asked to provide specific, detailed information about how you have behaved in a particular situation. The interviewer will often probe you for more details with questions like, "how did you feel at that point?" or "What did you do next?"

**Informational:** The purpose of this interview is to obtain information about a position, an organization, or an industry. This can help you in making career decisions or in seeking a position. This is important in the networking process; however, it is **not** a job interview.

**Plant Trips/On-Site:** In the interview process, the next step after a screening interview is typically an invitation for an on-site interview. This second interview is a more in-depth look at your qualifications and your match with the position. Interviews are typically longer in length, and you may meet with several individuals during the day.

**Phone Interviews:** Read our separate handout on handling phone interviews.

To be successful be sure to:

- Clarify travel arrangements prior to your visit
- Bring extra copies of your resume
- Research the company
- Follow-up after your interview

## After the Interview

- Always send a thank you note immediately after your interview. If you met with more than one person, send a thank you note to each.
- If an employer tells you to call at a certain time, DO IT.
- If you are supposed to hear from an employer by a certain date and you do not, follow up with a phone call. *This is critical to your success.*