



Strategies for Successful Interviews

Jennifer Guyer-Wood
Acting Assistant Director
MSU Career Development Center

After the presentation today you will:

- Know what to expect in an interview setting
- Learn how to prepare for an interview
- Obtain some tools to use to prepare for interviews and practice answering questions
- Know how to follow up with an employer after an interview
- Be prepared for your practice interview next week

Are you nervous?

- Nervousness is normal
- PREPARATION is key
- Techniques for calming yourself, like deep breathing, visualization, listening to calm music
- You are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you

Before the interview



- Assess your strengths, experiences and skills
- Prepare and practice
- Research the organization and understand the requirements of the job opening
- If you are interviewing in a different state or community, learn about the area as well
- Think of some questions you might ask the interviewer/s
- Determine what you will wear

Before the interview

- Have extra resumes and any correspondence with the company ready to bring
- Get good directions. Know where you are going, where you will park. Do a test run
- Practice answering questions
- Get a good nights sleep
- Arrive 15-20 minutes early. Check your appearance in a restroom

What to wear for a great first impression

- Be conservative. Your safest bet is always a suit!
- Closed shoes for both men & women
- Men-matching socks
- Women-conservative hosiery without runs
- Men-light shirt, conservative tie, clean, pressed business suit
- Women, clean pressed suit or tailored dress
- Minimal jewelry

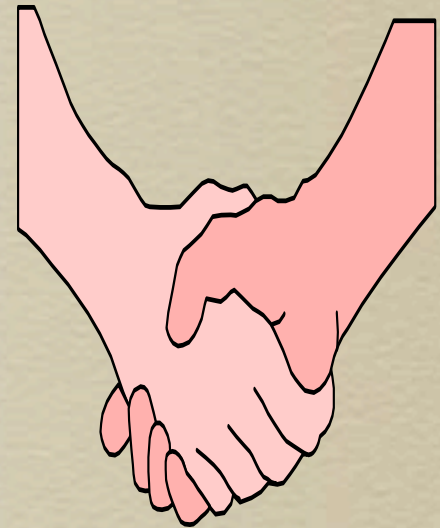


What to wear:

- Clean fingernails, good grooming
- Don't bring too much into the interview
- No perfume or cologne
- No food, gum, smoking
- Empty pockets
- Polished shoes in good repair
- Positive attitude/smile
- Men-clean trimmed head and facial hair
- Women-attractive, controlled hairstyle

Shaking Hands

- Hold the person's hand firmly
- Pump hand three times maximum
- Maintain eye contact
- Be positive
- Avoid
 - “The Crusher”
 - “The Dead Fish”



What will the interview be like?

- You may interview with one person or a panel of 2 or more people
- Some professions will have you interview with different groups, make a presentation, or go to lunch/dinner with them. It is okay to ask questions so you know what to expect.
- You need to be “on” from the moment you walk into the building until you leave. Anyone you see at the organization might be asked to give an opinion of you.
- Treat receptionists/secretaries with respect

What will the interview be like

- Most interviews follow a similar outline
 - You will meet the interviewer/s, shake hands, and start to build some rapport. Be ready for the “Tell me about yourself” question.
 - At some point, the interviewer/s will talk about the position and the organization.
 - You will be asked a number of questions to determine your fit with the position and organization.
 - The interviewer/s will give you an opportunity to ask questions. Be prepared!
 - At the end of the interview, you will shake hands and talk about next steps.

Tips for successful interviewing

- Do act confident and prepared.
- Don't be negative about former employers, extra-curricular experiences, college life, or tell hard luck stories.
- Do be aware of the length and conciseness of your answers. You don't want to have your answers be too long or too short.
- Don't inquire about salary, benefits, vacations, etc. until an offer has been made.

Common Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why should I hire you?
- What is your major strength?
- What is your major weakness?
- What would your former employers say about you?
- Why do you want to work here?

Common Questions

- Why did you choose this field/major?
- Where do you hope to be in 5 years?
- What were your favorite and least favorite subjects in school?
- Describe how you handle stress.
- Do you prefer working by yourself, or with others?
- Why should we hire you?

You NEED to ask questions too!

- What would a typical day be like in this position?
- What can I do in 5 years to ensure my success here?
- When and why do you have to fill this position?
- What is your favorite thing about working here? ...your biggest challenge?

Why didn't you get a job?

- Poor speech and grammar
- Looked unprofessional
- “What can you do for **me**” attitude
- Too much emphasis on salary
- Was not involved in extracurricular activities without a good reason
- No related experience
- Not willing to travel
- Low GPA without a valid reason

Behavior Based Interviewing:

- **Basic premise behind Behavior-Based Interviewing:**
 - The most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation
 - It is helpful to have prepared a career portfolio with specific examples of skills. The portfolio is one of the best ways to prepare for behavior – based interviews



STAR Technique

- Situation: Describe the situation
- Task: What was the task?
- Action: What action did you take?
- Response: What were the results?

Star Sample

- Situation: I was taking the Bio-Chemistry class required for my major, and I earned a C on my first test.
- Task: C level work isn't up to my standards, so I knew I needed to increase my grade.
- Action: I started a study group that met once per week to go over materials from class. I scheduled in 2 hours per weekday to work on Bio-Chemistry work, and I talked to my professor during her office hours when I had difficulty understanding concepts.
- Response: I earned A's on my other tests in Bio-Chemistry that Semester and received an A minus in the class.

Behavior Based Interview

Questions:

- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
- Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Behavior Based Answers

- Even if an employer does not ask specific Behavior Based Questions you can answer most questions this way
- If you are asked “Do you have computer skills?” or “How do you handle stress?” you can answer these questions in a Behavioral Based way using STAR. Try it!
- One technique you can use to prepare for interviews is to come up with 10 different situations that demonstrate your skills. Practice the STAR approach to talking about them. Then you are ready to answer a variety of questions in an effective way.

Thank-You Letter:

- Be sure and send a thank-you letter after the interview, it is the key to effective follow-up
- Send it within 24 hours of the interview
- It should be used to strengthen your candidacy for the position
- Can be hand written or computer generated
- Also send a thank-you letter to those with whom you had informational interviews with as well as those who serve as references

Thank-you/Follow-Up Letter:

First Paragraph: Express appreciation for the interview, indicate the job you interviewed for, where the interview was conducted, and date.

Second Paragraph: Reaffirm your interest in the job or position for which you were interviewed. Cover your reasons why you are qualified for this position and say that you are available for further interviewing at their convenience.

You can also mention something you discussed with the panel or interviewer that was interesting or will help them to remember you in a positive light

SELL YOURSELF!!!!

- 6 out of 10 people don't get the job they want because they don't sell themselves
- Show what you can do for the organization
- Show you are a team player
- Don't talk about your family, childhood, and hobbies. Use the small amount of time you have to talk about what is relevant
- Show enthusiasm for life in general and this position

Additional Resources...

- CDC Job Search Handbook
- Job Choices
- CDC website: www.mnsu.edu/cdc/
- Career Resource Library
- Individual appointments-call
507-389-6061

Your CDC Liaison

Jennifer Guyer-Wood

Career Development Center

Wigley Administration Room 209

507-389-6061

jennifer.guyer-wood@mnsu.edu

www.mnsu.edu/cdc