

EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

Employers use interviews to evaluate three things:

1. Do you have the academic background, technical qualifications and skills to do the job?
2. Do you have the personal characteristics and competencies necessary for effective performance?
3. Are you a good fit with the organization?

In most cases, an interviewer has already decided from your resume that you meet the first criteria, though he or she may have additional questions about your background. The answers to questions two and three can usually be gained only through an interview.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

When preparing for your interview, remember the 4 R's:

Research — Gather information about the position, organization and field through company websites, job descriptions, annual reports, trade journals, newspapers, magazines and informational interviews with alumni and people who work in the field.

Review & Relate — Your best guide to the skills and qualities necessary for a specific job is the job description. Review your experience and skills and draw connections between your background and the position's description. Identify specific examples that highlight your relevant skills. Download and complete the Cover Letter/Resume/Interview Prep Sheet from CareerLAB's website.

Rehearse — Prepare responses to questions you may be asked and practice with a friend or CareerLAB staff. Visit Handshake to schedule a half-hour mock interview with a career counselor or stop by Peer Career Advisor Open Hours to practice a few interview questions.

Interview Protocol

Interviewing is stressful and it's easy to forget the basics when you're nervous.

- Smile, make eye contact and give a firm handshake.
- Be alert. Show enthusiasm and energy.
- Take time before answering. Momentary pauses to collect your thoughts are okay.
- If at all possible, do not write anything down until after the interview is over.
- Be prepared to ask questions that demonstrate your enthusiasm for and interest in the position, the organization and the career field. It is okay to have a prepared list.
- Do not ask about salary.
- At the conclusion of the interview, ask about the next steps, the time frame and for a business card.
- Write a thank-you note within 24 hours (email is fine).

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TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

“Tell me about yourself” is an open-ended question that tests how well you can focus. Many interviewers start with this question. Your response should demonstrate how your past experiences, skills and interests would contribute to the position and organization.

Use this 90-second guideline when answering this question:

- Focus the first 15 seconds on personal information (ie., where you are from).
- Focus the next 30 seconds on your academic experience (ie. what you are studying, major research projects, study abroad experience).
- Focus the next 30 seconds on relevant experiences (ie., leadership activities, internships, volunteer work).
- Focus the last 15 seconds on your interest in the position (given the background you just discussed).

Give highlights of your experiences and focus your answer. This is not the time to elaborate. Spend some time writing down experiences you wish to discuss and practice your answers beforehand.

The Three Basic Interview Questions

You’ll be asked three basic questions in any interview:

- Why are you interested in this field?
- Why are you interested in this position and organization?
- What relevant skills and experience do you have that will make you a successful employee?

Be prepared to answer questions with specific information:

- Link your skills and experience to the qualifications and duties the employer included in the job posting.
- Be ready with concrete examples to back up the claims you make about your skills and experience.
- Illustrate your answers with short stories.
- Use the STAR technique to structure your answer for behavioral interview questions.

Situation: Briefly describe the situation you are going to discuss.

Task: Explain the action you had to complete or problem you had to solve.

Action(s): Describe the detailed action(s) you performed, focusing on the skills you used in this situation.

Results: Conclude with details about the positive outcome of your work. What was your takeaway?

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FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Why should we hire you?

Education

- Why did you choose to study at Brown?
- Why did you choose your concentration?
- What courses did you enjoy most/least?
- Describe a major paper/project you completed.
- What is your G.P.A.?

Career Goals

- What are your future career goals?
- What do you see yourself doing in 5 years, 10 years?
- Do you plan to go on to graduate school?

Knowledge of the Organization

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What kind of work environment is comfortable for you?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
- How can you make a contribution to our organization?

Experience

- How does your Brown education or work experience relate to this job?
- Give me an example of your skills in (ie. writing).
- What did you learn from your participation in extracurricular activities?
- What experience do you have working on a team?
- What is the best job you ever had? What made it the best?

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BEHAVIOR - BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavior-based interviewing is built on the premise that past behavior predicts future performance. Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave in an actual situation. Develop short narratives for each question below. Focus on positive outcomes, quantifiable results and qualitative improvements. Use the **STAR** technique described previously.

- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
- Describe a time when you successfully balanced several competing priorities.
- Give an example of a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you didn't agree.
- Tell me about a time when you persuaded team members to do things your way.
- Tell me about a time when you had to handle a difficult situation with a coworker.
- Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation you have had to complete.
- Describe a specific occasion in which you were creative in solving a problem.
- Give an example of a time when you felt you were able to build motivation with your co-workers or peers.
- Talk about a time when you were faced with a difficult decision and describe the outcome.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AN INTERVIEWER

The questions below demonstrate your enthusiasm and interest in an opportunity. Develop additional questions based upon research about the position, the organization and its competitors.

- What are the most important responsibilities of the position?
- What are the priorities over the next year?
- What is the greatest challenge currently facing this department or organization?
- What kind of supervision or training is provided?
- What type of person succeeds in this position? Organization?
- What type of feedback (reviews) can I expect? Frequency?
- How would you describe the organizational culture?
- Tell me about your own experience with this organization. What do you enjoy most/least about working here?
- Why is this position open? What happened to the previous incumbent?
- What is the next step in the interview process? What is your time frame? (You should not leave the interview without getting the answer to this question.)

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TIPS FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- **Location matters** — Find a location that has strong cell service and will be quiet during the call.
- **Find a comfortable position** — When phone interviewing, you should stand or sit. Do not lie down.
- **Limit the paperwork** — Have your resume in front of you, but don't shuffle through papers as you answer questions. Your answers should come naturally.
- **Don't ramble** — Applicants have a tendency to ramble in phone interviews because they have no visual cues that the listener gets their point. Be succinct.
- **Smile** — Although you can't be seen, smiles can be "heard." It's important to come across as pleasant.
- **Vary your pitch** — Most people sound more monotone over the phone than they do in person. Make an effort to sound friendly and engaging by varying the pitch of your voice. If possible, request a video interview so you can take advantage of different types of nonverbal communication.

TIPS FOR VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Prepare your interview space — Make sure you have good internet connection and a clean background. Practice with the video system prior to the interview, if possible.

Dress professionally — Dress as if you were participating in an in-person interview

Make eye contact — Keep camera at eye level and look at the camera, smile

Pre-Recorded Questions:

- Imagine you are having a live conversation
- Don't rush, but be aware of the time limit for each answer
- Try recording yourself to practice