

No matter how good your resume looks or how thorough your job hunt, the most decisive factor in getting the job is the interview. Successful interviewing is a learned skill and with thoughtful preparation and practice, you can interview effectively. The key is preparation and practice - without these, it will be like taking a test for which you have not studied.

Types of Interviews

There are basically two types of interviews: Screening (sometimes called on-campus) and On-Site. Each of these can be formal and structured or casual. Be prepared for both but don't be fooled by a casual atmosphere - you are still being evaluated.

- *Screening*: most screening interviews last from 20 minutes to two hours (30-60 minutes is most typical). These are generally one on one. If you are successful, you will be generally be invited back for an on-site interview.

- *On-Site*: these are usually longer, sometimes lasting an entire day, including lunch. On-site interviews often involve a series of meetings with different interviewers. Find out in advance which type of interview you will have so you can prepare accordingly.

Preparing for the Interview

Preparing and practicing are two key factors in order to convince an employer you are the best candidate. You need to know and be

able to articulate your expertise in four areas:

1. Know Yourself

It will be difficult to effectively articulate your strengths to an employer if you can't articulate them to yourself. Be able to discuss your skills and abilities, education, training, experience and career plans/goals. A common reason recruiters reject applicants is their inability to convey goals, strengths and career objectives. Prepare by listing your top 3-5 strengths and be able to back them up with solid examples. If needed, we can assist you in identifying your strengths and goals.

2. Know Your Career Field

Be able to discuss current trends and newsworthy events in your field. You can begin by researching the career field with materials in the Career Services office. We have books, articles and pamphlets that describe industries and jobs. By reading, you can learn about typical areas of responsibility in a given job field and the qualifications/qualities you will need to succeed. Your research should also include discussions with Oswego State alumni, family and friends, faculty, etc. They can give you an inside view of the industry, describe a typical work day and speak to you from first-hand experience. The Career Services handout "Networking and Informational Interviewing" can assist you in this process.

3. Know the Employer

Understand the company's products and services, history, operations, growth and future prospects as well as any problems of the company. There are many ways to obtain this information:

- Company literature available from the Career Services office;
- Literature available directly from the company - call and ask for brochures, newsletters, annual reports, stock quotes, etc.;
- Alumni who work for the organization;
- Web sites (see our "Internet Research/Job Searching" handout);
- Employer directories and *Job Choices* publications;
- Penfield Library's holdings;
- Newspapers business sections, particularly the NY Times, Wall St. Journal and the local papers at the company sites;
- Related organizations and associations (see "Encyclopedia of Associations" in our Career Library).

4. Know the specific job

Before interviewing, you should have a clear description of the job and required skills. Being willing to "do anything" suggests a lack of preparation, self-knowledge and decisiveness. Again, research is key. Use the Career Services office, alumni, family and friends for more information. You need to be able to demonstrate to the employer why you are qualified for the position.

Before The Interview

- Be certain of the place and time of the interview.
- Arrive 10 minutes early to demonstrate your enthusiasm and punctuality. Late arrivals are almost always inexcusable.
- Know the name and title of interviewer (s).
Bring several copies of your resume.
- Prepare thoughtful questions of your own (see insert).

During the Interview

Typical Questions

The purpose of the interviewer asking you questions is to evaluate: a) how prepared and motivated you are for this job with this company and b) do your qualifications and qualities match organizational needs. Read through the questions on the insert of the handout and think carefully how you would respond to them. Think about the question behind the question. For example, "Why did you decide to enter this career field?" might really be asking "How much thought do you put into major decisions?" "What do you hope to be doing 5 years from now?" might mean "How motivated or driven are you?" Practice is crucial, so prepare general statements and say it out loud over and over again so you get used to talking about yourself in a concise way.

Presentation

A. Nonverbal Communication
this can tell an employer as much

about you as the content of our answers. This component of the interview will not get you the job but it may keep you from receiving an offer. Remember, the following points when interviewing:

• *Posture:*

Your posture is noticed immediately and "speaks" to your attitude about yourself and the interview. Sitting erect and confidently will connote a sense of enthusiasm and professionalism while slouching may connote indifference and a lack of interest.

• *Hands:*

Shake hands firmly - it shows you are confident and professional. If you are prone to using your hands excessively while talking, consider keeping them in your lap. Touching other than a handshake is inappropriate behavior for an interview.

• *Eye Contact:*

Our eyes can be a window to what we are thinking and can be very important for establishing rapport. Look the interviewer in the eye, especially when he/she is talking, but don't get into a staring contest. Use eye contact to "punctuate" your points.

B. Verbal Communication

The interviewer will be making assumptions about your professionalism, experience and communication skills based on the sophistication level of your speech. Don't ramble; say what you need to and then stop. Be articulate!

Avoid filler words such as "um", "uh", "like", "gonna", "ya know", "stuff like that", etc. Think about what you will say before you start talking. Interviewers prefer 5-10 seconds of thoughtful silence rather than 2-3 minutes of rambling. Offer specific examples to back up your strengths - avoid vague statements like "I learned a lot from that job." Do not bad-mouth previous employers. Show enthusiasm for the interviewer's organization. Clearly indicate how much you really want the job.

• *Think of the Interview as a Two-Way Conversation*

You want to gather information about the organization and the organization wants to gather information about you. You are both looking for the best fit. Not all interviewers are experienced so you may have to redirect the interview to help get your message across.

• *Don't Be Afraid of Silence*

Pauses can seem like an eternity during an interview. A pause before answering a question not only gives you a chance to formulate your thoughts, it lets the interviewer know you are thinking. If you are unsure of the question, ask for clarification rather than guessing.

• *Be Yourself and Be Professional*

It is self-defeating to try to portray yourself as someone else, or attempt to fabricate or misrepresent your experiences. In-

interviewers are very good at recognizing these efforts. You will probably not be happy in an organization which does not match your style.

- *Use Examples Whenever Possible*

The best predictor of future success is past behavior. Give interviewers specific examples of your experience as it relates to your strengths and the position for which you are interviewing. For example, you could say "I have good organizational skills." Better yet: "I have good organizational skills. For example, I am the Secretary of the Psychology Club, involved in two intramural teams, tutor students weekly, hold down a part-time job and maintain a 3.2 GPA. Staying organized is the only way I can accomplish so much."

- *Find Out the Next Step*

Will the interviewer get in touch with you? If so, how (phone call, letter, email) and when?

Mock Interviews

Our office can assist you in preparing for interviews by helping you practice. We will video tape an interview with you and a Career Counselor and then review the tape. Students report very significant improvement and a greater sense of confidence after a mock interview. Some students do several until they are truly ready for the "real thing."

After the Interview

As soon as you can, take some time to jot down a few notes about your meeting. This will help you plan your next steps with an employer. Evaluate the interview and your performance. What did you handle well? Poorly? What questions took you by surprise? What didn't you say that you wanted to?

Thank You Letters

You should send a typewritten thank you letter as soon after the interview as possible. It is more than a common courtesy; most applicants do not send them and it will set you apart from the rest of the candidates. Reiterate your interest in the position and how your qualifications can be of value to them. For more information on thank you letters, see our handout "Thank You Notes".

Follow-up Phone Calls

If you do not hear from the interviewer within the designated time, call to follow up. Prepare what you will ask, including "What is the timeline for filling this position?", "Do you need any more materials from me to establish my candidacy?", etc.

Questions Regarding Salary

This is often a "sticky" issue in an interview. If pressed for a salary figure, try to give a range instead of one number. You want to avoid pricing yourself out of the position as well as "lowballing" your salary and not receiving as attractive an offer.

Be prepared; the more you know about salary ranges in your career field, the more effective you will be in salary negotiations. The Career Services office has salary information from the NACE Salary Survey or you can find ranges on professional salaries at (<http://jobsmart.org/tools/salary/sal-prof.htm>).

Reasons for Receiving a Rejection Letter

- Lack of proper career planning, purposes and goals ill defined, needs direction.
- Not well qualified, lacks specific knowledge or skill to perform the job.
- Poor communication skills, rambles, not articulate.
- No real interest in the organization - just shopping around.
- Unwilling to relocate.
- Not prepared for the interview, no research on the organization
- Little interest and enthusiasm, indifferent, bland personality.
- Overbearing, overaggressive, conceited, aloof, assuming.
- Too money conscious. Unrealistic, unwilling to start at bottom.
- No confidence or poise, immature, poor eye contact.
- Poor personal appearance, sloppy dress, lacks sophistication
- Insufficient evidence of achievement.
- Asks no or poor questions about the job, little depth or meaning to questions.
- Employer doesn't really get to know you during the interview.

Questions Often Asked by the Interviewer & Questions You May Want to Ask the Interviewer

Breaking the Ice

- Pottery has always intrigued me. How did you get interested in it?
- I see you are involved in sports. How is your season going?
- This snowfall in September is really something - do you enjoy winter sports?

Personal Assessment

- Tell me about yourself
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- How do you react to criticism?
- How would your best friend describe you?
- What frustrates you (makes you angry)?
- How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?
- Are you a leader or a follower?

Education/Experience

- Why did you decide to attend school at Oswego?
- Why did you major in Chinese Philosophy?
- What courses did you like the most? The least?
- Describe for me the most rewarding accomplishment since you've started college.
- How did you finance your education?
- If you could start college over, what would you do differently?
- Tell me about the most satisfying job you ever held? The least?
- Have you had any work experience related to this position?
- What kind of boss do you prefer?
- What extracurricular activities are you involved in? What have you gained from those experiences?

Career Goals

- Why did you choose this career field?
- What are your long-range and short -range goals?
- What qualities does a successful (manager, teacher, counselor, etc.) possess?
- What are the most important rewards you expect from your career?
- What kind of challenge are you looking for?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What are your ideas on salary?

Organization

- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- In what type of work environment are you most comfortable?
- Why should I hire you?

The Close

- If we invite you to our plant (main office), would you be able to come?
- Is there anything else I should know about you?
- Do you have any other questions?

Specific Questions for Teachers

- What was your student teaching like?
- How do you as a young teacher gain the respect of students?
- What problems did you have student teaching and how did you handle them?
- How would you allow for individual differences in your teaching?
- How would you handle (discipline, cheating, disruptive students, motivation)?
- What is your own philosophy of education?

Behavioral (Example) Based Questions

Interviewers need proof of your experience, skills and strengths. They will demand it through questions designed to find out if you have the core competencies that their organization values. Find out which skills are necessary to do the job and offer specific examples of how you exhibit these skills. Questions could include:

- Give me an example of a time when you used good judgement and logic in solving a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your communication skills to get a point across.
- Give me an example of a goal you reached and the obstacles you had to overcome in reaching that goal.
- Give me an example when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get the job done.
- By examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situation and environments.

Questions You May Want To Ask Interviewer

- Can you give me a detailed job description?
- What personality traits do you consider critical to success in this job?
- Will I be working with a team or on my own?
- What do you consider the five most important day-to-day responsibilities?
- How do you see me complementing the existing group?
- What are the major projects I will be working with in the first six months/year?
- What is the time table for filling this position?
- What other training and development programs exist to help me grow professionally?
- What do you see at the strengths of this department?
- What challenges does this department face in the near/ long term future?
- What does the department hope to achieve in the next two or three years?
- How are market trends such as (fill in the topic) effecting the company's growth?
- What changes are planned for this department, division or facility?