

The Interview

Published by the Career Services Office – Division of Student and Campus Life
SUNY Geneseo Blake A 104 1 College Circle Geneseo, NY 14454
Phone: (585) 245-5721 Fax: (585) 245-5800 Web site: <http://careers.geneseo.edu>

The hard work that you put forth with your resume and cover letter has paid off. Now you have an interview! You have the opportunity to present yourself to an employer and explain why *you* are the *BEST* person for the position. Personal presentation and preparation will determine whether or not you secure the role.

The interview allows you to match your skills, abilities and experiences to the needs of the employer. You should also use the interview to acquire insights and information to determine whether or not this is the right position for you. Interviewing involves a mutual exchange of information, rather than an inquisition or interrogation. Careful and thorough planning for each interview is necessary to present yourself and your qualifications in the most effective manner.

To learn more about what an employer is looking for in a candidate, keep these things in mind. Most employers evaluate a candidate's:

- ✓ **Presentation** (appearance, body language, dress, poise)
- ✓ **Education** (level, type, caliber of institution)
- ✓ **Experience** (type, amount, quality and level of responsibility)
- ✓ **Performance** (grades and evaluations)
- ✓ **Potential for development** (leadership experiences)
- ✓ **Characteristics** (communication skills, work ethic, enthusiasm, teamwork, work habits)

Here are some tips on how you can put your best foot forward in an interview:

Preparation

Self Assessment: Know yourself and what YOU can offer the organization.

- What qualities do you have? (*personality traits*)
- What is important to you? (*values*)
- What working conditions would you like? (*needs*)
- What abilities do you possess? (*skills*)
- What are your aspirations and career directions? (*goals*)

You need to present to the employer confidence in yourself and your abilities. If you have difficulty identifying your strengths in these areas, make an appointment for a mock interview or to speak with a professional in the Career Services Office.

Research: Learn as much as you can about the organization with which you will be interviewing:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| *products and services | * competitors |
| *types of training (if any) | * location of plants/offices/stores |
| *prospects for the future | * company growth |

You can find this information using:

- library resources
- the organization's website
- magazine and newspaper articles
- company literature
- Internet resources
- Hoover's Handbook of American Companies or internet site: <http://www.hoovers.com/>
- www.experienceonline.com
- www.myjobsearch.com

Learn as much as you can about the specific position. This can be accomplished by:

- Reading books and articles about the occupations.
- Attending career panels and fairs.
- Conducting information interviews (discussing occupations with individuals currently employed in the field—find out about Career Services' Career Partners program)
- Acquiring exposure to the field through experience in an internship, externship or service experience.
- Attaining part-time and/or summer employment in your desired career field.

Interview Attire

Men:

- Wear a suit, not a sports coat/slacks (if you can, unless otherwise noted by employer).
- No flashy colors or styles, solid-colored suits work best.
- Polished, clean dark dress shoes and socks; no boots.
- Express your personality through your shirt and tie, but err on the side of conservative.
- Avoid soiled, wrinkled or worn clothing.
- Hair, mustaches and beard should be well trimmed.
- Pay special attention to clean hands and groomed nails.
- No strong colognes or aftershaves.
- Remove piercings before the interview.

Women:

- Neutral colors are best (blues, grays, beiges).
- Skirts should be knee length or below.
- Always wear stockings (opaque in flesh tone or neutral colors). Bare legs are not acceptable.
- Hairstyles should be clean and neat.
- Use make-up moderately.
- Do not overdo the use of jewelry—nothing that dangles or “clinks.” Piercings in places other than your ears should be removed.
- Do not forget to shine shoes and clean fingernails.
- No strong perfumes.

Try not to carry too much to an interview, but do have a padfolio or something presentable in which to write and refer. It is acceptable to use the pad of paper to write your questions for the company. However, do not read from this, simply refer to it. In addition, bring copies of your resume, a list of references, and work samples (a portfolio, if applicable).

A reference list is necessary. Many employers want the names of 3-5 references once you have reached the interview stage. Be sure that you have spoken to each of the references about your job search and keep them informed. When you have accepted a position, be sure to send a thank you note to the people who helped you get there.

On the Day of the Interview

- ✓ Arrive approximately 10 minutes early.
- ✓ Use good communication skills:
 - avoid using slang expressions—“you know” and “like.”
 - maintain good eye contact and watch your body language.
 - listen carefully and respond to the interviewer’s questions.
 - speak in a controlled voice of reasonable volume.
- ✓ Be career-directed; express an interest in the position/career field for which you are interviewing. Summarize your qualifications and interests.
- ✓ Cite examples—avoid yes and no answers, articulate and expound upon statements.
- ✓ Be specific—“I earned 75% of my college expenses.”
- ✓ Silence is golden! If you are not certain how to answer a question, take a moment—think about your response, then express it. You will sound more thoughtful and articulate.
- ✓ If asked about salary, give a range.
- ✓ Be positive—do not talk negatively about former employers.
- ✓ Be polite to all personnel.
- ✓ Ask intelligent questions of the interviewer.
- ✓ Practice interviewing with anyone who is willing (parents, friends, supervisors, faculty, Career Services staff members,...).
- ✓ Project confidence, enthusiasm, sincerity, and commitment.
- ✓ Smile!
- ✓ Follow-up quickly.

During the Interview

1. **Initial Greeting:** The first impression is extremely important. Walk toward the interviewer and firmly shake hands. Make eye contact and introduce yourself.
2. **Ice Breaker:** The interviewer may try to relax you by making small talk. Answer with more than “fine”. Taking the time to talk should help with any nervousness you may have.
3. **Career Interest and Goals:** An interviewer wants to hear a well thought out response and they need to know if your goals correspond with their future needs. They may ask:
 - ✓ Why are you interested in the field?
 - ✓ Why are you interested in the organization?
 - ✓ What are your long-term goals? Where do you see yourself?Note: Try not to say that you are interested “because you want to work with people.” Instead, specifically indicate HOW you want to work with people (i.e. “I enjoy counseling adolescents...”)
4. **Your Qualifications:** The employer will be looking for tangible results or achievements and transferable skills gained through work experiences, internships, community or voluntary involvement, coursework or co-curricular involvements. It is extremely important to provide concrete examples. To prepare for this area of questioning, review the job description and your own resume. Think about how your past experience, accomplishments, and skills demonstrate your ability to perform the necessary job responsibilities.
5. **Organizational Information:** The interviewer will either spend time talking or asking you what you know about the organization. (This is precisely why it is important to research the organization prior to the interview!)

6. **Questions:** Prepare to have at least 10 questions for the interviewer, as employers often judge how interested a person is in the position by how thoughtful their questions are. The interviewer does not want to answer questions relating to what has already been explained in the organization's literature (unless you ask for more specific information). You should have read the information prior to your meeting. Also, it is **not appropriate** to ask questions about salary and benefits in the initial screening interview. *Don't ask a question that you could have learned had you done your homework!*

Topics you might ask about include:

- Types of training
- Skills that are important for this position
- Management style of supervisor
- Specific job responsibilities
- Typical day
- Expectations for position

7. **The Close:** If the interviewer does not tell you what the next step in the selection process will be, ask. Finally, reaffirm your interest in the job/company and reiterate your qualifications for the position. Think about this summary statement prior to the interview. Thank the interviewer for his/her time.

8. **Follow Up:**

Notetaking: If you're interviewing with a number of organizations, jotting down notes immediately after each interview will help you keep track of your experiences. Record your likes, worries, and the next step in the process.

Follow up notes: Do your best to collect business cards; this makes it easier to respond to each person that interviewed you. Follow-up notes should include a thank you for their time and specific information about the interview with them. Also talk about the organization and reiterate why you are interested in them. Finally, should you have forgotten to mention any important aspect of your candidacy, mention it here. These notes can be handwritten or word processed depending on your preference. They should be short and sent within 48 hours of the interview.

Follow-up calls: Keep a list of organizations you have interviewed with and their individual follow-up process. If you have not heard from the organization within the time period indicated by the interviewer, you should telephone to inquire about your status. Have confidence when you call to ask about their decision.

Questions

1. Traditional:

These are questions that you would normally expect during an interview. Be honest and have an answer for each question:

- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- Why did you choose Geneseo/your major?
- What are your short and long term goals?
- Why did you choose this profession?
- Describe yourself.
- Why do you want to work for us?
- How would others describe you?

2. Behavioral

These questions are founded on the premise that your past behavior predicts your future performance. In other words, how you do your job, volunteer experiences, classes, and activities is as important as what you do. You may be asked:

- Describe a situation in which you accomplished something and tell me about it.
- Think of a time when you overcame a difficulty and describe it.
- Tell me about coming up with a solution to a problem.
- Describe how you keep track of everything.
- Talk to me about persuading others to do things your way.

These are questions that require complex answers. Not only do they want a brief outline, but they will typically move on to more probing questions, such as:

- What was your role?
- How did you get involved?
- What were the steps that you took?
- Who else was involved?
- What was the outcome?

3. Technical

These are questions designed to test your knowledge of the career field you are choosing. If you are in a technical field (biology, chemistry, computer science) or are interviewing for a technical position, an employer will want to know specifically what you can do. Be prepared to talk about equipment, lab procedures or software that you are familiar with.

Types of Interviews

Individual - This most common type of interview takes place one-on-one. You will often interview with multiple individuals within the company during your time there.

Group - Many times, an organization will have more than one person interviewing a candidate at the same time. These interviews are not that different from a one-on-one interview in terms of strategies. The one thing to remember is to maintain eye contact with the person who asked the question, but do not forget the others in the room.

Typical Progressions of the Interview Process

First Interview/ Screening: This will give the employer a chance to meet you and determine if you have the necessary skills and qualifications they seek. If distance is a factor, this may be done over the phone.

Telephone interviews need to be taken as seriously as an in person interview. To prepare, consider dressing as if you were going to an interview. It may help to increase your feeling of professionalism during your discussion with an employer. Also, be sure to research the organization and send a follow-up note to the person who took the time to interview. Many of the questions in a telephone interview will be the same as an in-person, so be ready.

Second Interview: This more in-depth format is offered to candidates who are a good match and/or fit with the organization. Receiving an invitation to a second interview is an honor that you should be proud of, but it is not a job offer! To get that, you'll need to be prepared—do more research regarding the company and the open position. They will want more specific information about you and what you can bring to their organization. If you can do all of this with professionalism and confidence, you are sure to become a top candidate for the job.

Things to look for when you visit the organization:

While on the visit or tour, you should be looking at the physical environment and compensation package, but also at the human element and work atmosphere.

- Do the people seem happy? Tense? Overworked?
- Do they honestly seem glad to meet you...to welcome you?
- Do they seem to be challenged? Bored?
- Are they genuinely enthusiastic about the organization? About their job?
- Do you feel comfortable in the environment you see?
- Do you like the people? The facility? The management style?
- Are your questions being answered honestly (as far as you can determine)?
- Are you receiving conflicting responses?
- Does it seem like a good place to work?

Handling Inappropriate Questions

It is important to recognize that federal legislation prohibits interviewers from using information gained through asking illegal questions to make hiring decisions. Examples include (but are not limited to) questions concerning age, color, creed, disability, marital status, national origin, race, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status as either disabled or of the Vietnam era. Employers cannot exclude individuals from employment consideration solely on the basis of any factors listed above. If asked an inappropriate (illegal) question, you will need to make a personal decision on how to respond. Regardless of how you choose to respond, it should be done tactfully and politely.

You have three options:

- ✓ Answer the illegal question. (Be aware that it may provide them with information they may use to discriminate against you.)
- ✓ Alert the interviewer to the illegal question. (This response could signal that you are uncooperative, so be careful.)
- ✓ Confront the underlying concern and address it in your answer. (This is probably the safest way to answer an illegal question, however you have to guess their intent. For example, they may ask if you are a U.S. citizen. You can then respond with, "I am authorized to work in the United States.")

Please contact the Career Services Office if you feel that you were asked an inappropriate question or discriminated against based upon your response to an illegal question.

Reimbursement of Expenses

Often organizations offer to reimburse your expenses for on-site interviews. These expenses usually include transportation, lodging, and food costs. Obtain receipts for all expenses you incur. If you drive, indicate your round trip mileage. Reimbursement policies vary from organization to organization. Some companies make travel arrangements for you, but often you will be responsible for taking care of them yourself. If you are unsure about expenses to be reimbursed, you should clarify before visiting.

The Job Offer

Acknowledgment of Job Offer: After an offer from an employer has been extended, it is important to acknowledge receipt of the offer. The letter should:

- ✓ Indicate the receipt of the offer letter and re-state the terms: position, title, and salary.
- ✓ Reaffirm your interest in the position.
- ✓ Provide a date by which you will contact the employer with your decision.

Note: **Do not** ask for a delay of more than 1 week.

Acceptance of Job Offer: Use this letter to formally accept a job offer, even if you have accepted over the telephone. This should be done as soon as you have made the decision to accept the job. The letter should convey the positive feelings about the job and your future with the new employer. Include the following elements:

- ✓ Indicate the date of receipt of letter or phone call.
- ✓ State position that was offered.
- ✓ State salary level at which you are accepting the position.
- ✓ Confirm the starting date.

Note: It is courteous to express personal thanks to particular people who were especially helpful during the interview process. Also, indicate any change of address that will occur before you start your job.

Rejection of Job Offer: Not all job offers will suit your career goals, needs, or interests. In the event you are offered a job you cannot or will not accept, it is necessary to write a careful and thoughtful letter of rejection. The letter should accomplish three things:

- ✓ Extend your thanks for their consideration and offer.
- ✓ Explain your thoughtful deliberation of the position.
- ✓ Express your decision to decline their offer.

Questions Interviewers/Recruiters May Ask

The purpose of an interview is for the interviewer to find out about you, the prospective employee. The employer wants to know about you to make a decision about hiring; you want the employer to know you to make the decision favorable. Two types of questions you may be asked are *traditional* and *behavioral*. Formulating your answers to the questions below in advance will help you express yourself in the most accurate and positive manner.

Remember, nothing beats proper preparation.

Typical Questions

1. Why should I hire you?
2. What are your long- and short-range goals and objectives; when and why did you establish these goals; how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
3. What are the most important rewards you expect to receive in your career?
4. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
5. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
6. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
7. How would you describe yourself?
8. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
9. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
10. How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
11. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful?
12. What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
13. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
14. Why did you select your college or university?
15. What led you to choose your field of major study?
16. What college subjects did you like the best? Why?
17. What college subjects did you like the least? Why?
18. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
19. Do you think grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
20. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
21. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
22. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
23. Why did you decide to seek a position with us?
24. What do you know about our organization?
25. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
26. What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
27. Are you willing to travel?

Behavioral Questions

1. Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a research paper. What was the topic? What journals did you read?
2. Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker or a classmate criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has the event shaped the way you communicate with others?
3. Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do?
4. Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your professor or supervisor an idea or concept. How did you proceed? What was the result?
5. Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines?
6. Tell me about a time you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company or class was facing. What was the challenge? What roles did others play?
7. What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in building and maintaining successful business relationships? Give me examples of how you've made these work.
8. Describe a time when you got co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?
9. Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?
10. Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play?

Questions You May Ask

1. Do employees have the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns?
2. What is the rate of employee turnover?
3. Why is the position open?
4. Does the job require much travel?
5. What are the chances of being relocated after starting the job?
6. How often are performance reviews given?
7. Who determines raises and promotions and how?
8. What would be my primary responsibilities?
9. What would I be expected to accomplish in the first six months on the job? In my first year?
10. What are some of the department's special projects?
11. What do you like best/least about working for this department/company?
12. Can you describe a typical workday in the department?
13. Do you feel free to express your ideas and concerns here?
14. What are the possibilities for professional growth and promotion?
15. How much interaction do you have with superiors, colleagues, and customers?
16. Do you have much of an opportunity to work independently?
17. How long have you been with the company? Does your future here seem secure?