

10 Steps to Acing the Interview

Before an Interview

1. **Research the organization**
 - Know who is interviewing you (and their position within the company)
 - Research the company and what they do
 - Know who the key players in that company
 - Use the company website to get a general feel for the company overall
2. **Review your resume**
 - Make sure you can expand on anything written on your resume
 - Print extra copies (2-3) of your resume and bring to your interview
3. **Practice answering potential interview questions**
 - Use this packet to begin thinking about the interview
 - Use a mirror, friend or a career counselor to practice your interview skills
 - Participate in Mock Interview Day
4. **Prepare a list of questions for the employer**
 - Always be prepared to ask questions of the employer
 - Think of questions that you want the answers to and will help you to learn more

The Day of the Interview

5. **Dress and adjust your attitude for success**
 - Be positive and have a professional attitude walking into the interview
 - Dress according to the style dictated by your field
6. **Manage your time effectively**
 - Be sure to arrive 10-15 minutes early
 - Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the interview
 - Be sure to have change in case you need to pay a parking meter
 - If you have a morning interview get things together the night before

During the Interview

7. **Follow the lead of the interviewer**
 - The interviewer will guide the interview, follow their lead
 - Be sure to answer questions fully and concisely
8. **Determine the next step**
 - Ask about their hiring decision process

After the Interview

9. **Analyze the interview**
 - Think of the strengths and possible weaknesses of the interview
 - Consider things discussed in the interview and whether this is a position in which you are truly interested
10. **Follow up**
 - Always follow up with a Thank You note to the interviewer

What Happens During the Interview?

The typical interview will last 30 minutes, although some may be longer, A typical structure is as follows:

- Five minutes: Small talk
- Fifteen minutes: A mutual discussion of your background as they relate to the position
- Five minutes: Your turn to ask questions of the interviewer
- Five minutes: Conclusion of interview

Important Things to Keep in Mind

SELLING YOURSELF

The four categories of SELLING YOURSELF are:

- **Enthusiasm**: show your interest for a position with both verbal and non-verbal expressions
- **Sincerity**: Be genuine in your communication with the prospective employer
- **Tact**: Be sensitive to others and remain professional at all times
- **Courtesy**: Please, Thank-Yous, and a warm greeting will go a long way

COMMUNICATING

Use a relaxed, conversational style. Show enthusiastic, positive energy. Come across as someone willing to pitch in and do anything to help the organization. Decide three major points you want them to remember about you.

Include the following:

- Skills, talents, education and credentials
- 2 or 3 accomplishments that are relevant to the position
- Mention themes running through your school and work choices
- Mention 3 - 6 personality traits or values (i.e. team-player, organized, self-starter)
- Mention relevant work experience
- Summarize: "You should hire me because I can benefit you in the following ways..."

Dress to Impress

You Only Have ONE chance to make a FIRST Impression

- **First Impressions** count!!
 - As first impressions are vital in how we are treated and how we are remembered
 - It is important to dress appropriately for the interview
- One of the first things the interviewer will pick up on is **dress**
 - Keep in Mind: Your dress shows your respect for the organization. Professional attire is always recommended (i.e. a dark suit or business casual dress)

For Some Helpful Hints and Pictures see Northern Michigan University's Website:

<http://jobsearch.nmu.edu/students/articles/dress/index.php>

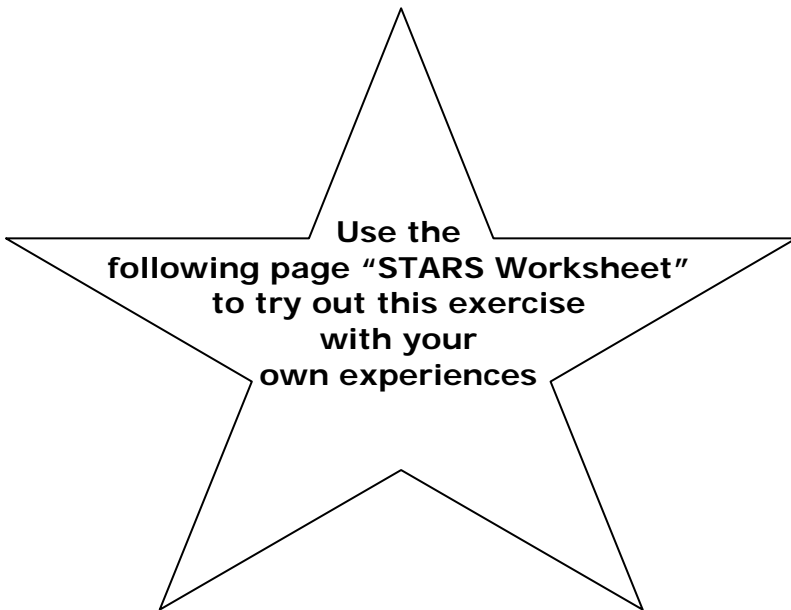
Some general rules to remember include:

- Avoid wearing bold prints and bright colors
- Avoid using excessive make-up, jewelry, perfumes or colognes
- Wear dark colors and pinstripes to convey authority
- Wear light colors to convey warmth and creativity

[STAR(s) Method... For Answering Interview Questions]

The best approach to preparing for interview questions is to apply the STAR(s) method to construct your "Success Stories". "Success Stories" are examples from your work, school or life experience when you demonstrated initiative, leadership or teamwork skills to solve a problem or make a decision.

- Situation:** State the situation and your role clearly and concisely.
 "Both cashiers called in sick and I was asked if I would handle the cash register even though I had not been trained in its use."
- Task:** Display the task or tasks and the time frame or setting.
 "I agreed and was assigned to the cash register for the entire day"
- Action:** Explain your actions, framed in the context of the situation.
 "I had a very brief emergency training session from the manager and handled all sales until the evening cashier came in."
- Result:** Explain the result and its benefit.
 "When they corrupted the totals at the end of the day, they found that I hadn't made any errors. The manager was impressed and eventually moved me from the stock room to the cashier's desk."



STARS Worksheet

S (SITUATION: The organization; it's climate; how big, interesting or otherwise impressive; timing; interpersonal situations, "This is what was happening—this was the situation where I worked...")

T (TASK: The objective, assignment or problem to be solved)

A (ACTION: How YOU accomplished the task)

R (RESULTS: Use numbers, what the result means for the organization or for you)

(S) (Success Story)

Types of Questions

Open ended Questions:

- Explorative questions
- These questions ask: who, where, what, when, how.
 - Example: What is your experience with the media field?
- Allows the interviewee (YOU!) the chance to elaborate on experiences
- You can answer the question in whichever direction you choose—but make sure you answer the question being asked

Closed ended Questions:

- This kind of questions is usually asked to ascertain facts
- These questions require one word answers
- These are the possible answers to this kind of question: yes, no, maybe, I don't know.
- It leaves no room to negotiate an answer.
 - Example: Do you speak Spanish?
- Questions of this type speed up the interview process. However, in some cases you can work to turn the question around to create an open ended answer
 - Example: "Although I am not fluent in Spanish, I am enrolled in a Spanish course now and plan to continue my language studies at Pepperdine."

Rhetorical/Leading Questions:

- These are the "tough" questions
- This question answers itself but is simply looking for your confirmation
 - Ex) "I think that you also agree that we need to cut down costs, right?"
- Be careful to not get trapped in these types of questions
- Allow yourself the option of answering this question in an open-ended way
 - Ex) "In many situations it is best to cut down costs when its possible to do so"

Questions probing Alternatives:

- Interviewee may choose between two or more alternatives offered by the Interviewer
 - Example: Do you prefer to work independently or with a group?
- When answering these questions its best to be honest—and if you like both, state that

Knowledge and Experience Questions:

- These questions seek to better understand your background and experience
- Examples of experience questions are:
 - What have you learned from your job at Pepperdine?
 - What do you know about our company?
 - What important trends do you see in this industry?

Small Talk Questions

- These are typically used as an icebreaker at the start of an interview
- Speak up! There is always something to talk about
- However, you should avoid speaking about controversial topics (i.e. Politics)
- Examples:
 - I noticed on your resume that you write for *The Graphic*, how did you get involved in that?
 - What made you decide to attend Pepperdine University?

Stress Questions:

- Questions of this kind are targeted to see how you handle stressful circumstances
- These questions not only focus on your response but also on the personality and behavioral traits you display when in a stressful situation
- Examples of this kind of questions are:
 - Why are you still looking for a job and have not found one yet?
 - How long will it take you to make a really meaningful contribution to our organization?
 - Your résumé suggests that you are under-qualified for this position. Why should I hire you?
 - Would you be willing to start at a lower salary level because of your inexperience?

Helpful Hints for Tough Questions:

- Remain calm and consider what the employer is looking for
- Slow the process down by taking a deep breath
- Answer the question by stating facts
- Be confident in what you have to offer
- Restate your competence in your field

Illegal Questions:

- It is not legal for employers to ask questions focusing on the following biases: Race, color, age, sex, marital status, religion, nationality and disability
- Examples:
 - How old are you?
 - Are you married?
 - What is your native language?
 - What are your religious beliefs?
 - Do you live with your parents?

<u>Behavioral Interviewing:</u>
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Behavioral interviewing is a style of interviewing that suggests that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. Recruiting interviewers often attempt to learn about a candidate's personality and work ethic by including in their interviews several performance-related questions like:

- Describe a situation where you had to be flexible
- Describe a teamwork situation when you had to do more than your share
- What was the toughest decision you had to make in the last six months?

The best approach to way to answer these questions is to prepare your "Success Story" before the interview. "Success Stories" are examples from your work, school or life experience when you demonstrated initiative, leadership or teamwork skills to solve a problem or make a decision. Try using the "STAR" method (on pages 3-4) to create your "Success Story."

Common Interview Questions and Answers:

- Q. Tell me about yourself.
A. List 3-5 things you want them to know about you. Support these with concrete examples from your past.
- Q. Why do you want this job?
A. Demonstrate your motivation for the job and what you will contribute to the organization.
- Q. What do you consider to be your greatest strength?
A. Support your response with examples. If you have a few areas where you are strong-- use the one most relevant to the position of interest.
- Q. What is your greatest weakness?
A. Explain how you manage this.
- Q. Tell me about a time where you experience failure.
A. Give your example and then explain/show that you learned something from the experience.
- Q. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor, supervisor or co-worker?
A. Avoid talking negative about that other person or situation and instead address how you handled the situation and what you took away from the experience.\
- Q. What have you learned from previous work or internships?
A. Relate what you have learned to the job of interest. Explain how your past experiences will benefit you in this position.
- Q. Tell me about a time when you juggled multiple tasks.
A. Address time-management, setting priorities and follow-through.

Adapted from "Questions Asked by Employers" (Cal Poly Pomona)

It's Your Turn to Ask Questions

When the interviewer asks, "Now do you have any questions?" it's important to have a few ready.

Questions you SHOULD ask

- Ask specific questions about the position. You need to know what duties will be required of the person in the position to see if there is a fit between your interests and qualifications and the job you seek.
- Try to find out as much as possible about qualities and skills the employer is looking for in job candidates
- Once you determine the necessary qualities, you can then explain to the employer how your background and capabilities relate to those qualities.
- Ask questions concerning advancement and promotion paths available. Every company is different and most advancement policies are unique. Try to find out what the possible promotion path is to see if it fits your career goals. You may also want to ask about periodic performance evaluations.
- It is appropriate to ask specific questions about the company's training program if this information is not covered in company literature.
- Ask questions about location and travel required. If you have limitations, this is the time to find out what is expected in the position.

Practice Makes Perfect

PRACTICE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Check your tone of voice
- Avoid: "like," "um," "uh," "okay," and "you know"
- Use correct grammar and vocabulary
- Check your non-verbal communication: posture, facial expressions, eye contact and nervous mannerisms (i.e. playing with your hair)

PRACTICE TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF

- Get comfortable with you as the main topic! For some people who are naturally shy or less inclined to talk about themselves this will take practice. But, if you don't sell yourself- who will?
- Stating the facts is not boasting!
- Practice stating your selling points, with emphasis and enthusiasm
- Practice relaxation techniques.

PRACTICE INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

- Practice restating complex questions and clarifying before answering
- Practice pausing before answering
- Practice answers to questions on the following pages and study questions you may want to ask
- Practice emphasizing positive aspects of your experience. Learn how to avoid any negative comments
- Practice anticipating concerns the employer may have about your qualifications and consider your response
- Set up a mock interview with a Career Counselor

Phone Interview Tips

Phone interviews should be considered the same as an in-person interview. Prepare yourself in the areas addressed earlier in this packet. In addition to these key ideas, consider the following information to help you prepare and succeed in your phone interview.

Before the Interview

- **Dress up**—even though the person on the other end of the phone may not be able to see you, dressing for the interview will help put you in the right frame of mind.
- **Have your materials nearby**—Have a copy of **your resume**, the **job description**, **company information** and other relevant materials in front of you. This will help you to cover key points. Additionally, keep a **notebook** handy to write down notes during the interview.
- **Prepare yourself**—for many organizations the phone interview may be the first step in making a hiring decision. Do your best to prepare for the interview by researching the organization, re-reading the job description, knowing the name and position of the interviewer and preparing yourself using the STAR method so you can easily share your “success stories.”

During the Interview

- Find a **quite space** where you will not be disturbed by noise or interruptions. If you live with a roommate it may be helpful to alert them of your interview.
- **Smile**—believe it or not a smile can be heard across the phone. Smiling during your interview can help you maintain a **positive and professional** attitude. If you think you may have trouble remembering to do this, place a mirror near you during your interview.
- **Speak slowly and clearly**—since you will not have the interviewer sitting in front of you it is important to pace yourself and speak clearly enough for the interviewer to follow your responses.
- **Sit up straight or stand**—this will give you access to your full lung capacity—which in turn allows you to speak clearly
- **Listen**—since you will not be able to pick up on visual (non-verbal) cues it is important to make sure you listen and follow the lead of the interviewer. Often times its easy to talk too much during the phone interview, so answer the question and then pause to allow the interviewer a chance to follow-up.

After the Interview

- **Follow up**-- Always thank the employer/interviewer for their time. Be sure you have their correct mailing or email address to send your thank you note. Use our follow-up guide to help you through this process