

Interviewing Strategies & Techniques



INTERVIEWING

A job interview is similar in many ways to a social conversation yet it requires more than just conversational skills. How well you do in a job interview will depend on how well you can articulate your accomplishments and qualifications as they relate to what the agency/hiring manager wants and needs.

First, you will need to have a good understanding of the different types of interviews you could encounter and how to approach each one.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Screening:

These interviews are usually conducted over the phone with an HR or search firm recruiter. They seek to verify your skills and experience related to the position and the information on your resume. Once you have passed this first test, you will be scheduled for a second interview with either a panel or the hiring manager. *Complete the Interviewing Preparation Worksheet and the Interviewing Preparation Matrix. Ensure you can articulate well everything on your resume.*

Panel:

These are interviews conducted by two or more interviewers. Most agencies at the State utilize panel interviews. Many times the panel is the team or group of coworkers you will be working with if you are hired, so there is a lot at stake in the panel selecting the right person. The panel is looking for skills and experience the team or department needs going forward. They are also looking for fit, especially a cultural fit. Additionally, they will be looking for how the candidate approaches projects and tasks. Candidates should be clear on how their skills, experience, and accomplishments match the job requirements.

Behavioral Interview:

Many organizations use behavioral interviewing today. It provides the interviewer/s with how candidates have performed, acted, accomplished tasks, or handled situations in the past. Since past performance is the best predictor of future performance, the behavioral approach is the most widely used interviewing strategy. Some interviewers will create scenarios to identify how you work under pressure, such as: dealing with an irate customer, deadlines, and issues with coworkers, or difficult projects. A sample behavioral interview question might be, "Describe a time when you had a conflict with a coworker and how you resolved it.

Candidates' accomplishments are excellent answers for most behavior questions.

Hiring Manager:

The hiring manager is usually the decision maker, so you will want to be very prepared for the interview. The hiring manager is looking for a good match with the skills and experience that is required in the job. He/she is also looking for a good personal/cultural fit, as well as a money (salary) fit. If you are too expensive...your



current or required salary is too high, they may move onto someone that better fits their budget.

Stamp of Approval:

Once the hiring manager has made his/her decision, they may ask you to meet with their superior for a final o.k. This is typically a brief interview; however, one the interviewee still needs to be prepared for. Prepare in the same manner you have in the previous interviews. Even though the decision may have already been made, the hiring manager's manager could squelch the deal if something goes awry.

Beauty Parade or Sequential Interviews:

The candidates are paraded in front of a series of people usually all in one day. The sequence can be the chain of authority, hiring manager, or team members who have a stake in the hiring decision. The key to acing the sequential interviews is to consider each interviewer as the most important one. Prepare for each interviewer by anticipating what kinds of questions he/she might ask based on their position and occupation. Remember, you may be asked the same questions over and over again, so always answer with enthusiasm. Try to relate your experience to something that would be of help to the person you are interviewing with.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

The key to getting an offer is to be the best candidate and the best candidates are the best prepared; therefore, the most important part of the interview is concluded before the interview even begins, **preparation**. Preparation is the key to success and it starts well before you ever arrive at the interview session.

Overall, recruiters and hiring managers are looking for **"Fit"**. The three areas they are looking for fit include: skills and experience fit, cultural fit, and salary/compensation fit. You will need to be able to answer questions that reflect your fit for the job in these three areas. To be able to articulate how well you are a "Fit", you should prepare by completing the following exercises and utilizing the remainder of the interviewing guide.

Understand the position

It is important to know what the hiring authority is seeking in a candidate. Review the job posting for requirements and job description. Job descriptions and requirements should be a good indication of the scope and responsibilities of the position; however, there is usually much more information if you can research further. To gather additional information you can use your network to discover needs, requirements and desires not listed in the job description. Try to talk with someone who is already working there to gain an "inside" perspective.

Know the agency, board or commission

It is important to show you have researched the Agency or department. This emphasizes your enthusiasm for the position and shows you take initiative in gathering information. Again you can network or talk to someone who works there or use the internet for further information regarding the business, future projects, current challenges, and history.



Know yourself

Know why you are the best candidate for the position. Brainstorm at least 5 reasons why you are good fit, and then prepare examples that illustrate your reasons. See page 3 for instructions.

Complete the Interview Preparation Matrix

Complete the Interview Preparation Matrix. This will provide you with detailed information regarding your matching skills, experience, and associated accomplishments. See page 4 for Matrix.

Develop 10 Stories – then Practice, Practice, Practice

The best way to ensure a successful interview is to practice. Practice the answers to commonly asked questions and behavioral interview questions. Develop 10 stories related to your past experiences that can help “prove” to the interviewers that you have been successful in previous job, and you will be successful in this one. Stories should cover such areas as your technical expertise, customer service, relationships with supervisors and colleagues, etc.

Schedule and complete a mock interview session here at the Career Center. Practice will allow you to go into the interview session with confidence!



INTERVIEW PREPARATION WORKSHEET

List 5 reasons why you are the best candidate and give examples for each reason.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

NEXT STEPS

Recruiters and hiring managers are looking for a good “**Fit**” in a candidate. Specifically, they are looking for “**Fit**” in three areas: skills and experience fit, cultural fit, and salary or total compensation fit. So, you will need to be able to answer questions that reflect your fit for the job in these three areas. On the following page, there is an **Interviewing Preparation Matrix** that will assist you in clearly understanding your fit for a particular position and prepare for answering questions regarding each requirement for the job.



INTERVIEW PREPARATION MATRIX

Position Requirements (list all major requirements)	Matching Skills & Experience	Accomplishments

THE MOST COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself?

Although this seems like an innocent question with a simple answer, it is really a great opportunity for you to position yourself as the best candidate. You have been given a clean, blank canvas and can paint any picture you want. So, what picture do you paint?

You want to provide an overview of your background that is related to the requirements of the job. This could include the industries, job functions, areas of expertise, competencies and of course accomplishments. This should be a 90 second to 2 minute answer and should be concise with key areas related to the position.

What are your weaknesses?

This is the one of the most difficult questions for interviewees. You should minimize your weakness and emphasize your strengths. Focus on professional traits vs. personal qualities: "I am always working on improving my communication skills to be a more effective presenter. I recently joined Toastmasters, which I find very helpful."

You should NOT use a weakness that is a core competency of the position for which you are interviewing. Choose something true, something that you have made progress improving and one that does not raise questions about your ability to perform very well in the position.

You might approach the answer like, "Early on in my career, I had difficulty with presentation skills. I took several seminars on effective presentation and communications skills, as well as joining Toastmasters and now I see it as a strength."

Why should we hire you?

Summarize your experiences: You should provide an overview of your experience matching the requirements of the job. You might begin with your professional title, industry experience, work functions and some of the things you were able to accomplish. You might discuss your proven track record of saving the company money, or what a difference you made in your previous positions adding, "I'm confident I would be a great addition to your team."

Why do you want to work here?

The interviewer wants to know that you are interested in their agency and are not sending out resumes indiscriminately. For example, "I've selected agencies whose mission statements are in line with my values, where I know I could be excited about what the agency does, and your agency is very high on my list." Additionally, you want to discuss what you know about the agency's history, their current issues and how you can assist them in achieving their goals.

What are your goals?

Sometimes it's best to talk about short-term and intermediate goals since it might be difficult to discuss your distant goals. For example, "My immediate goal is to get a job in accounting where I can contribute to the goals of the organization. My long-term goal will depend on the direction and objectives of the agency; I would like to grow with them. I hope to eventually grow into a position of responsibility." Or, I would like to become



successful and productive in my new position at ABC, and eventually take on additional roles and responsibilities in the area of xyz.

Why did you leave (are you leaving) your job?

If you are employed, focus on what you want in your next job: “After two years, I made the decision to look for a place that is team-focused, where I can add my experience.” You can even give specifics about people you know in that organization that have impressed you.

You may also state that you are looking for an opportunity to grow or advance in a certain area or field and you believe this job would allow you that opportunity.

If you're unemployed, state your reason for leaving in a positive manner: “I managed to survive two rounds of downsizing, but the third round was a 20 percent reduction in the workforce, which included me.” Or, “As you might be aware, XYZ is in a serious budget crunch and many of the agencies have been asked to consolidate their operations. My agency was one of those and as a consequence, my position was eliminated. Be positive and excited about your next position and state that you are confident you will be a valued asset to your next company.

When were you most satisfied in your job?

The interviewer wants to know what motivates you. If you can relate an example of a job or project when you were excited, the interviewer will get an idea of your preferences. “I was very satisfied in my last job, because I worked directly with the customers and their issues; that is an important part of the job for me.”

What can you do for us that other candidates can't?

What makes you unique? This will take an assessment of your experiences, skills and traits. Summarize concisely: “I have a unique combination of strong technical skills, and the ability to build strong customer relationships. This allows me to use my knowledge and break down information to be more user-friendly.” You can add a few of your accomplishments, i.e. times when you have made a difference or solved a problem and summarize that you are confident you can add value to the team.

It might be important to talk about problems/issues/initiatives you know about (ones that you found in your research) and specifically how you would solve/handle/work them.

What are your strengths?

If you have completed the Self-assessment Guide, you should be very clear on what your strengths and major competencies are. If you have not, you will want to complete some assessments that will provide you that clarity. Regarding the interview question, you should articulate three of your strengths that are directly related to the major competencies of the position for which you are interviewing and be able to back them up with an accomplishment.

What are three positive things your last supervisor would say about you?

You might want to review your old performance appraisals and boss's comments. This is a great way to brag about yourself through someone else's words: “My supervisor has told me I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can rely on me, and he likes my sense of humor.”



What salary are you seeking?

Some job positions list a range, prepare by knowing your bottom line or walk-away point. One possible answer would be: "I am sure you pay competitively. I am willing to accept any fair and equitable offer. Then ask the interviewer: In what range do you typically pay someone with my background?" If pressed, provide a \$10-15k range based on your research of what this position pays in the marketplace. You can research salaries on www.salary.com at no charge. Every position at the State is assigned a grade and a salary range. You can look up that information on the Statewide HR website: <http://www.hr.az.gov/>

Additional Money Questions & Answers

There are many ways to approach each money question. The following are examples that will assist you in identifying the right approach for your situation.

How much money are you looking for/do you require? It is not how much you require, but how much you are worth and how much the position is worth. You need to understand your worth in the market and adjust according to the roles and responsibilities of the position.

1. "Salary is important of course, but I am looking at the whole package. I am sure that if we decide that this is a win-win situation, we will be able to come to agreeable terms."
2. "I am sure you pay competitive wages; I am willing to fit into your salary range. Do you have an established salary range for this position?"
3. "I am confident that you will pay a competitive salary for this position. I am willing to accept any fair and equitable offer. "
4. "Salary is negotiable. I am not sure I know enough about the position to make a salary determination. Maybe we could discuss in more detail the roles and responsibilities of the position, and I can assess a fair market value for the job."

How much did you make in your last position? It is not how much you made in your last position, but what you are worth and what the position is worth.

1. "XYZ company paid competitive wages as I'm sure you do. I would like to be paid according to the responsibilities of the position, so I am willing to fit into your salary range and compensation package. What salary do you have in mind?"
Or,
2. "XYZ company paid competitive wages as I'm sure you do. I will accept any fair and equitable offer. "
3. "This position is somewhat different than my last position at XYZ company. I would like to be paid according to the roles and responsibilities of the position. Maybe you could share with me what salary range and package you have in mind."

I need to know what salary you are expecting. You should always be prepare to answer with a range.

1. "In researching similar jobs, I found that the industry averages between ____ and ____."
(use \$20-30k range).
2. "I am talking to other people about salary ranges between ____ and ____."



BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Behavior-based interviewing is based on the idea that your *past behavior is the best predictor of you future behavior*. These types of questions are presented in phrases like “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me a situation where you....” Interviewers want to hear about skills, functions or knowledge you have that relates to the position you are applying for. In a survey done in 1996, 64% of responding employers stated they use some form of behavioral interviewing.

When answering behavior-based questions think of situations or examples from your past experience that illustrate the skill or qualification the interviewer is asking about. Use the **STAR** technique to answer these questions.

S = State the situation

T = What was the task at hand

A = What was the action you took

R = What was the result of the situation or your action

This techniques helps to keep you focused and ensures complete information was provided. Remember, your goal is to help your interviewer, by your stories and accomplishments, “see” you performing their job.

Before you go into the interview, identify the 3-4 main skills that are required for the position. Then identify examples from your past that illustrate that you have those skills.

Dimensions that are explored with behavioral based question.

Oral Communication Skills:

- Tell me about the time when you prepared and presented an oral program.
- Give an example of a time when you had to use your verbal communication skills in order to clarify a point or resolve a situation

Written Communication Skills:

- Describe the most significant written document/report/article you have had to complete
- Tell me about your most enjoyable and least enjoyable written documents you have had to produce.

Interpersonal Skills:

- Describe a time when you had to modify your behavior in order to interact effectively with someone else
- Tell me about a time when you helped to motivate co-worker or subordinates.

Leadership Skills:

- Tell me about a specific role you held, what was your management style, did you modify your behavior based upon team members, what was the purpose of the team, what action was taken and what were the results?
- Describe a time when you had to influence the actions of others for a desired outcome.



Analytical/Technical:

- Give me an example of a problem you faced at work and how you resolved it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your fact-finding skills to gain information regarding a problem. How did you analyzed this problem and find a solution?
- Describe the most creative problem solving techniques you have used.

Flexibility/Adaptability:

- Tell me about the most difficult work transition you have had to make.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to change to adapt in the workplace.
- How have you positively changed in the workplace to adapt to your colleagues or supervisor?

Organizational and Planning Skills:

- Give an example of when you had to plan or organize a long-term project.
- Give an example of when you have used your organizational skills to improve your department or area.

Initiative:

- Give an example of when you took the initiative to suggest improvements to a process or area. What happened?
- Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.

Motivation:

- Give me an example of an important goal you set for yourself and how successful you were in reaching it.
- Tell me about a challenge you have faced in the past and how you resolved it.

The most important part of interviewing is knowing who you are and what you have to offer. This means that to be successful in an interview, you must assess and identify your skills and qualifications; understand you values and personality so you can understand the environment the best suites your work style and preferences.

Secondly, know what the agency or division wants. What kind of skills do they need for the position, what is the department personality like (culture), how do the people in that department describe their own area. Remember, YOU are the answer to their problem! They are filling this position because they have a need! You must effectively communicate that if they hire you, life will be better for them!

Utilize questions in your interview – make the interview a conversation. For example, if the interviewer asks, “What type of software experience do you have? you might reply, “I’m proficient with Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Flash. What types of programs do you use here?” This technique of answering the questions and then asking a question will yield valuable information for you to continue to market your skills through the rest of the interview.



SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

1. Why is the position open?
2. What are the roles and responsibilities of this position?
3. To whom would I report?
4. Who would I supervise? How many direct/indirect reports?
5. What are some of the objectives you would like accomplished in the next two or three months?
6. What is most pressing? What objectives or standards would I be expected to meet or exceed?
7. What are the challenges a person would face in the first 3-6 months? What are the main issues that need attention in this position?
8. What are you personally looking for in a successful candidate? What capabilities do you feel are more important?
9. Six months from now/a year from now, how will you know you have hired the right person?
10. What significant changes do you foresee in the company/agency?
11. How is one evaluated? What accounts for success?
12. What are the critical factors for success in this position?
13. Where do you see the department going in the next few years?
14. How would you describe your management style?
15. How would you describe the organizational culture?
16. What are the next steps in the process? When can I expect to hear from someone regarding my candidacy?



DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Start off like a winner. Offer your hand, and give a firm handshake, a pleasant smile and a positive confident attitude. Introduce yourself. Remember, the SMILE is the best indicator of self-confidence in an interview!
- Be comfortable. Take a seat facing the interviewer, however, slightly off center. Be sure you are not facing into direct sunlight or some other uncomfortable situation.
- Listen attentively. Look at the interviewer directly, but don't get into a stare down! Sit up straight. Try to relax. It is okay to take a few notes if the questions are lengthy, or you need to remind yourself of something you want to stress. But in general, note taking is not recommended as it will break the eye contact that you need to maintain with your interviewer.
- Avoid nervous mannerisms. Pay attention to nervous mannerisms you might have such as clicking your pen, jingling change in your pocket, twisting your hair, biting your nails, moving side to side in your chair. Control these impulses! Everyone is nervous to some extent. The key is to appear calm and collected.
- Speak clearly. Use good grammar and a friendly tone. Never answer just "yes" or "no" to a question. Always clarify, expand on your answers. Be sure not to ramble on. "Check in" with your interviewer if you feel yourself rambling. Ask, "Does that answer your question?" or "Do you need more information on that?"
- Be positive and enthusiastic. You want to outshine all other candidates so "turn it on" during the interview! No matter how sterling your credentials are, you won't be hired if the interviewer isn't sold. Pump up your enthusiasm prior to the interview. Never complain about past employers, jobs, classes, etc. Everything should have a positive spin.
- Ask pertinent questions. Be prepared to ask a few questions. Do not monopolize the interviewer's time, particularly if you know they have appointments scheduled following your interview. Do ask thoughtful questions. Don't ask about salary and benefits, this can be discussed when the company is definitely interested in you!



AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Say thanks. The next day write the interviewer a brief note or email reiterating your interest in the job. Spell his or her name correctly! *There is a sample of a Thank You letter on the next page.*
- Follow up. If you haven't heard from the interviewer within the time frame indicated at the close of the interview, call them to relay a polite reminder you're still interested in the job. Ask when they plan to make a hiring decision.
- If you aren't hired... If you continue to be interested in the agency, it pays to keep in touch with the interviewer. Often, through persistence, you may be offered a position at a later date.
- You may also want to send the hiring manager a letter after the turndown stating you know they made the best decision, but you still believe you are a great fit for the job. List some of your skills, experience and accomplishments that back up what you are saying and add: if for some reason, their candidate does not work out or they have another position that fits your background, to please give you a call.
- Chin Up. Gear up for your next interview. After all the more interviews you tackle the more polished you become. You may want to contact the interviewer who rejected you and see if you can get any pointers on what to improve before your next interview.
- Don't feel too down if you don't get the position! Look at it this way – you are one step closer to the job you will be offered! Things will work out, most often for the best. In the rear view mirror it is usually easier to see why something ended up the way it did, although it can be discouraging at the time. Keep moving forward!



Sample Thank You-
YOUR NAME
Your Email & Phone Number

Date

Name
Title
Company
P.O. Box 123
City, State Zip

Dear

Just a brief note to express my thanks and tell you how much I enjoyed the time we spent discussing your need for a _____.

There is little doubt in my mind that the position we discussed and the opportunity it offers would be challenging, exciting and a great fit with my extensive background in _____. The following are some of my recent accomplishments that meet your needs:

- (put your related accomplishments here vs. skills-you should have 3 or 4.
- Accomplishment
- Accomplishment
- Accomplishment

I welcome the opportunity to answer any additional questions you might have and will follow up with you later this week. I look forward to the possibility of becoming a part of your team.

Sincerely,

Your Name



MANAGING YOUR APPEARANCE AND IMAGE

You only have one opportunity to make the best first impression. To accomplish this, be sure to keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Dress Appropriately: You will want to dress for the culture of the organization and group where you will be interviewing. When in doubt, be sure to err on the conservative side. Your clothes should be clean, pressed, well fitted, and neat. Your shoes should be shined and ladies' purses should be clean and be a good match with the dress and shoes. Jewelry and makeup should be conservative and appropriate. It is usually best to dress 2-3 levels higher than you would dress if you got the job. For example, if people in this job wear jeans and t-shirts to work, it may be best to wear dress pants and a long sleeved shirt or blouse. If they wear business casual attire, a suite may be best for the interview.
- Proper Hygiene: You should ensure you have proper hygiene and your grooming should be immaculate. Be sure to have a nice current hair cut, nails should be clean and buffed, and makeup for women should be conservative and professional.
- Good Posture: During the interview, you should sit up straight and lean a little forward to show interest. Do not slouch or lean from side to side. Fidgeting is also a no-no.
- Mannerisms: Be natural in your gestures. It is natural to use your hands from time-to-time when you are talking, but be careful not to over use them. Do not fidget with objects such as glasses, pens or pencils, or change in your pocket. Avoid appearing awkward or stiff.
- Demeanor: Communicate enthusiasm and warmth. Express your interest with energy and a positive demeanor. Avoid negative comments or topics and never vent about a previous position, company, coworker, or manager.

