

THE CATHERINE CAREER GUIDE TO

Interviewing

Interviewing for Success

This guide identifies types of interviews, how to prepare for interviews, and sample questions. Interviewing comes more easily for some people than for others. But everyone can become an effective interviewer if they know how to prepare and what to expect.

Types of Interviews

Screening Interview

Purpose: Human resources representative or manager asks you about your background and skills, and you reply to her/his questions and “sell” yourself. If all goes well, you’ll be invited for a longer follow-up interview, usually at the employer’s offices.

Method: Usually one-on-one with human resources staff person. Often conducted by phone or using Skype or another electronic method.

Length: 1/2 - 1 hour

On-Site Job Interview

Purpose: These interviews include common interview questions, and may also be conducted in a behavioral interview format.

Method: Takes place at the employer’s work site

- Meeting(s) with a representative from HR and a hiring manager from the department
 - Other personnel may also be included—co-workers, other managers, a vice-president, etc.
- Some organizations might schedule a group interview where you meet with two to five people simultaneously.

Length: Interview(s) may be 1 hour to several hours

Behavioral Interviews

Purpose: Commonly used by many employers in on-site job interviews to gauge your skills, abilities, and personality based on how you respond.

Method: The interviewer asks situational questions.

For example, “Tell me about a time when you...” or “Give me an example of...”

Answering Behavior-Based Questions – Use the STAR method

To successfully structure your answer to a behavior-based question, include each of the following elements: **Situation, Task, Action, Results**. For example, if you are asked to describe a situation in which you had to work as a member of a team, your answer might include the following elements:

Situation: I was taking a biology class last semester....

Task: I had to work with a group to put together a presentation on our experiment....

Action: We agreed upon which items to include and divided up responsibilities...

Results: We received an ‘A’ on the project and classmates expressed enthusiasm for our presentation...

Interview Tips for Phone and/or by Skype

If your screening interview will be conducted by phone or via Skype, FaceTime, or Google Hangout, prepare as you would for an in-person interview. Some organizations now use a video recorded interview as their first screening method.

By phone: have a copy of your resume and the job posting in front of you for easy reference.

By Skype: be sure to look professional and have a plain background behind you. A messy background in a video frame can leave a very negative impression.

Preparation Is Key

Preparation is vital to help you conduct a successful interview and to help you feel self-confident.

Research the company! This includes: what the organization does, how large it is, where it is located and if it has more than one operation in different locations, what is its philosophy, what is its financial status, and how long it has been in business, to name a few.

Know the job requirements. Identify the key skill, qualities and experiences that the position requires. Review your work, volunteer, and academic background to identify experiences where you have developed and displayed these skills and abilities.

Be ready to ask questions. Prepare some general questions prior to the interview: To whom will I report? How will my work be evaluated? In what new directions do you expect this organization to grow in the next few years?

Practice for the interview. By anticipating types of questions and practicing your responses, you will be better prepared to articulate your skills and strengths during an interview. Forms of practicing:

- A friend, a professional colleague or a professor can give clear, honest feedback about your answers and your nonverbal behavior.
- Make an appointment for a mock interview or interview coaching with the Career Development Center.
- Practice online with Interview Stream —<https://stake.interviewstream.com/Account/Login>

Have your outfit ready. In almost all cases, “business formal” will be appropriate for professional positions. Attire can vary by field and professional options for candidates. Religious & Cultural Attire—Wear what you typically wear that reflects your cultural beliefs. You should feel comfortable wearing the clothing that represents you.

Referrals to Dress for Success can be made through Career Development.

Know where to go. Find out exactly where the interview will be, when to be there and, if needed, where parking is available. Verify directions, plan for traffic, and arrive a few minutes early. Take those extra few minutes to visit the restroom, take a few deep breaths, and relax.

Day of The Interview

Arrive a little early. If you are late for an interview, most employers will assume you are not responsible and not very interested in the position. **DON'T BE LATE!**

Greet everyone with a firm handshake and a smile. Remember to maintain good eye contact throughout the interview. In group interviews, make eye contact with each interviewer when responding to questions.

Behave professionally and courteously. Some candidates leave a negative impression without meaning to by acting too familiar, talking too much, or being too casual.

Share success stories. When talking about what you have done, include examples of projects, programs, work or classroom situations where you demonstrated the skills the employer is seeking. Don't forget to include the successes of your work—a promotion, positive feedback, an accepted project, etc.

Don't bring up the “S” word! Salary and benefits are often high on the list of what candidates want to know, but protocol dictates that this is usually brought up by the interviewer.

Consider bringing a portfolio. A portfolio includes samples of your work, a resume, letters of recommendation and more. The portfolio can be used to show an employer that you possess the skills you say you have.

Ask for business cards. By possessing business cards, you have the correct spelling of individual names, titles and addresses which you will need for writing follow-up letters and making phone calls.

ASK FOR THE JOB! If you want the position, tell the employer that you hope you are chosen. It demonstrates your interest and enthusiasm.

After the Interview

1. ***Send a Thank You note or letter within 24 hours.*** The note should reiterate your interest in the specific position and organization, and express your appreciation for the interview. See a sample letter at the end of this guide.

2. ***Follow-up with a phone call.*** A few days after the interview, if you have not heard from the employer, you should call to check on the status of your candidacy, and express your continuing interest and enthusiasm.

Possible Questions— What Are They Looking For?

There are some basic types of questions for which you should prepare before your interview. These general interview questions can be sorted into the following themes:

- Open-ended questions (Tell me about yourself. What are your strengths?)
- Future plans (What do you hope to be doing in 5 years? What are your career goals?)
- Strengths and weaknesses (What are you good at? What are your weaknesses?)
- Career/job/organization related (Why are you interested in this position? What do you know about the organization?)
- Behavioral (Explain and describe how you would handle this situation... Tell me of a time when...)

The following examples are typical types of interview questions with suggestions about how to answer them:

“Tell me about yourself.” Talk briefly about why you are here for this interview; that is, what interests you about the position, and what relevant skills you have to offer that make you qualified for the position. Avoid discussing personal information that is not relevant.

“Why are you interested in this position?” Talk about what responsibilities and components of the job are attractive, and how you have developed the skills to meet the requirements of the job.

“What makes you qualified for this position?” Articulate your skills with examples of situations where you demonstrated the abilities they seek and the successes you have had. Examples are key to doing this effectively— “For my senior biology research project, I developed a hypothesis, tested the theory and found that it would have an impact on future related projects. I received an ‘A’ for the project, and it was submitted to a national college competition. It may help to foster new research.”

“How would a supervisor (professor, colleague, friend) describe you?” Before the interview, create a list of positive work attributes that describe you. Examples of positive attributes are: dependable, team player, good communicator, accurate, analytical, possessing a good sense of humor.

“What background (from work, internships, volunteer or the classroom) do you have that would help you in this position or field?” Present examples of your experiences and articulate how they demonstrate the skills they are seeking. For example, if you were interviewing for a job in marketing, you might say, “As an intern I contacted 200 customers by phone and collected data for a survey to evaluate how the new company brochure displayed the products and articulated their value to our customers.”

“What are your weaknesses?” Be ready to share an example of something that is not a terrible problem, but rather something that you have been working to improve. For example, “I have received feedback that I need to be more assertive when working on projects and to ask more questions. I have been doing that for the last few months in my internships and feel more comfortable requesting information and assistance.” An example here can be very helpful, but avoid sharing very negative examples—being late for work, conflict with coworkers, etc.

“Tell me about a time when you had to do multiple assignments with limited time and how you accomplished them?” Think about what skills and attributes the employer wants to see in a successful candidate. Can you prioritize? Do you meet deadlines? Can you work with other people and solicit help? Your research on what skills the employer is looking for will help you to prepare for these questions. Don’t forget to use the STAR method to structure your answer.

“What are your goals?” Respond with goals related to the work and company. For example, “I hope to begin in this position, demonstrate my abilities and do quality work. I plan to learn as much as I can in the position, and eventually qualify for positions with even more responsibility.” Longer-term goals may include continuing your education and planning for management positions.

“What areas in school or work have been the greatest challenge to you?” Think of times when a difficult college assignment, or a big project at work or an internship was due, and how you successfully accomplished the task. Successes might include, an “A” on the assignment, increased customer satisfaction, or meeting an important deadline that was vital to a department.

“Why do you want to work here?” Articulate clearly what is attractive to you about the organization and the position. Do not focus on salary or benefits.

“What motivates you in a work situation?” Review what experiences you have had that have been energizing or exciting in the past. These skills are what you hope to find in your new position, such as public speaking, being creative, problem solving, working with teams of people to solve problems, working with technology, etc.

“Why did you leave (or plan to leave) your past (present) employer?” There are many legitimate reasons to leave a position or company. You may have had a lack of promotional opportunities or you were looking for new challenges. Never speak badly of a present or previous employer—even if your boss was awful or the company didn’t treat you fairly. Speak to a Career Counselor about how to provide a solid response to this question.

Date of Mailing

Interviewer's Full Name

Job Title

Company Name

Company Address

City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview this morning for the Assistant Buyer position in your Junior Fashions Department. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about Good Buy Clothes.

I especially enjoyed talking with you about the new line of summer fashions. The new designs and fabrics were very intriguing, and I would be delighted to get to know more about them.

After talking with your staff and further investigating your company, I am eager to reaffirm my interest in the position. My familiarity with the product line and considerable retail sales experience would help me to do well in this position.

Again, thank you for your consideration. I hope to talk with you soon regarding your final decision.

Sincerely,

Your Electronic/Handwritten Signature

Your Name (Typed)

Mailing Address

City, State, Zip

Sample Thank You Letter



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