



Interviewing

Career and Employment Services

University of Puget Sound

Howarth 101

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Finding a job is a process that takes time, commitment, an adventuresome spirit and a lot of practice. A good interview is a significant part of the job search process. The interview is a short period of time that demands much preparation. The success of the interview is directly related to the preparation that has been completed. To be adequately prepared for the interview, you should know the following things.

Know Yourself

It has been said that there is only one real question asked in an interview. “Who are you?” Every other question the interviewer asks you will be geared toward finding a few more pieces to the puzzle of “Who are you?” To answer this question you will need to take a thorough inventory of your life experiences. The information you collect about yourself will enable you to develop cogent and articulate answers to the questions you are likely to encounter in an interview. Develop a good understanding of your education, experience, skills, interests, values, and abilities. Be able to translate your goals and abilities and show how they would be an asset to the company with which you are interviewing. Try listing your features under the following headings:

- strongest skills
- greatest areas of knowledge
- strongest parts of your personality
- things you do best
- skills you should develop to do better in your career
- areas of personality you should improve

Career and Employment Services has many resources to help you assess yourself in these areas including personal career counseling, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Strong Interest Inventory. Stop by Howarth 101 to learn more about these self-assessment tools.

Know the organization to which you are applying

Find out everything you can about the employer before the interview. Know the company’s products, training programs, history and current status. You can learn this information by talking to people in the field or company (you can access alumni through the ASK Network on our website), calling the company to request information (annual reports, brochures, public relations materials), and by conducting research in the library. Visit us for information on researching companies.

Know the position for which you are applying

You should know the key competencies required for the position. You should also know if you would be working as part of a team or on your own. Knowing the requirements of the position will allow you to highlight your particular strengths as they relate to the position. For example, if you know that one of your duties will be to give oral presentations, you will be sure to articulate your experience and ability in that area.

Practice

Now that you have analyzed your skills and strengths and you have researched the company and position to which you are applying, you are ready to practice interviewing. Practice is a vital component of preparing for the interview. Make an appointment for a mock interview with a career counselor.. You will be asked some common interview questions and given suggestions on how to answer them. Another way to practice is by using a tape recorder to record your answers, or by writing out your answers to sample interview questions. Here are some to get you started.

Tell me about yourself

This is often the most feared question of interviewees. However, if you are prepared, it gives you the opportunity to show interviewers the four traits that they are looking for most in job candidates: enthusiasm, confidence, dependability, and intelligence. You will want to prepare a brief (60-90) second speech in response to this question. Below is a suggested outline for your speech.

- brief introduction of yourself (major, year in school, where you are from)
- key accomplishments
- key strengths demonstrated by these accomplishments
- importance of these strengths and accomplishments to your prospective employer
- where and how you see yourself developing in the position for which you are applying

What experience do you have that prepares you for this position?

Express your past experiences and interests that directly relate to this job. Even if you are a recent college graduate with little practical experience, you can strengthen your qualifications by mentioning special projects you worked on or pertinent part-time or volunteer positions. End your response by emphasizing your enthusiasm and interest in this position.

Why are you interested in this job?

The employer is looking for an idea of your motivation and interest in the type of work this job involves. Your answer should directly reflect your qualifications for the job. If you are interviewing for a sales position in an insurance office, you might respond with “My educational background prepared me to be involved in the field of sales and I have a great deal of experience in this area. I am particularly interested in the insurance field because...”

What is your greatest weakness?

This can be a tricky question to answer. If you sit and ponder for several seconds and finally say, “I really can’t think of anything,” the interviewer will only be amused or irritated. We all have weaknesses. In answering this question, don’t discuss a weakness that the interviewer might expect to hamper job performance. Instead, discuss a deficiency which might be a plus, given the right “spin.” For example, state that you have a tendency to take on too many tasks, and that you’re working on this problem by delegating more. It’s important to talk about the steps you are taking to work on your weakness.

Why should we hire you for this position?

This is usually the final question asked. At this point, you need to reiterate the points you have made throughout the interview and stress the strongest benefits you have to offer. Finish by stating how much you would appreciate the opportunity to work for this company.

More Interview Questions

Below are some additional questions you might encounter in an interview. Check out the books on interviewing our career resource library (Howarth 101) for tips on answering them.

Describe the most difficult assignment you have tackled.

What are your short-term goals? Long term goals?

If I didn't know anything about this company, what could you tell me?

What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Why do you think you can be successful in this position?

Why do you want to work for us?

Why did you choose your college major?

Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?

How has your college experience prepared you for a career?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

Questions you can ask:

You will nearly always be given an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview. You should always have several prepared. Asking questions conveys to the interviewer that you are intelligent, enthusiastic and interested in the position. This is not the time to ask questions about salary and benefits. Hold those until after an offer comes and you are negotiating the details. Below are some sample questions you could ask.

What are some of the greatest challenges I would face in this position?

What type of training programs do you have?

How is this department organized? To whom would I report?

Interview Questions for Educators

Below are some questions educators may be asked in an interview. For additional questions and suggestions on how to handle them, come pick up a free copy of the *AAEE Job Search Handbook for Educators*. Then schedule an appointment for a mock interview with a career counselor.

What would you do if a student were not learning a concept?

How do you/will you provide for individual differences within your classroom?

What influenced you to choose teaching as a career?

What is your philosophy of education?

Are parent/teacher conferences important? Why or why not?

What do you know about our school district?

Describe an ideal classroom.

What would you do with a student who refused to do the work you assigned?

What is the greatest attribute you can bring to a classroom of students?

Sample Questions for You to Ask

How active is your parent-teacher organization?

What staff development opportunities does your district offer?

Do teachers participate in curriculum review and change?

Does the district have a statement of educational philosophy or mission?

What Employers Are Looking For

The interviewer will be evaluating you against criteria that have been established for the position you have applied for. These are not usually as concrete as it might appear. Personal qualities can be more important than specific skills. The National Association of Colleges and Employers found these are the traits employers frequently seek in candidates:

1. **Ability to Communicate** Do you have the ability to organize your thoughts and ideas effectively? Can you express them clearly when speaking or writing? Can you present your ideas to others in a persuasive way?
2. **Intelligence** Do you have the ability to understand the job assignment? Learn the Details of operation? Contribute original ideas to your work?
3. **Self-Confidence** Do you demonstrate a sense of maturity that enables you to deal positively and effectively with situations and people?
4. **Willingness to Accept Responsibility** Are you someone who recognizes what needs to be done and is willing to do it?
5. **Initiative** Do you have the ability to identify the purpose for work and take action?
6. **Leadership** Can you guide and direct others to obtain the recognized objectives?
7. **Energy Level** Do you demonstrate a forcefulness and capacity to make things move ahead? Can you maintain your work effort at an above-average rate?
8. **Imagination** Can you confront and deal with problems that may not have standard solutions?
9. **Interpersonal Skills** Can you bring out the best efforts of individuals so they become effective, enthusiastic members of a team.
10. **Flexibility** Are you capable of changing and being receptive to new situations and ideas?
11. **Self-Knowledge** Can you realistically assess your own capabilities? See yourself as others see you? Clearly recognize your strengths and weaknesses?
12. **Ability to Handle Conflict** Can you successfully contend with stress situations?
13. **Competitiveness** Do you have the capacity to compete with others and the willingness to be measured by your performance in relation to that of others?
14. **Goal Achievement** Do you have the ability to identify and work toward specific goals? Do such goals challenge your abilities?
15. **Vocational Skills** Do you possess the positive combination of education and skills required for the position you are seeking?
16. **Direction** Have you defined your basic personal needs? Have you determined what type of position will satisfy your knowledge, skills and goals.

Tips for Handling the Interview

1. Be on time (a few minutes early).
2. Dress professionally. When in doubt, dress on the conservative side.
3. Practice a firm handshake.
4. Be alert. Sit up straight.
5. Maintain appropriate eye contact.
6. Smile, relax, and be yourself.
7. Speak distinctly, and be complete, but don't ramble.
8. Use specific examples to illustrate your answers when possible.
9. Emphasize the positive about your experience.
10. Express your enthusiasm and interest in the job. Be specific about areas that sound particularly exciting.
11. Always come prepared with several questions to ask at the end.
12. Thank the interviewer for their time at the end. Ask when they will be making a decision.
13. Send a thank you note the same day.

Accepting the Position

Congratulations! Your hard work and practicing paid off and you have just received that eagerly awaited acceptance call.

Unless this is the only job you applied for, you may have to do some thinking about whether or not to actually accept it. This is especially important if you have more than one job offer to choose from. Ask the caller if you can give them your answer within two or three days and then ask yourself the following questions.

- Is the company's vision of the future consistent with yours?
- Are you comfortable with the position and what it would require of you?
- Does it seem like an organization you could work for?
- Are the salary and benefits agreeable to you?

You must answer these questions before you accept. If you feel there are still questions that need to be answered before you accept the position, do not be afraid to ask. It will be better for you and the employer in the long run if you ask them now. It would be detrimental to your reputation in the professional community (and it is a surprisingly small world) to accept an offer from company A, keep interviewing and then accept an offer from company B. So before accepting, think it over. Once you have accepted an offer, notify any other companies with which you have been dealing.

Interview Checklist

- _____ Research the company and the job
- _____ Do a self-assessment of your skills, knowledge, goals, and accomplishments.
- _____ Assess the value you bring and practice communicating it. (NAB)
 - Need: What does the employer need or want?
 - Action: How have I demonstrated this skill?
 - Benefit: What was the positive result?
- _____ Prepare the questions you will ask.
- _____ Dress professionally. (Review Present your Best Self checklist. Check grooming immediately prior to the interview.)
- _____ Rehearse your handshake and greeting.
- _____ Obtain details about the interview in advance.
 - Who will conduct the interview?
 - How many interviews will there be?
 - How long should I plan for the interview?
 - Directions.
 - Parking availability.
 - Request a job description faxed or mailed in advance.
- _____ Gather necessary materials.
 - Portfolio
 - 2-3 extra copies of resumes
 - Copies of reference list.
 - Job application information (social security number, name and address of educational institutions, driver's license number.)
 - Nice quality pen (Not the one from the Best Western Hotel.)
 - Paper
- _____ Arrive 15 minutes early (But go inside no more than 5-10 minutes early.)
- _____ **Tell your story to the interviewer with confidence!**
- _____ **Request a business card from each person who interviews you.**
- _____ Send thank you letters promptly (within 24 hours).

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Interviews: Present your Best Self

FOR MEN

Hair: Have your hair trimmed a few days before. Hair length should be short. Hair below the collar of your jacket or ponytails will not go over well.

Face: Facial hair should also be trimmed and short. Avoid trendy styles (e.g. no Elvis sideburns)

Tie: Should be current fashion (watch the width). Avoid cute patterns or funny sayings. (No Mickey Mouse or bow ties). Best choices are solid colors, polka dots, paisley. Wear a solid color shirt with patterned ties. Choose a quality silk or silk blend tie. The tip of your tie should touch the top of your belt buckle.

Suit: Choose a good quality, two-piece, wool blend suit. Best colors are charcoal, navy, or gray.

Belt and Shoes: Do wear a belt in brown, black, or cordovan. Belt and shoes should match. Black shoes/belt with charcoal and grey suits. Brown or cordovan shoes/belt with blue suits.

Shirt: Make sure your shirt is **PRESSED**. Use a little starch. Wear long sleeves. Check that shirt tail is tucked in. Always wear a white undershirt.

Pants: Be sure that pants are hemmed properly. They should help you do this when you purchase the suit.

Socks: Choose solid black or dark blue over the calf socks. (No white gym socks).

Shoes: **POLISH THEM AND USE HEEL DRESSING**. Shoes should always be darker than your suit and match your belt.

Accessories: Wear a thin plain watch. Avoid earrings, beads, chains, fancy buckles, or facial jewelry. No more than one ring per hand.

Outerwear: Purchase a quality coat. The coat should be longer than your suit coat. Beige, black, grey, and navy are classic colors. Use black or dark brown leather gloves. Briefcase and/or portfolio should be cleaned and polished. Choose black, brown, or cordovan leather (avoid nylon styles).

Avoid cologne. No gum.

These guidelines will vary depending upon the organization. When in doubt, choose to dress more formally than less.

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Interviews: Present your Best Self

FOR WOMEN

Hair: Have your hair trimmed within a few weeks of the interview. Keep the style simple and easy to manage.

Face: Face cosmetics should be conservative and simple (no evening wear styles or shimmer products).

Suit: Buy a good quality wool or polyester blend suit with a **skirt**. Best colors are charcoal, navy, gray, taupe, or black. Choose a simple style. (Avoid styles with excessive ornamentation such as buttons, clips, piping, velvet trim, etc.) Skirt length should fall at or slightly below the knee (1-2 inches).

Belt and Shoes: Belt and shoes should match. Black shoes/belt work with charcoal, gray, taupe, and black suits. Brown or cordovan work better with taupe and navy. Shoes should be closed toe, pump style with heels **no higher than 2 inches**. (Avoid sandals, shoes with straps, buckles, sling backs, and stiletto heels.) **POLISH YOUR SHOES AND USE HEEL DRESSING.** Shoes should always be darker than your suit and match your belt.

Blouse/Knit Shirt: Choose a conservative style blouse or knit shirt that complements the suit color. Avoid clothing with too much ornamentation (ruffles, bows, strings). Avoid overly feminine styles. The neckline should be above or at the collarbone (not below).

Skirt: Even though pants are acceptable for work, do not wear them to an interview. Women are viewed as being more professional when wearing a skirt. Skirt length should be at or slightly below the knee.

Stockings: ALWAYS wear stockings even though trends dictate otherwise. Inspect them for snags and runs. Have an extra pair or two with you in case you get a snag along the way. Avoid styles with decorations (e.g. lace, seams in the back).

Purse: Purse should match your shoes/belt. Choose a small, simple style. Clean it out before the interview.

Accessories: Jewelry should be small, simple, and kept to a minimum. No more than 1 ring per hand. If you wear a bracelet, don't wear a necklace and vice versa. No more than 1 earring per ear. Styles should be small studs or hoops (not more than ½ inch diameter). Avoid facial jewelry.

Outerwear: Purchase a quality coat. The coat should be longer than your skirt. Choose beige, black, gray, or navy. Use black or dark brown leather gloves. Briefcase and/or portfolio should be cleaned and polished. Choose black, brown, or cordovan leather (avoid nylon styles).

Avoid perfume. No gum.

These guidelines will vary depending upon the organization. When in doubt, choose to dress more formally than less.

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