Interview 101: The Basics
THE JOB INTERVIEW

“Candidates with marvelous qualifications lose out, not because they couldn’t do the job or even lacked confidence they could do the job. They lose out because their confidence didn’t come through in the interview.”

Think of the interview as a sales call to sell a product in which you are confident…YOU!!

As in any sales call, you must be prepared, make a good first impression, build rapport, understand the needs of the customer (employer), sell the benefits (of hiring you), overturn objections and close the sale.

Everything you have been doing in your job hunt – putting together a strong resume, researching companies, developing a network of contacts, and writing cover letters – has been leading to this point: the interview with a prospective employer that lands you the job.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Communication Skills + Image = Perception

An ounce of image is worth a pound of performance. Keep in mind that the eye is a stronger sensor than the ear. We remember 15% of what we hear and 50% of what we see and hear. Once a person forms a positive perception of us and makes the decision to deal with us, our performance then becomes critical.

When two candidates are equally qualified for a job, the one who makes the best impression will get the job!

WHAT IS A JOB INTERVIEW?

For the Interviewer, the purpose is to gather enough of the right kind of information about you to make a reliable prediction of how well you can do the job and fit into the organization.

For the Interviewee, the purpose is to make the most favorable impression by selling his/her strengths, skills, and experience related to the position. It is also an opportunity to learn specific information about the job, i.e., company goals and the work environment to determine whether or not the position is a match for your career goals.
DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

*Situational Interview:* Questions are asked that will allow you to use your problem solving skills to communicate how you would handle future situations and experiences.

*Behavioral Interview:* Questions are asked that will allow you to demonstrate you previous work experiences and work behaviors in order to understand how you may handle future experiences and responsibilities.

Both situational and behavioral interviews types can be used in a variety of settings:

- **Telephone:** An initial interview form to help weed out candidates before committing to face-to-face interviews.
- **Face-to-Face:**
  - **One-on-one:** A conversation between one interviewer and you about the job, the company and how your skills fit the employer’s need.
  - **Panel:** Two or more people interviewing you simultaneously.
- **Group:** Involves you and the competition for the position being present at the same time, typically involving a presentation with candidate participation required. This format is used to determine who is invited back for a one-on-one interview when there are several potential candidates.
- **Multiple:** A series of interviews where the candidate meets individually with several members of the organization.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The **initial interview**, known as the “screening” interview, is utilized to narrow the field to several promising candidates. It lasts approximately 30 minutes.

**Subsequent interviews** may be as brief as the first or may last as long as a day. There may be as many as six or seven contacts. The interview process may involve many members of the organization’s staff in groups or consecutively (the multiple interview setting.) It may necessitate travel to the home office, staying overnight(s), and personality tests. Most employers usually reimburse travel expenses; however, this should be clarified before you make the out of pocket investment.

**Negotiation of terms** is the final step of the interview process if the employer decides to make a job offer. Salary, benefits, starting date, location and training are determined at this time.
COMPANY RESEARCH PRIOR TO INTERVIEW

Employers have an expectation that you will be familiar with the company prior to the interview process, and that you are prepared to share your background and future expectations that will benefit the organization. You should be familiar with:

- Product line or services offered by company
- Geographical location of its plants, regional offices and headquarters
- Recent new items about the company
- The values, mission, and/or vision of the company
- Potential growth and trends of the industry*
- Competition in the marketplace
- Potential new markets, products, and/or services*
- Relative size of the firm in its industry (market share, etc.)
- Growth of annual sales within last five years
- Name and title of recruiter
- Career path for your field of study

TIP: *Most of the answers for these questions can be found in a library or on the individual company’s website. You can use the following abstracts and indexes: The Wall Street Journal Index, The New York Times Index, and The Detroit News Index.
WHAT EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR IN JOB CANDIDATES

An interviewing organization may begin its recruitment process with a pool of several hundred candidates, but have only a few positions available. In today’s crowded job market, many candidates possess the tangible perquisites of education and experience. Most experts concede that intangible subjective factors often make the crucial difference. No matter what your goals, the following points can be adapted to enhance your chances of being selected.

**Appearance**
Cleanliness and appropriate dress are a MUST. Avoid strong perfumes and colognes; your interviewer may have allergies, which could interfere with their focus on you.

**Personality Style**
Be courteous and act with appropriate mix of self-confidence and respect.

**Articulate**
You must be able to express yourself in fluent, grammatically correct language, avoid slang, profanity, be specific, and communicate both socially and professionally.

**Energy, Drive & Ambition**
Demonstrate energetic posture and movements, fresh appearance, tone of physical and emotional health, positive and focused conversation.

**Positive Attitude**
Display prudent optimism, a hopeful and confident view. Don’t complain about past employers, your university, the weather, and don’t whine or criticize.

**Thoughtfulness**
No one wants a “yes” man or a “brown noser”. An intelligent person usually weighs a question a second or two before responding. Don’t be glib. Some questions really are difficult and no one knows the answer to everything immediately.

**Composure**
Nail-biting, hair twirling, foot tapping, chain-smoking, twitching, or avoiding eye contact are almost certain to destroy your image.

**Leadership Aura**
A self-confident manner, carriage, eye contact, and smile connotes leadership. You must be sure of yourself to lead others. Implicit in this is that you inspire trust and are likeable.

**Bright & Well Informed**
Spontaneous, natural interaction with a bit of humor and a relaxed sparkle mark you as someone who is intelligent, lively, and interesting to be around. Let your natural personal uniqueness show.

**Interests**
An educated person knows a lot about his/her chosen field and a little about many other topics….art, politics, travel, languages, economics, literature, and music. Being able to converse widely marks you as a mature, educated, and interesting person. Be cautious about taking sides on controversial issues like politics and religion.
INTERVIEWING TIPS

First impressions are important when presenting you in an interview situation. Many interviewers consciously or unconsciously evaluate the interviewee within the first 5 minutes of an interview.

A good impression can move you along into the interview process by exploring job opportunities with the company representative; a poor one can close the door of opportunity forever with this particular company. The following tips are from corporate recruiters on how to make a good “first impression.”

Groom yourself carefully making sure that you are presenting the image you wish to project.
Ask yourself, “What type of image do I want to project?” Is your answer efficient, professional, intelligent, and enthusiastic? Make sure that your personal appearance and grooming projects this image.

Research the company and its products and/or services.
Hopefully, you have already conducted your in-depth company research. The bigger the company, responsibilities, and salary involved the more research you must do.

Prepare definite questions about the company or the job responsibilities.
Again, research will have assisted you in helping to prepare these questions.

Be on time. Write down the time, date, and location of the interview.
Do not rely on your memory. Plan to arrive approximately 15 minutes before your appointment. Get directions ahead of time. If possible, do a trial run to know where you’re going. When planning travel time, allow extra time during peak travel times.

Be confident.
You have something to offer! Remember, they invited you in to meet with them therefore, they’re interested in you! Bring a copy of your resume, list of references, and appropriate identification. Avoid “one word” answers when answering questions. Always give the employer examples as it gives credibility.

Complete application forms neatly and correctly.
A messy application gives the impression that the applicant is untidy, inaccurate, and lacks interest.

Greet the company representative by name making sure that you pronounce it correctly.
If he/she extends his/her hand in greeting, use a firm and confident grip. Don’t be overly aggressive by crushing the person’s hand or limply offering a passive hand. You may wish to practice with friends or family members.
Maintain good eye contact.
People feel very uncomfortable when there is not good eye contact. Good eye contact transmits the idea that you are sincere, alert, interested, and friendly.

Ask questions; avoid asking questions that require one-word answers.
Make sure your answers reflect that you are focused, yet flexible.

When the interview ends, again express your interest and ask for a business card.
90% of the jobs offered are to the person demonstrating the most company knowledge, enthusiasm, interest and desire.

Send a thank you letter.
Remember to send a brief thank you letter to all the people you interviewed with expressing your continued interest in the position. This should be done within one day after the interview.

Smile and relax.
Enjoy the interview process; it is a mutual exchange of information. Don’t forget you are interviewing the interviewer to determine if the position/company is the right one for you.

Never lie.
Should your lie be discovered at a later date it will provide justifiable grounds to terminate your employment immediately.

Do not make derogatory remarks about your former employers.
If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.

Project a positive attitude.
   Go in with the attitude of “this is what I can do for you” versus “what can you do for me.”
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:
GENERAL & BEHAVIORAL-BASED

The following are some of the most commonly asked [general interview] questions. A well-prepared candidate should be able to answer each question in detail.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
3. What are your short range and long-range goals, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
4. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
5. What are the most important rewards you expect in your business career?
6. Why should I hire you?
7. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in business?
8. What qualities do you think a successful manager should have?
9. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
10. What led you to choose your field of study?
11. What college classes did you like best and least?
12. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
13. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
14. How well do you work under pressure?
15. Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
16. What do you know about our company?
17. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
18. Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you? Are you willing to travel?
19. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
20. What have you learned from your mistakes?

The following are some of the most commonly asked behavior-based interview questions. A well-prepared candidate should be able to answer each question in detail. Remember to use the S-T-A-R approach:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation and/or Task:</th>
<th>Describe the situation you were in or the task you needed to accomplish.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action:</td>
<td>Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Don’t tell them what you might do, tell what you did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result:</td>
<td>What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

2. Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.

3. Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

4. Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.

5. Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.

6. Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

7. Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.

8. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

9. Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.

10. Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.

11. What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.

If asked inappropriate (or illegal) questions such as “How old are you?”, “Are you married?”, “Do you have children”, or “Where were you born?” think about what the real concern is for the interviewer and address that concern.
Please schedule an appointment with a Career Services Coordinator if you are having difficulty answering these questions. Career Services welcomes the opportunity to assist you with your interviewing techniques.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER**

Asking pertinent questions during the interview demonstrates that you’ve done your homework about the company and also that you believe you are a match for their open position. To distinguish yourself from numerous applicants you want to ask questions that are not easily answered through your own research.

Be prepared to ask approximately 2-3 questions. The following are some examples of questions that can serve to help you find out the “real deal” about the job and assist you in making your final decision regarding a job offer.

1. How is it that you have an open position?
2. Is there a career path for this position? What are realistic timeframes?
3. What type of formal training is there for the position?
4. How would you describe a typical day on the job?
5. What do you see as the greatest challenges and rewards in this position?
6. Would you explain the performance review process?
7. What are opportunities for advancement in this position?
8. Are there any new changes or developments in the department in which I’d be working?
9. How would you describe this work environment?
10. What opportunities exist for professional growth and development?
11. If I surveyed your employees, what would they say is the best thing about working here? What would they say is the most challenging thing about working here?
12. What are the company’s plans for future growth?
13. How do you view this organization as a place to work?
14. Are employees encouraged and given the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns?
15. What would I be expected to accomplish in the first six months on the job? First year?
16. Could you describe to me your typical management style and the type of employee that works well with you?
17. How would you describe the corporate culture here?
18. Describe a typical workday in the department.

**TIP:** Do not ask about pay or benefits unless the interviewer brings up the subject or you have a job offer.

**DRESS FOR SUCCESS**

**The Do’s and Don’ts of Presenting a Professional Image for Interviews**

It is important to dress in a conservative well-coordinated manner for an interview or job fair. First impressions are critical and appearance counts. Many employers reject applicants based
on poor personal appearance; therefore, it is important to project an image that is positive and professional. Here are some guidelines for men and women to convey a professional and high powered image on a job:

- Be appropriately dressed to fit the industry, job, geographical area, and location.
- Shop affordably and do not exceed one’s budget and time resources.
- Be self-assured and convey competence and confidence.

TRADITIONAL BUSINESS ATTIRE FOR MEN

Suits: Wear a suit of quality in navy blue or gray. The darker the shade worn, the more authoritative of an image will be presented. (Avoid solid black, because it is too formal for business attire). Cuffs on the pant legs can add a distinctive touch.

Shirts: Long sleeve, 100% cotton shirt is best. Be sure it is crisp and professionally laundered. White is the most classic and traditional color, but pale blue or cream is also acceptable.

Ties: A good choice is a tie that is pure silk and has a red color scheme (red, mauve, or rust). Red is the power color and looks great for an interview. Navy, black, yellow, teal, blue, gray, or taupe are suitable as well.

Shoes: Leather, ¼ inch heels, black, clean and polished.

Socks: Dark and neutral in color (no light, bright, or loud patterns)

Belt: Black leather, as it is most traditional.

Wallet: Top quality leather in black or brown.

Outwear: Classic trench coat in tan.

Briefcase: Trim, tailored 3-inch case in heavy leather. Choose a good quality case in black, brown, or burgundy.

Jewelry: Those items deemed appropriate can include:
- Good quality watch
- Wedding band or conservative signet ring, limit on hand
- Cuff links that are small, conservative and high quality
- Glasses in style that flatters the face

Handkerchiefs: White cotton and linen or colored silk inserted into a pocket presents a look that is fashionable and functional.

TRADITIONAL BUSINESS ATTIRE FOR WOMEN

Suits: A woman’s suit should be classic and tailored. The jacket style should be thigh, hip or waist length. Wear a suit of quality in navy or gray. The darker the shade worn, the more authoritative of an image will be presented. (Avoid solid black, because it is too formal for business attire). Choose a style based on the type of employment you are seeking. Here are some appropriate ways for women to dress
for the most conservative and powerful look:
- Matched skirted suit: skirt and jacket are the same color.
- Unmatched skirted suit: skirt and jacket are in coordinated colors.
- Business Dress: worn with or without coordinated jacket.
- Matched Pantsuit: pants and jacket are in the same color.
- Ensemble: fitted dress with long or short jacket matching

**Pantsuit:** Rapidly gaining acceptances as traditional attire.

**Blouse:** Tailored shirts and fine sweaters are best, in solid colors, or small print.

**Dress:** Less authoritative than a suit, can be effective if accessorized nicely.

**Colors:** A business wardrobe built mainly in solid colors has a more elegant effect. Other suggestions:
- Classic Neutrals: always correct and versatile.
- Jewel tones: sapphire, emerald, or amethyst exudes energy and confidence.
- Dusty mid-tones: mauve, cadet blue, sage or green.
- Pastels: used with formal styling, will appear professional.

**Shoes:** Leather, comfortable, neutral colors (black, navy, gray, taupe or burgundy).
- Shoe color should match hemline or be darker.
- Basic pump is the most versatile, closed heel and toe, 1”-2” heel.
- Be sure shoes are clean and polished.

**Hosiery:** Wear neutral colors that match skin tone.

**Belt:** Wear same neutral colors as shoes in a one-inch leather.

**Scarf/Hat:** Inappropriate for business wear.

**Outerwear:** Classic trench coat in traditional tan or black. Leather gloves in black or brown coordinate easily.

**Jewelry:** Those items deemed appropriate can include:
- Fine quality watch.
- Small earrings, bracelet or necklace, but not all three worn at the same time.
- One ring per hand
- A strand of pearls can convey an elegant look.

**Purse/Briefcase** Select one or the other in genuine leather. The color should be black for a briefcase. A purse should be small or moderate sized tailored look. It can be a black or neutral color to match the shoes.

**PRACTICE FOR THE INTERVIEW**

Interviewing is a skill and improvement comes from practice. Use these practice methods to improve your interviewing skills.

Participate in on-campus interview programs and have a mock interview with your Career Services Coordinator.
During the interviews, observe your performance.
- How are you doing?
- Do you sound confident?
- Are you organized?
- Does the interviewer seem interested in you?

Debrief after each interview.
- What went right?
- What went wrong?
- What do I want to do differently next time?

Mentally rehearse.
Go over your interview in your mind. Think about how your experience and education relate to what you have read or heard about the employer and the available position. Then, start preparing your “sales presentation.”

Rehearse with someone else.
Videotape your mock interview with your Career Services Coordinator, or use an online interview program such as Interview Stream.
Practice your responses with family members.

Practice your answers.
Just like a homework assignment you need to read interview questions, write out your answers, and review what you have written. Modify your responses based on the position the interview is for.
AFTER THE INTERVIEW

An interview is hard, stressful work. So the first thing to do when you walk out of the interviewer’s office is to relax a bit! But then, there are a few important follow-up measures to take:

Write a Thank You letter
Always write a brief thank you letter within 24 hours following the interview. Thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you and restate your interest in the company and the position. Try to mention something from the interview – ideally a particular need the interviewer expressed and how you might address that need. But keep your letter to one page. Generate the letter in business-style and be sure there are no spelling errors. Refer to the sample thank you letter on the next page for guidance.

Evaluate the interview
Replay the interview in your mind. What went well? What could you have done differently? What would you change if you had the interview to do over? Be careful not to beat yourself up; the point is to determine which things worked and which did not – use that knowledge in your next interview.

When to call back
During the interview, make a point to ask when the hiring decision will be made. If you don’t get word about the job by that time, it is perfectly acceptable to call the employer to inquire about the status of the position. Also, you sent the thank you letter within hours after the interview, while on the phone, confirm the receipt of your letter.

REMEMBER
● Rejection letters are inevitable. Do not take them personally.
● Make a rejection letter work to your advantage. Call each person who has sent a rejection letter and thank him/her for their consideration. Ask for feedback so that you can improve your resume, interview skills or job search direction.
● Ask for referrals to other organizations or other people who may require your skills.
● Above all, continue your job search with a positive mindset. You will be successful!

REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL READINGS

● Knock ‘Em Dead: The Interviewing Guide, by Martin Yate
● 60 Seconds and You’re Hired!, by Robin Ryan
● New Professional Image, by Susan Baxter and Nancy Nix-Rice
  Boost your Interview I.Q., by Carole Martin
SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Jason Roberts
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jaroberts@davenport.edu

July 16, 2004

Mr. Paul Smith
Smith Accounting Firm, Inc.
1234 Independence Drive
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Mr. Smith:

I would like to thank you for the time you spent with me on Thursday, July 15, 2004, to discuss the Bookkeeper/Accountant position. I appreciate your candid responses about what your clients expect from your company and how you strive to exceed their needs.

I would like to stress my willingness to take on the responsibilities of this position. My previous experience has given me the skills needed to handle the high level of intensity that is associated with this position. The knowledge I have of accounting principles gained from work experience combined with the skills gained from my studies will allow me to serve your clients as soon as my employment begins. In addition, my ability to work with a diverse population will be an asset to your company.

If at any time you need additional information, you can contact me at (248) 555-4321. Once again, thank you for your time and interest. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jason Roberts