



ANDERSON UNIVERSITY

Center for Career and Calling

JOB SEARCH TIPS: The Interview

In interviewing there are some things you have control over and other things that you do not. In this handout the focus will be on those things you do have control of and the strategies you can implement to effectively prepare for your job interviews. You do have control over your first impression and your preparation.

Knowing the kind of information the employer is likely to seek will help you prepare for the interview. Employers want to know your motivation for employment: Do you have the ability to do the job? How will you fit into the organization? How much will you cost them?

Research is key in preparing for the interview. It is to your advantage to know as much as you can about the job before that first interview. Good preparation will help your first impression to be a good one.

FIRST IMPRESSION

Your handshake. Your smile. Your appearance. Your eye contact. Your confidence. Your preparation. All of these things and more are what make up the first impression that occurs within seconds as you meet the recruiter for the first time. Blow the first 10 seconds and you will find it difficult to redeem your image in the eyes of that employer.

Tips on Verbal Communication

- Have a clear beginning and ending.
- Avoid using filler words (i.e., and, um, uh, you know, etc.).
- Answer the question asked and volunteer relevant additional information.
- Do not ramble; use slang or poor English.
- Identify in advance what information you want to communicate.
- Practice making verbal transitions from one thought to another. Answer the question behind the question—what are they really asking?

Tips on Non-Verbal Communication

How to make an impression without saying a word!

- Maintain eye contact, but don't stare them down.
- Maintain an open posture—no folded arms, head turned downward, (e.g. strive for a natural conversational pose that is neither stiff nor overly casual).
- Eliminate nervous habits (i.e. smacking your lips, twisting your ring, tightly grasping your hands, kicking your foot, playing with your hair or jewelry, etc.).
- Give a firm handshake.
- Use your hands when you talk as long as you do not distract the listener and gestures are a natural form of expression for you.
- Avoid stiffness in posture; shifting positions is natural.
- Project your voice and enunciate your words to show sincere enthusiasm.
- Smile! Let them know you are friendly and likeable. Let your personality come through.

Professional Dress

Tips: Rule of thumb...Err to the conservative. If in doubt, opt for the more conservative image.

Neat haircuts—no extreme styles; avoid hair hanging in the face.

Polished shoes (preferably dark leather) with heels that are not “run over.”

Make sure all clothing is clean and neatly pressed.

Practice good hygiene; shower, brush your teeth and wear deodorant.

Carry resumes in a leather/leather-like portfolio (can be obtained for under \$20.00), a briefcase is not necessary.

For Women:

- Wear a business suit or tailored dress with a jacket. Typically blues, grays and blacks are most acceptable.
- Select neatly pressed blouses that are in white or pastels. Watch the neckline—you want a job, not a date. Avoid lace, ruffles, low-cut and see-through material or poor quality fabrics that do not look crisp.
- Wear a classic style, dark, medium-heeled pump with closed-toes. Make sure they are polished and that the heels are not “run over or scuffed”.
- Be conservative in wearing make-up, jewelry and perfume. Keep it simple.
- Make sure skirt lengths, necklines and slits are conservative. You want to be able to bend over and sit in a chair without concern that you are revealing too much.

For Men:

- Dark suits (gray, navy, or black) are preferred. Avoid sport coats—they are usually too casual for most employers. Even in education, social service and ministry positions probably the most casual dress for an interview should be limited to a neutral sports coat and contrasting pants in a solid color. Avoid faddish styles and cheap polyester fabrics—look for a quality wool-blend material.
- Wear hard sole dress shoes (preferable black) with dark colored socks that match the pants. Avoid casual shoes, cowboy or work boots and suede materials.
- Shirts should be neatly pressed plain whites or pastels with a relatively subdued tie. Subtle striped shirts may also work. Make sure the tie stays in place with a tie clip or pin. Avoid ties that are too wide or too thin.

RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER

Before interviewing with an organization, research the potential employer to get a good understanding of the services and/or products provided by the organization. If the organization you are interviewing with is a business, consider using the following:

- Company Website
- Google Search
- Nicholson Library Resources

Local newspapers often have articles on school systems, local businesses, and social service organizations. Talk with people who have some connection with the organization (i.e. customer, employee, and competitor).

Look for the following information when researching the organization:

Any Type of Organization

How old and large is the organization?

What are its' products, services and special programs?

What is the organization's philosophy and mission?

Has the organization seen growth or has it been declining?

What is the financial condition of the organization? How is it funded?

Who is the organization's target audience (i.e. the general public, children, teens, lower socio-economic groups, certain types of distributors, etc.)?

What is the target group's perception of the organization?

What is the turnover rate for employees and/or volunteers?

What style of management does the leadership have? What is the organizational structure?

What are some of the organizational problems that people face in this position?

What kind of training or professional development opportunities do new employees receive?

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Make sure that you know your own strengths and weaknesses as it relates to the position's job description. Be able to identify examples of how you acquired certain skills that are your strengths. For those skills which you consider weak, be ready to answer what you currently are doing (or will be doing) to turn your weaknesses into a strength. Thoroughly understand what skills and knowledge you have to offer the company/organization.

TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are an unlimited number of questions you can be asked. The idea is not to memorize answers to all possible

questions but to be prepared to answer the typical questions. Give particular thought to the questions you feel would be your hardest—the ones that would put you on the spot.

Traditional Interview versus Behavioral Interview

In a traditional interview, you will be asked a series of questions which typically have straight forward answers like "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "What major challenges and problems did you face? How did you handle them?"

In a behavioral interview, an employer has decided what skills are needed in the person they hire and will ask questions to find out if the candidate has those skills. Instead of asking how you would behave, they will ask how you did behave. The interviewer will want to know how you handled a situation because that is their best way of determining what you might do in the future.

Questions in a Behavioral Interview: Behavioral interview questions will be more pointed, more probing and more specific than traditional interview questions:

- Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
- Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.
- Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it.
- Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?

- What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handle it.
- Have you had to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about?
- How did you do it?
- Have you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker? How?
- Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.

Follow-up questions will also be detailed. You may be asked what you did, what you said, how you reacted or how you felt.

Preparation for the Potential Behavioral Interview: What's the best way to prepare? It's important to remember that you won't know what type of interview will take place until you are sitting in the interview room. So, prepare answers to traditional interview questions.

Then, since you don't know exactly what situations you will be asked about if it's a behavioral interview, refresh your memory and consider some special situations you have dealt with or projects you have worked on. You may be able to use them to help frame responses. Prepare stories that illustrate times when you have successfully solved problems or performed memorably. The stories will be useful to help you respond meaningfully in a behavioral interview.

Finally, review the job description or the job posting or ad. This will give you a sense of what skills and behavioral characteristics the employer is seeking.

During the Behavioral Interview: During the interview, if you are not sure how to answer the question, ask for clarification. Then be sure to include these points in your answer:

- A specific situation
- The tasks that needed to be done
- The action you took
- The results i.e. what happened

It's important to keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. The interviewer is simply trying to understand how you behaved in a given situation. How you respond will determine if there is a fit between your skills and the position the company is seeking to fill. So, listen carefully, be clear and detailed when you respond and, most importantly, be honest. If your answers aren't what the interviewer is looking for, this position may not be the best job for you anyway.

Your Education

Why did you choose to attend Anderson University?

Why did you major in _____?

What subjects did you enjoy the most? In which ones did you get the best grades?

Tell me about a leadership experience you had while in school.

How did you finance your education?

If you started all over, what would you change about your education?

Why were your grades so low? So high?

Did your grades accurately reflect your ability?

In what ways did your education prepare you for this job?
Tell me about the extra-curricular activities in which you were involved.
Discuss your plans for advanced study or education.
Describe your most rewarding college experience.

Your Qualifications and Career Goals

Why do you think you are qualified for this position? Why should we hire you?
How would you make our organization (church, school, agency) better?
What are your salary expectations? (Be prepared with a salary range that reflects the current market.)
What do you want to be doing five years from now?

What are your short term and long-term career goals?
If you could choose, where would you locate?
What other jobs are you considering? What other companies?
When will you be ready to begin work?
How do you feel about relocating? Traveling? Working overtime? Weekends?
What is your definition of success?
What would be your "ideal job" following graduation?
In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?

Your Personality and Other Considerations

What are your major weaknesses? Your strengths?
What causes you to lose your temper?
What do you do in your spare time?
What type of books do you like to read?
What role does your family play in your career?
How well do you work under pressure? In meeting deadlines?
Tell me about your management philosophy.
Tell me about what kinds of people you prefer working with as co-workers.
Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative.
Describe a time when you were particularly creative, analytical, tactful, etc.
If you could change your life, what would you do differently?
What motivates you?
Who are your references?
If I asked your best friend to describe you, what would they tell me?

The Organization or Position for Which You Are Interviewing

Why do you want to work for our organization?
What interests you most about the position we have open? The least?
If you were hiring a person for this position, what qualities would you be looking for?
What do you know about our company/organization?
What job in our organization do you want to work toward?
Do you prefer a large or small company? Why?
What about our products or services are of interest to you?
What qualities should a successful manager (teacher, nurse, minister) possess?
Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates.
In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?

Your Work Experience

What were your major achievements in each of your past jobs?
Why did you change jobs?

What functions do you enjoy doing the most in your current job? The least?
What did you like about your most recent boss? Dislike? (*Watch this one—do not bad mouth former employers.*)
Which job have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
Have you ever been fired? Tell me about it.
What special skills have you acquired from past jobs?
Given your lack of experience, what makes you think you can do this job?

Typical Questions for Teachers

What do you do when a discipline problem arises?
What is your grade level preference?
What kind of school system are you looking for?
What do you know about _____(open classrooms, cooperative groupings, team teaching, etc.)?
What is the role of the principal?
Describe your student teaching experience.
What about your student teaching experience would you do differently? The same?
Describe an experience in teaching that you felt particularly proud of.
How do you establish authority?
What is your philosophy of education?
How would you involve parents in their student's learning?
What do you like most about teaching? Dislike?
Tell me about your experience with cultural diversity in the classroom.
What is your philosophy on discipline and/or classroom management?
What three strengths do you bring to the classroom? Weaknesses?

Typical Questions for Ministers

What is your vision for this church?
What is your philosophy of ministry?
What are your spiritual gifts?
How have the believers affirmed these?
Describe your spiritual pilgrimage.
What one thing would you change about the church if you could?
What would be your ministry emphasis?
What do you believe is the role of the pastor?
What is the role of the laity?
What do you believe about the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the end times, sanctification, etc.?
Describe your call to the ministry.

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK DURING AN INTERVIEW

The key to asking questions is for you to leave the interview with the answers you need to determine whether or not this organization and job is a good fit for you. Ask questions that clarify the job responsibilities, the employer's expectations, the orientation and training, the professional development opportunities, the performance evaluation schedule, the structure and goals of the organization, management philosophy, supervisor issues, organization direction, travel requirements, outside work expectations; avoid questions that give the impression of a what-can-you-do-for-me attitude. The following are suggestions of questions that can be asked, but be original! Recruiters get tired of hearing the same questions over and over because students all read the same handout. The idea is to show that you have thought about the question and are truly interested in the answer.

- What qualities are you looking for in candidates for this position?
- How would you describe the organization's personality and management style? How does this affect the work environment?
- What are the organization's goals for where they want to be in 10 years? What problems do they want to have solved by then?
- Describe your performance appraisal process.
- What are the biggest challenges in this position?
- What is the organization's philosophy on the professional development of its employees?
- What would a successful candidate for this position look like?
- What is a typical career path for someone coming into this position?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- What is the average length of tenure for someone in this position?
- What goals need to be met the first year in this position?
- Describe the organization's expectations for the individual who is in this position.
- Who supervises this position and what is their management style?
- What are the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
- How often can I expect to be relocated during the initial years of employment?
- How often will I be evaluated for my performance?
- When can I expect to hear from you concerning the hiring decision?

Note: The initial interview is not the time to ask about salary and benefits; typically in selection interviews, the employer will address your salary expectations. You should be prepared to provide to the interviewer your salary range expectations. Let the employer initiate the salary question.

LEGAL RIGHTS DURING AN INTERVIEW

Although recent legislation protects you from being asked illegal questions on job applications, occasionally they do come up during the interview. Human resource personnel are usually aware of what is legal and illegal but others involved in the hiring process may not have the same knowledge.

It is your right to withhold information unrelated to the job. However, research shows that refusing to answer questions may hurt your employment opportunity. If a question bothers you, be prepared to address it in a way that will not offend the interviewer. Be prepared with suitable answers well before the interview.

Legally an employer can ask the following questions during a pre-hire interview:

- What name(s) is your employment history recorded under?
- Are you aware that our organization is an equal opportunity employer?
- How long have you lived at your current address? At your previous address? How can I contact you?
- Do you have a legal right to work in the United States?
- What schools have you attended and are you fluent in any foreign languages?
- Do you possess the required licenses and/or certifications for this job?
- What experience qualifies you for this job?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Are you available for overtime?

Discriminatory or Illegal Questions:

- What is your age or date of birth?
- What is your maiden name? Your spouse's name or line of work?
- What is your sex, race, religion, national origin?
- Do you own or rent; do you live in an apartment or a house?
- Are you a United States citizen?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Do you have children? Their ages?
- Have you ever filed for Worker's Compensation? Been injured on the job?
- Do you have any physical impairment?

Title I of ADA lists these additional prohibited questions:

- What is your height/weight? What is your hair/eye color?
- Have you ever been hospitalized? If so, for what?
- Has a psychiatrist or psychologist ever treated you?
- Is there any health-related reason you may not be able to perform the job for which you are applying?
- How many days were you absent from work due to illness last year?
- Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?

After hiring, an employer may request the following information from an employee:

- Birth certificate
- Share affirmative action statistics for the company
- Marital status
- Proof of citizenship
- Photographs
- Physical exam and drug testing
- Social Security card or alien registration card

Five Ways to Handle Illegal Questions

1. Answer the question and ignore the fact that it is in violation of EEO Laws and Regulations.
2. Answer the question with the statement: "I am wondering why obtaining this information is relevant to the requirements of this position?"
3. Politely sidestep the question, while seeking to avoid offending the interviewer. (i.e. **Q:** "Are you married?"
A: "Whether or not I am married will not deter me from having a career in this field. I see your organization as an excellent place to begin realizing this career goal.")
4. Refuse to answer the question and risk offending the interviewer.
5. Ascertain the question behind the question: (i.e. **Q:** "Do you have children?" **A:** "If you check with my references they will tell you I have had an exemplary attendance record.")

REASONS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR A POSITION

- Personal Impression: Presence, neatness, and confidence.
- Communications Skills: Verbal and written.
- Enthusiasm: Interest in the position and sincerity. Knowledge of the company. Preparation for the interview.
- Competence and knowledge in the field: Expertise, work experience.
- Leadership potential.
- Vocational Maturity: Defined goals, realistic expectations, knowledge of strengths and weaknesses, realistic self-concept.
- A "Fit": The individual who brings the best combination of personality traits, skills, experiences and knowledge to the position where the individual's values match the employer's and hiring supervisor's values.
- Personality factors: Creativity, dependability, maturity, confidence, diplomacy, perseverance, stability.
- Job skills: Initiative, common sense, team management skills, cooperation, leadership.

REASONS FOR BEING REJECTED

- 1) Asks poor questions (little depth or meaning to the questions) or none at all.
- 2) Expects too much too soon; not willing to pay dues first.
- 3) Makes excuses; appears evasive, hedges on unfavorable factors in record
- 4) No confidence and poise—fails to look interviewer in the eye; immature.
- 5) Poor appearance—sloppy; lacks sophistication.
- 6) Lack of proper career planning—needs direction. No defined goals.
- 7) Lack of knowledge in the field of specialization—not well qualified. Lacks depth.
- 8) Inability to express thoughts clearly and concisely. Rambles.
- 9) Insufficient evidence by the applicant of personal achievement. Does not appear to have the capacity to excite action in others.
- 10) Not prepared for the interview. No research into the organization.
- 11) No real interest in the organization or the industry. Merely appears to be shopping around.
- 12) Narrow geographic location interest. Unwillingness to relocate.
- 13) No enthusiasm—appears indifferent; bland personality.
- 14) Overbearing—conceited, cocky, overly aggressive, assuming, aloof.
- 15) Interested only in the financial prospects of the opening.

OTHER HELPFUL TIPS

DO

- Be yourself.
- Dwell on the positive.
- Volunteer relevant information related to your qualifications.
- Shed your student image in appearance and use of language.
- Arrive 15-20 minutes early for your appointment.
- Have references and additional resumes available for the employer.
- Be courteous to everyone, especially the administrative assistant.
- Choose a chair facing the interviewer.
- Have money with you for parking, lunch, etc.
- Go to the bathroom before entering the waiting room.
- Take a pen and any information you would need to complete an application.
- Greet the interviewer with a smile, a firm handshake and direct eye contact.
- Be aware of the current events in the world.
- Take an umbrella in case of rain.
- Send a follow-up letter thanking the interviewer for the interview.

DON'T

- Chew gum, smoke, slouch, or fidget.
- Use slang.
- Be chatty while the recruiter reviews your resume.
- Bring anyone with you.
- Place anything on the interviewer's desk (i.e. purse, elbow, portfolio).
- Be too familiar with the interviewer (calling them by their first name unless asked to; making inappropriately familiar comments like "That's a nice suit").
- Get the interviewer's name wrong.
- Pick anything up off the interviewer's desk.
- Be a jokester.
- Give monosyllable answers.
- Criticize anyone, including your past employer.
- Overuse their name.
- Make excuses or apologize for low G.P.A., or a lack of experience, etc.
- Ramble on or interrupt the interviewer.
- Get upset or angry and let it show—even if the questions get into questionable areas; you can be firm without being angry.