



# INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

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## Interview Training.....Introduction

### Why Effective Interviewing Skills Matter

The job interview is the most important aspect of your job search. Often it is the person with the best interviewing skills, not necessarily the best qualifications, who gets the job offer.

Your primary objective on any interview is to communicate to the interviewer that you have the skills and qualities to do the job. In other words **SELL YOURSELF!** If you don't, no one else will. A positive self-concept, confidence in your abilities and enthusiasm for the job/organization are extremely important in the interviewing process. It will make the difference in whether or not you get a job offer.

### The Message

**You never get a second chance to make a good first impression!**

The interview is your opportunity to stand out from the crowd, to send the employer a clear message that you are the best candidate for the position. It is said that an interviewer decides during the first 30 seconds whether to hire an applicant or not. You have a small window of opportunity to leave the employer with the impression that hiring you is the best thing he/she can do for the organization.

Developing the ability to showcase your strengths in an interview and leave a strong first impression will generate job offers. The steps to successful interviewing begins with considerable preparation. You would never act in a play with out researching and practicing your "lines". The same is true of interviewing; preparation and practice is the strategy for success.

### Common Misconceptions

- An interview is a type of "test" where an applicant sits passively and answers questions
- Interviews involve unpredictable questions
- One cannot prepare for an interview; it is best to just "wing-it"
- Interviewers are looking for ways to trap the interviewee
- If you were unable to answer all the questions, you did poorly

### Types of Interviews

All interviews have the same objective, but employers may use different methods to reach that objective. A good strategy is to understand the different types of interviews you might experience so you are prepared to do your best. Below is information about some of the more common types of interviews.

## **One-on-One**

This is the most familiar format in job interviewing. It consists of two individuals sitting down and having a conversation with a particular purpose; to determine whether there is a fit between the applicant and the interviewer/organization. Most candidates experience this type of interview.

## **Group**

A group interview would require that you interview simultaneously with other candidates. It provides the organization with a sense of your leadership potential and style and how you interact with peers. The interviewer might ask the group to discuss an issue with the other candidates, solve a problem collectively or have individuals discuss their qualifications in front of the other candidates. This might seem intimidating, so ask for clarification if you are unsure of the "rules". Treat others with respect; avoid power conflicts which may make you look uncooperative and immature.

## **Committee**

As a candidate, you are interviewed by a group rather than an individual. Organizations often want to gain the insight of various people when interviewing candidates. This method is popular in organizations where team work is important. Search Committees help organizations determine not only if you have the right skills/background, but whether you would "fit in" with the other members of the team.

## **Telephone**

Many organizations use a phone interview as an initial screening technique for a variety of reasons. By asking a few key questions, employers can determine whether or not it is worthwhile to pursue the candidate further. Preparing for a phone interview is similar to the preparation that you will do for a face-to-face interview. Since the chances are great that you will be asked to participate in a phone screening interview, here are some tips to increase your success.

- Treat the phone screening interview as seriously as you would a face-to-face interview-remember, the outcome will determine whether or not you will be invited for a second interview
- Take the call when you are at home or in a quiet place alone
- Have your resume and cover letter in front of you
- Make a "Cheat Sheet" for critical points you want to make with the interviewer
- Dress up - at least a little - it will put you in the right frame of mind
- Stand up or sit up straight at a table or desk; you will feel more confident

## **Behavioral**

The premise behind behavior based interviewing is that past performance is the best predictor of future success. Candidates are asked to provide specific examples of past experiences and how they were involved or handled the situation. This technique can show an interviewer whether an applicant has key skills and the experience needed for the job. Behavioral

interviewing is said to be 55% predictive of future behavior while traditional interview questions/techniques are said to be only 10% predictive. It also can be a more objective way to evaluate candidates. Detailed information, sample questions and techniques for answering behavior based interview questions is in the Appendix.

## College

Many colleges offer on-campus interviews to prospective students before the application review process. Some colleges arrange for alumni to conduct interviews at locations closer to prospective students. This type of interview is intended to give a representative of the college an opportunity to meet candidates and get a sense of who they are. This is a valuable opportunity to get the admissions committee to see beyond the numbers to what makes you unique and interesting. This is an opportunity to ask questions and communicate what you would like them to know about you. Dress is generally business casual, comfortable, but giving the impression that you are taking the interview seriously.

## Informational

The purpose of an informational interview is to get very specific information about a career field of interest, **NOT** to ask for a job. You will also be making very important contacts for networking purposes. This kind of interview can help clarify career choice, how to look for a job in a specific industry and what skills and training are important. The idea is to learn from successful professionals in the field and get advice on how you should proceed on your own plan to success. Detailed information on how to set up informational interviews, steps involved as well as a list of questions is in the Appendix.

## Interviews... The Basics

### Where Do I Begin....Preparation?....Why Bother??

Before you schedule any interviews, it is important to be thoroughly prepared. Just as you did some homework to create a more effective resume, your preparation for the interview will help you do a better job. You will make a better impression with the interviewer if you can clearly identify your strengths and how they blend with the mission and culture of the organization. Being well prepared can also eliminate or reduce anxiety, help you focus your thoughts and aid in communicating your skills, abilities and qualifications to the specific needs of the employer and the job. Everyone gets nervous during an interview; feeling prepared and ready will help to minimize that anxiety so you will be able to do the best job. Good interviewing is a **learned** skill.

Preparing for an interview involves the following areas:

1. Analyzing strengths and weaknesses
2. Researching your career area of interest
3. Researching the specific company/organization where you will be interviewing
4. Making a list of possible questions to ask the interviewer

5. Practice answering questions you might be asked by the interviewer
6. Determining what you will wear to the interview

## Self Analysis

Make a list of your accomplishments (use your resume to help you). As you did in your resume, emphasize your transferable and marketable skills. Think about your level of motivation and enthusiasm for the position. Think about what sets you apart from other candidates. What is special about you that will make an employer want to hire you??

Career experts consistently mention the following transferable skills as vital for new graduates:

- Communication skills (oral and written)
- Teamwork/group/interpersonal skills
- Leadership skills
- Work-ethic traits, such as drive, stamina, effort, self-motivation, diligence, ambition, initiative, reliability, positive attitude toward work, professional appearance, punctuality, ethical, flexibility, honesty
- Logic, intelligence, proficiency in field of study

These five skill clusters can be considered the most important in your first post-college job, and some or all of them will be required in just about any job in your career. It is therefore very important to show a prospective employer how you have them.

Consider transferable skills you've attained exclusively in the classroom:

- Ability to meet deadlines, thrive under deadline pressure
- Ability to handle multiple tasks
- Ability to achieve goals
- Ability to adapt
- Writing, speaking and listening skills
- Research skills
- Ability to work as part of a team

Make a list of your positive qualities and practice saying them to a friend or into a tape. Think of at least one example from your background to support each item on your list. You must be able to present your positive qualities in conversation so that what you say is convincing. Mentioning strengths without backup examples is not convincing enough.

Of course, don't forget the "content skills" you are learning and refining. Be prepared to talk about foreign language proficiency, computer literacy and any knowledge/ability specific to your major that you developed while in college. Examples include specific programming languages, software knowledge, ability to write a business plan, art/design skills, read/interpret schematic diagrams, analyze financial statements, etc. Oh, and be prepared - you may be asked to take a quiz about the level of proficiency.

The bottom line is - the employer wants to know if you are the right person for the company and the job, and you want to know if this is the right job and company for you. Both parties are evaluating each other; the experience should be more like a conversation than a question and answer period. It is very important to prepare for questions you will be asked and those you can ask. Sample questions are in the Appendix.

Use the worksheets on the next two pages to get started evaluating yourself. Ask for help from the people who know you the best – family, friends, teachers, work supervisors, co-workers, clergy, etc. Make an appointment with a Westchester Community College Career Counselor to help you develop/enhance/review this area.

## INTERVIEWING SELF-ANALYSIS

Analyze your strengths and weaknesses, your background, your academic performance, your career interests, and your personal aspirations and values. In other words, begin to formulate, in your mind, not only what you would like to do but also what you feel you are best prepared to do.

Many job candidates sell themselves in a very wishy-washy manner. Self confidence is the best thing you can take with you to the interview.

To gain confidence and identify your achievements, try completing the worksheet below.

Finish the statement below with as many positive qualities that you can think of.

I am...

Now sort through the list and identify five qualities that you are most proud of. Then take some time to complete this statement.

I demonstrated my (positive quality) when I ...

These specific achievements are proof that you are what you say you are and will set you apart from other job candidates.

Now try formulating answers to the following commonly asked interview questions:

1. Why does our company/organization interest you?

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2. Why did you choose your particular career field?

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3. Tell me about your interests and activities.

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4. Why did you choose this major?

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5. What do you expect from this job?

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6. What do you feel you have to offer this company/organization?

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Knowing who you are and what you want and being able to clearly articulate that to the interviewer is your goal. The questions you have just answered are important ones.

When enumerating your strengths, think of at least one example from your background to support each item on your list. Supporting your strengths with examples **is** more convincing to the employer than just the statement alone.

## **Research your Career Area**

When selling yourself for a job, it is important to sell within the context of what the organization and career area need. Review the job description for clues as to the qualities the employer is seeking and be prepared to discuss how you have those qualities.

Be sure that you are fully aware of the qualities, skills and educational background for the career area in which you are seeking employment. Think about what led you to choose your major, what intrigued you about that area; what qualities make for a successful professional in that area. Familiarize yourself with career material related to that major; learn about the nature of the work, working conditions, training requirements, earning potential, future job outlook and career paths. The more you know about the skills and abilities needed for the field, the better you will be able to sell your skills and training for the position. It is **your** job to clearly understand and communicate how you have the skills necessary to be successful in the field. Reflect on accomplishments from your past that demonstrate the qualities needed for the field and those that you enjoy and want to use in the future. Examples can come from many areas of your life such as past jobs, volunteer experiences and class assignments. Think of projects where your role was integral to the success of the project.

- Use the internet as well as Career Services resources in the appendix to help you with researching careers
- Check the Careers section of the Westchester Community College library
- Talk with your professors and/or other professionals in the field to get information about the career area
- Research professional organizations and associations - every career field has a professional organization that provides career information to current and prospective members. They can be great resources for information, networking and potential informational interviews

## **Research the Specific Company/Organization**

Learning as much as you can about the organization with whom you have an interview will give you the opportunity to sell the strengths you know they are seeking. Just as you should know the “product” (you), it is important to know the “customer” (the organization) who is looking to buy the product. The more you know about your “customer” the better able you will be to convince them that you are the “product” they want. You will be able to sell yourself in a way to which they can relate.

Employers will expect you to be very familiar with what the company has to say about itself both in print and on the web before you come to an interview. It proves to them that you have done your homework and are sincerely interested in their organization.

The company's website is the best source for information. It can give you some insight into the mission/corporate culture of the organization as well as how they position themselves on the web to potential customers. Use your favorite search engine to get to the website. Many firms have a careers section which can give you information about their hiring policies, advancement opportunities and general structure of their organization. Additionally, you should research

what others say about this firm; other publications- books, magazines, internet sites, etc. Some suggested sites include:

Business Week	<a href="http://www.businessweek.com/careers/index.html">http://www.businessweek.com/careers/index.html</a>
Forbes	<a href="http://www.forbes.com/leadership/careers/">http://www.forbes.com/leadership/careers/</a>
Fortune	<a href="http://money.cnn.com/news/economy/index.html">http://money.cnn.com/news/economy/index.html</a>
Hoovers	<a href="http://premium.hoovers.com/subscribe/">http://premium.hoovers.com/subscribe/</a>
Vault	<a href="http://www.vault.com/">http://www.vault.com/</a>
Better Business Bureau	<a href="http://www.bbb.org/">http://www.bbb.org/</a>
Small Business Administration	<a href="http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/lib/library.html">http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/lib/library.html</a>

At the very least you should know the following information before going on an interview:

- What are the company's products or services
- Who are their customers
- Who is the competition
- What is the company's mission statement or corporate philosophy

Another great idea is to talk to current or past employees. If you really want to know what it is like to work for an organization, talk with people who are or have worked there. They will give you an invaluable perspective and help you determine if this organization is a good fit for you.

Once you have analyzed your strengths and researched the careers and companies that interest you, you will be better able to see which organizations are a better match for your background and which employers best fit your career needs and desires. It is also important to look at the corporate culture and the nature of the work you will be doing, not just the knowledge and skills the position requires.

(Check the Appendix for a list of websites for further research on the organizations that interest you.)

## Asking Questions

Think about what is important to you in working and the type of organization to which you would like to be a part. Think about the lifestyle that you envision. This will help you determine what questions you should ask on the interview. Now review the list of questions in the Appendix. Add questions of your own to the list. Your questions should demonstrate knowledge of the industry and organization and indicate understanding of the problems and needs of the employer.

You will always have an opportunity to ask questions, but you don't need to wait to be asked. This is your opportunity to show what you know about the company. Formulate questions that relate to what you want to do/learn and ask about the tasks you will be responsible for.

It is **NOT** a good idea to ask questions about salary, benefits, overtime or holidays in the initial interview. It sends the message that all you are interested in is what the organization is going to give you. Wait until you are being seriously considered for the job to ask about the organizations benefits. You want to impress upon them that you are most interested in what

you can do for the organization- how your skills and background are a match to their needs. Once an offer is made, be sure to clarify **ALL** your questions before accepting a position.

## **Dress for Success**

Your choice of clothes and your overall appearance make a statement about you. Dress for the job you are seeking. A way to check the "look" of an organization is to check their promotional material for representative employees. When in doubt, choose the conservative option, no loud or flashy items and no hats. Cleanliness and neatness are essential.

### **Tips on Dress and Grooming**

The impression an employer has of you is formed in the first **30 seconds after meeting you**. Your appearance counts 25% toward your success in getting a job. Therefore, care should be given to your total appearance from head to toe.

#### **Grooming...**

Grooming involves many things:

- personal cleanliness
- using a deodorant daily
- clean hair and a becoming hairstyle and cut
- a close shave
- moderate makeup
- clean teeth and fresh breath
- short, evenly trimmed, clean nails (use hand cream)
- fresh, neat clothes
- shoes clean, shined and in good repair
- appropriate clothes

Suggestions for how to "Dress for Success":

**Men** - Conservative suit (navy, gray are preferred); loafer or lace-up shoes (black, cordovan, dark brown); socks (dark shade to match shoes or suit); tie (solid or small prints); shirt (solid color, white or blue).

**Women** - Suit; conservative or coordinated skirt (hemline no more than three inches above the knee) and blouse (solid navy, brown or gray); shoes (medium to low heel closed pump or flats); stockings (natural or muted tones); jewelry (simple button-sized pearls or metal earrings; no bangles on wrist or excessive rings); subtle nail polish; small purse,

As a general rule, **DRESS CONSERVATIVELY!** Keep in mind the position for which you are applying. Avoid extremes in style or color. Also, no clothing should be tight or revealing, and blue jeans should not be worn. Your aim is to impress and fit in, not startle or shock. An interview is usually not the place to make a fashion statement. Whatever you wear, the message you want to send is that you are a professional who is ready to get to work.

## Questions You May Be Asked

Anticipate questions and practice answering them. Write down what you want to say first and then practice answering them into a tape recorder or with another person. The most commonly asked questions fall into the following categories:

### Career Goals and Career Options-

- What led you to choose this career field?
- What are your specific career objectives?
- Why did you major in ...?
- Describe your ideal job

### Job Expectations-

- Why are you interested in this position?
- What satisfactions would you expect to gain from this position?

### Reasons for Selecting The Organization-

- Why do you choose to interview with our organization?
- How do you feel you would fit into our organization?

### Personal Qualifications-

- What do you consider to be your greatest asset?
- Why should I hire you?

### Specific Qualifications For The Job-

- Why do you feel you are qualified?
- What in your background had prepared you for this position?

Remember- all questions are generally directed at determining if you possess these qualities:

- Communication skills
- Creativity and problem solving ability
- Logical reasoning
- Ability to fit into the organization
- Enthusiasm/high motivation
- Poise and self-assurance
- Demonstrated knowledge of the organization and field
- Maturity
- Flexibility/adaptability

## Illegal Questions- What are they; How do I handle them?

As a candidate for a job, various federal, state, and local US laws regulate the questions a prospective employer may ask you. Generally these laws apply to companies with 20 or more employees. Although it is technically not wrong for an employer to ask illegal questions, the problem arises when employers use this information when making the hiring decision. An employer's questions—whether on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process—must be related to the job the applicant is seeking. For the employer, the focus must be: "What information do I need to determine whether this person can do the job?"

Employers ask illegal questions because they make an assumption that certain personal situations will automatically disqualify a candidate for a position. Some employers don't know any better; they have not had the opportunity to train in appropriate interview techniques and are unfamiliar with what is considered an illegal inquiry.

Illegal questions generally fall into four categories:

- Disabilities and physical skills
- Personal background
- Race, creed or color
- Family and relationships

Questions like:

How old are you? Are you a US citizen? What religion are you? Are you married? How many children do you have? Have you ever filed for bankruptcy? How tall are you?

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- **You can answer the question**—you're free to do so. It is not illegal for you to answer an inappropriate question. If you feel it is in your favor to answer, go ahead. However, remember that you may be giving information that isn't related to the position; and might in fact, be giving an answer which could harm your chances of getting the job.
- **You can refuse to answer the question**, which is well within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational—hardly words an employer would use to describe the “ideal” candidate.
- **You can answer the intent behind the question** and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, the interviewer asks, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” or “What country are you from?” You have now been asked an illegal question. You could respond with “I am authorized to work in the United States.” Similarly, let's say the interviewer asks, “Who is going to take care of your children when you are at work?” You might answer, “I am prepared to meet the work schedule that this job requires.” This option is usually the best choice as it provides the information the employer really needs but protects your legal rights.

The goal is still to get the job offer, yet be respectful of the interviewer and protect your legal rights. It is usually not a good idea to confront the interviewer in a hostile way. You can always decline the position if offered at a later date.

If you are sure that an interviewer has asked you illegal questions **with the intention of using your answers as a basis for a hiring decision**, it may be time to contact the governmental agency in charge of handling complaints related to employment discrimination—the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Their website provides information on how to determine if you have been discriminated against and how to file a complaint with the commission- [www.eeoc.gov/facts/howtofil.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/howtofil.html)

## Structure of the Job Interview

### Before the Interview

Arrive on time; being late is not acceptable; take a trial run if needed

Take a moment to breathe deeply and relax before you walk in the door. Perhaps stop in the restroom on the way to gather your thoughts for a moment and to check your appearance.

Be polite to everyone you meet in the office, you never know who is included in the decision making process.

Make sure you have the correct name/title of the person with whom you will be meeting. Remember that you have passed the first test - resume review and/or phone screening

### What to Bring

Bring extra copies of your resume on bond paper

Bring a portfolio or other samples of your work

### During the Interview

#### Introduction

Connect with your interviewer with a firm handshake and by maintaining eye contact throughout the interview

Always address the interviewer formally (Mr., Ms., Dr.) unless told otherwise

Be aware of your body language and facial expressions- Over 90% of the message we send another comes through body language. How you say something is often more important than what you say.

We tend to give more credibility to nonverbal messages. Use body language to your advantage and project a positive impression-

- Smile
- Good, firm handshake
- Make eye contact
- Show energy and enthusiasm
- Be sure you appear relaxed but not slouched, confident but not arrogant, and attentive but not intimidating

#### Question/Answer Phase

Be conversational rather than recite facts and rehearsed answers.

Listen to the interviewer's questions or remarks. Do not respond until the interviewer has stopped talking.

Keep your answers concise and only answer the question that was asked. Avoid rambling or taking the lead from the interviewer.

Let the interviewer control the interview, but it is your responsibility to make sure the interviewer hears everything you want to say-He/She won't know why you are the best person for the job unless you tell them.

#### Never...

- Talk too much
- Provide too much personal information

- Complain about past jobs, teachers, employers
- Stretch the truth. Always be upfront and honest

## Salary Negotiation

Be prepared with information about the current standard rate of pay for the position. Show how your background adds value to the organization but be willing to negotiate. Don't ask about the salary and/or benefits offered on the first interview. If they ask you for a figure, tell them that you need to know more about the position before you discuss compensation. State your salary requirements in a range, indicating that the final salary depends on a variety of job factors. Be willing to negotiate; focus on your figure, but be willing to accept a midpoint. Try to determine what else may be negotiable- time flexibility, performance reviews, etc. Before you accept a position be sure to get all the information you need to determine if this is the right opportunity for you.

Sources of Salary Range Data-

NACE Salary Surveys	<a href="http://www.jobweb.com">www.jobweb.com</a>	Career InfoNet	<a href="http://www.acinet.org">www.acinet.org</a>
Trade and professional associations		American Almanac of Jobs and Salaries	
Professional in the field		Career Center or classified job listings	
Monster Career Advice-	<i>10 Tips for Salary Negotiation</i>		
<a href="http://www.collegerecruiter.com">www.collegerecruiter.com</a>			

## Closing the Interview

At the end of the interview make sure the interviewer knows you want the job. Employers want enthusiastic employees; re-state why you want to work there and how your skills, knowledge and experience can specifically help their company. Ask when they hope to make a decision; if you can, call to follow up at an appropriate time and get a business card of the person that interviewed you. Ask if there is anything else you can provide to support your candidacy. Ask about the next step. Restate your interest in the position.

## After the Interview

Immediately after the interview, while you are in your car or on the bus/train, try to write down as many of the questions you were asked and how you answered them. The more information you remember, the better. Also write down any overall impressions of your success or failure. Since interviewing is a learned technique, you can learn to do better the next time by evaluating your performance after each interview. Discuss this with a career counselor in the career center or a professional in the field.

## Follow-up

### A simple thank you note is powerful

It:

- Shows the interviewer common courtesy and respect
- Shows continued interest in the position
- You automatically stand out from other candidates, because most people do not send thank you notes (only about 5% do!)
- Gives you the opportunity to reiterate points made during the interview but also the opportunity to **include information that you forgot**
- Demonstrates your written communication skills

Have a career counselor proof read your letter.

Send the letter within 24 hours of the interview - you want it to influence their decision.

Email is OK if that is how you corresponded with the employer in the past.

## THANK YOU LETTER GUIDELINES

Date

Your Name

Address

City, State Zip

Name

Title

Company

Address

City, State Zip

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. \_\_\_\_\_:

### **First Paragraph-**

- Thank the interviewer for his/her time and consideration
- Note anything you liked about the position or organization and how much you enjoyed the meeting

### **Second Paragraph-**

- Sum up important qualifications you possess which make you a good candidate for the position (For example: "I believe my organizational skills would make me particularly effective in this position" or "I am quite interested in the management position as it will complement my coursework and allow me to use my strong leadership skills")
- Add new information about yourself, correct any misinformation given, reinforce your skills; this is your chance to mention anything helpful to your "sales pitch" that you forgot to say in the interview
- Be enthusiastic and sincere with your comments

### **Third Paragraph-**

- Thank the employer again for his/her time and interest in you as a candidate
- Reiterate your interest in the position
- Conclude with a statement like "I look forward to learning of your decision" or "I believe I can make a valuable contribution to your company and look forward to hearing from you"

Sincerely,

(your signature here)

Your name typed here

**Send the letter immediately following the interview**

**Keep it short and sweet- one page- proof read for spelling and grammar**

## **SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER**

September 12, 2007

Jane Smith  
27 Jones Avenue  
White Plains, NY 10607

Ms. Mary Jones, Manager  
Restaurant X  
145 Long Rd.  
Pleasantville, NY 10543

Dear Ms. Jones:

It was a pleasure meeting you today and learning more about the Assistant Manager opportunity currently available with Restaurant X. I am clearer now that this position is a "perfect fit" for me as it will allow me to use many of the skills and abilities I am developing in my academic program at WCC.

The position seems to involve a variety of tasks and responsibilities that sound very exciting and interesting to me. As I mentioned in the interview, I am great at multi tasking, a quick learner and enjoy the challenges that come with customer service positions. I would also like you to know that since we met I have been nominated as the Curriculum Award winner for the highest GPA in my major.

Thank you again for meeting with me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

## Follow-Up Phone Calls/Emails

After the interview, it is important to follow up with a phone call or email to the employer to check on the status of your application. You should have determined at the end of the interview, when they hope to make a decision. That will determine when to follow up with the employer. You should give at least 5-7 days before you contact them. Following up shows to the employer that you are interested in the position and gives you another chance to sell yourself to the employer. The method you use is determined by how you contacted them in the past, but the important issues here is that you follow up after every interview. Keep your follow up brief, to the point and professional. Focus on your "fit" for the position. You could ask if they need any additional information or offer some new information not included in your initial discussion. If you are nervous about following up by phone, make a short script, have your resume in front of you and make the call from a quiet place without distractions. Be prepared for a short screening. Finally, thank the employer again for his/her time and interest in your application.

After the interview and careful consideration of the pros and cons of the position, if you decide you are not interested in the position, call the employer immediately. It shows better professionalism if you back out before they go through the decision making process and offer you the position.

## Evaluating your Effectiveness

Use the worksheet below to help critique your performance after each interview

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs work
Overall impression: grooming, eye contact, body language, facial expressions.				
Ability to express personal & career goals and interests both present and future.				
Ability to articulate positive qualities / strengths.				
Ability to ask questions that demonstrate interest and knowledge.				
Apparent honesty / sincerity.				
Positive attitude / self-confidence.				
Ability to listen to interviewers questions and answer appropriately.				
Knowledge concerning the company.				
Ability to obtain information from the interviewer.				
Ability to explain non-positive factors in background.				

Energy level /enthusiasm.				
Ability to control interview.				
Speech: voice, tone, pitch, speed, volume.				

## Some Final Thoughts

Just as an effective resume and cover letter will result in invitations for interviews, strong interview skills will win you consideration for the job. Polishing your interview skills will make the difference between getting the offer and being the runner up. Do your homework, make a good impression and no one will talk about you as the candidate who "almost" got the job.

## **Appendix**

## **INTERVIEW TIPS AND REMINDERS**

1. Dress appropriately
2. Be on time (no more than 10 - 15 minutes early). Call if you have a conflict or delay
3. Don't take a friend along on the interview
4. Turn off your cell phone/pager
5. Be sure to greet everyone you meet including the Receptionist, with courtesy and respect. This is where you make your first impression
6. Introduce yourself if you're not introduced
7. Give a firm handshake at the beginning and close of the interview
8. Try to relax, smile, and show enthusiasm
9. Do not take a seat until invited to do so
10. Don't chew gum, smoke, eat/drink anything (even if someone offers)
11. Sit erect (back straight) but comfortably
12. Don't touch or place anything on the interviewer's desk
13. Listen carefully to questions or comments
14. Express yourself in complete sentences. Answer questions completely. Tell about your accomplishments and training; be sincere and direct
15. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer
16. Don't discuss personal issues, family problems, religion, politics or any controversial issues
17. Know as much as you can about the company and job
18. Stress your strong points; job experience related to the job you want, interests or hobbies related to the job, related training/education, etc.
19. Play down your weaknesses - admit them but try to indicate something positive - such as efforts to improve and give examples
20. Answer questions honestly; never lie
21. Don't criticize present or former colleagues, employers or supervisors
22. Don't talk salary/benefits until you have an offer
23. Thank the interviewer for his/her time

## **FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN EVALUATING A POTENTIAL JOB OFFER**

After each interview, review/evaluate what you learned about the position and the company.

### **The Position**

- Why is it available?
- How long has it been open?
- What happened to the previous employee?
- What would your specific responsibilities be?
- Are the goals set for the position realistic and attainable?
- Can you successfully perform the responsibilities of the position?
- What is your growth potential in this position?
- Can this position provide bridges to future opportunities?

### **The Company**

- Is the company growing or downsizing?
- Is the company a result of an acquisition or a planned expansion?
- Has this growth affected its profitability? How will it affect you and your position?
- What is the growth potential of the company's products and/or markets?
- What is the company's market share?
- Who are its competitors?
- What is the tenure of its management?
- Does the management team consist of new hires or people promoted from within?
- Does the company have a high retention rate of employees, or do they have a problem with attrition?

### **Your Potential Supervisor**

- How long has he/she been in this position?
- To whom does he/she report?
- What was his/her previous work experience?
- How does this relate to his/her background?
- What is his/her growth potential?
- Do you think you can work well with this person?

### **The Career Center suggests you also evaluate the following:**

- How does the position fit into your long- and short-term career goals?
- Do the daily work activities appeal to you?
- Are your salary and benefit requirements satisfied?
- Is there opportunity for advancement?
- Will you be developing new skills and expanding your experience?
- Are the demands of the job compatible with your lifestyle?
- Can you manage the stress associated with changing jobs/relocating?
- Are the values of the organization compatible with your own?
- Is this employment opportunity a mutually beneficial relationship?

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

How would you describe yourself?

What do you think that you can contribute to our company that would make us want to hire you??

What qualities do you feel are important for this position?

Why do you want to work for our company?

What do you think it takes to be successful in this company?

What skills do you have that prepare you for this position?

What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project?

What do you see yourself doing in five years?

What are your long term career objectives- how do you plan to achieve them?

What are the most important rewards you expect to gain from your career?

What led you to choose your particular field (or your academic major)?

What are your greatest strengths? What about weaknesses?

What qualifications do you have that will make you successful?

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

How would your professors describe you?

How has your college coursework/training prepared you for this position?

What were some of your favorite classes; your most memorable classroom experience, why?

What skills have you acquired for your internships or part-time jobs?

What have you learned from your college experiences outside of the classroom?

Describe one of the biggest mistakes you made in college. What did you learn from that mistake?

How has your past work experience prepared you for this position?

Why do you think you would like this particular type of job?

What are the most important considerations for you in choosing a job?

Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How did you resolve it?

What accomplishments have given you the greatest satisfaction in your life?

What characteristics would you look for in a good Manager?

What kind of salary are you looking for?

How did you get along with your former co-workers?

Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?

Are there any questions that you want to ask?

Why did you leave your last job as a\_\_\_\_\_?

Have you ever been fired or laid off from a job?

There is a gap of\_\_ months between the jobs you listed on the application.

What did you do between jobs?

## **QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK DURING A JOB INTERVIEW**

What is the top priority for the person who accepts this position?

What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this position?

How will my performance be measured and by whom and how often?

Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in the field?

What are the responsibilities for this position?

How would my work be evaluated?

What are the major challenges of this position?

Where does this position / department fit into the organization?

Whom would I be reporting to?

Who are the primary people I will be working with?

What are some of the problems I might encounter?

How have other students/employees functioned in this position?

What are the opportunities for growth and advancement?

Is this a new position?

What kind of training should I expect?

What hours and days will be needed for this position?

What are your expectations for this position?

What happened to the last person who had this position?

**DON'T ASK ABOUT SALARY AND/OR BENEFITS UNTIL YOU ARE OFFERED THE JOB. Sometimes this information will be offered to you. IF OFFERED A POSITION, BE SURE IT IS CLEAR TO YOU WHAT SALARY AND BENEFITS ARE OFFERED.**

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

One of the best sources for gathering information about what's happening in an occupation or an industry is to talk to people working in the field. This process is called *informational* or *research interviewing*. An informational interview is an interview that you initiate - you ask the questions. The purpose is to obtain information, not to get a job.

### GOOD REASONS TO CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS:

- to explore careers and clarify your career goal
- to discover employment opportunities that are not advertised
- to expand your professional network
- to build confidence for your job interviews
- to access the most up-to-date career information
- to identify your professional strengths and weaknesses

Listed below are **STEPS TO FOLLOW TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

### 1. Identify the Occupation or Industry You Wish to Learn About

Assess your own interests, abilities, values, and skills, and evaluate labor conditions and trends to identify the best fields to research.

### 2. Prepare for the Interview

Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Decide what additional information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered.

### 3. Identify People to Interview

There are several ways to find someone to interview.

- Let everybody know that you are interested in finding employment in this particular field. Someone may know someone in that field and will be able to refer you. This includes friends, relatives, professors, counselors, and co-workers
- Ask your Career Services counselor to connect you to alumni in the field
- Identify the type of company/organization that you would like to work for. Find out the person/people that actually do what you are interested in and "cold call" them. This may be scary and intimidating at first but this yields great results. You simply introduce yourself, "Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am currently attending Westchester community College. I'm thinking about going into your field of work and I would really appreciate it if I could talk to you very briefly about what it is you do and what suggestions you might have for someone like me who is thinking about pursuing this career. Would it be possible to meet with you for maybe 15 minutes at your convenience?"

What is the worst thing that can happen? They can say "no." So what. Move on to the next person. Almost everybody says yes. Most people love to talk about themselves and most people love to share their expertise with students just getting started.

#### **4. Conduct the Interview**

Dress appropriately, arrive on time, be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. Before leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use you're his/her name when calling these new contacts.

#### **5. What Questions Do I Ask On An Information Interview?**

There are 5 essential questions to ask.

1. What do you actually do on your job on a day to day basis?
2. What do you like most/least about your job?
3. How did you get this position?
4. What advice can you give me?
5. Who else can you refer me to for more information?

#### **6. Follow Up**

Immediately after the interview, analyze and record the information in relation to your career goals. Don't forget to send a thank you letter. Follow up in a month or so and let them know how your job search is going.

**REMEMBER:** You may not ask for a job on an information interview. This would be dishonest. You asked for information only.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In the position you hold now, what is a typical day like?
2. What are the most interesting aspects of your job?
3. What were some of the previous jobs you held that led to this position?
4. What skills are critical for this position?
5. How long would you say it takes to move from one step to the next in this field?
6. What would you say are the most important qualities/skills one must possess in order to achieve success in this field?
7. What types of training do companies offer in this field?
8. What experience / background / training are necessary for this job? What is your educational background?
9. What is the salary range for a person entering this field?
10. What aspects of this job do you enjoy, dislike?
11. Is there any special advice you would give to someone entering this field?
12. How do you feel the field is changing?
13. Can you describe the kind of work your job involves?
14. What would you like to change about your job?
15. What advice do you have for someone in my position?
16. Who else might be someone who could give me information about this? May I use your name as a referral?

These are some **suggested** questions, but feel free to create your own. You don't have to ask all the questions, just those important to you.

## BEHAVIOR BASED INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES

Behavior based interviewing is a relatively new strategy, developed in the 1970's, and one that is commonly used in interviewing today. You should expect and be prepared for behavior based questions. The premise behind behavior based interviews is that a candidate's past experiences and behaviors can predict future behavior. Companies predetermine skill sets for particular positions. These sets could include:

- Decision making and problem solving
- Leadership
- Motivation
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Planning and organization
- Critical thinking
- Team building
- The ability to influence others

Interviewers formulate structured questions that will determine if a candidate has those qualities. Questions usually begin like this- "tell me about a time... or describe a situation... or how would you handle... Since you now know the importance of preparing for the interview, be sure to prepare answers to behavior based questions. Of course, researching the organization and knowing the skills/background they seek, will help. Start by collecting a small list of "stories" that could be adapted to behavior based questions. Use examples from college classes/projects, internships, PT/FT jobs, extracurricular activities, community service or hobbies.

A good technique to handling behavior based questions is described on the Quintessential Careers website ([www.quintcareers.com](http://www.quintcareers.com)). The STAR technique is outlined below.

<b>S</b> <b>T</b>	Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
<b>A</b>	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.
<b>R</b>	What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

## **Sample Behavioral Interview Questions**

### ***Decision Making and Problem Solving***

Give me an example of a time when you had to keep from speaking or making a decision because you did not have enough information.

Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.

### ***Leadership***

What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?

Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?

### ***Motivation***

Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.

Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the action of others.

### ***Communication***

Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.

Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?

### ***Interpersonal Skills***

What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?

Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.

### ***Planning and Organization***

How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?

What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.

### ***Additional Behavioral Questions***

Describe a situation in which you were able to persuade some to your point of view

Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation

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

Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer. How did you handle it.

How do you typically deal with conflict?

Give me an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed.

Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree.

Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.

## **Interview Web Resources**

Try these websites for additional information and articles about the job search and interviewing strategies:

<http://www.vault.com>

<http://interview.monster.com>

<http://www.jobweb.com>

<http://www.collegegrad.com>

<http://www.quintcareers.com>

<http://careerplanning.about.com>

<http://www.careerjournal.com>

<http://www.bls.gov>

<http://collegerecruiter.com>

<http://careerbuilder.com>

<http://www.wetfeet.com>

<http://www.forbes.com>

<http://www.rileyguide.com>

<http://www.knockemdead.com>

<http://www.hotjobs.com>

## Career & Transfer Center Print/Video Resources Interviewing

### Video-

*Sell Yourself: Successful Job Interviewing*, Lake Zurich, IL: Learning Seed, 1999,  
22 minutes

### Print-

Fry, Ron, *Your First Job*, Franklin lakes, NJ: Career Press, 1996

Farr, Michael, *The Quick Interview & Salary Negotiation Book*, Indianapolis, IL: Jist Works, Inc., 1995

### Take the Interview Quiz-

[http://www2.thomasmore.edu/career/job\\_interview\\_quiz.cfm?group=Job%20Search&sublink=Interview%20Assistance](http://www2.thomasmore.edu/career/job_interview_quiz.cfm?group=Job%20Search&sublink=Interview%20Assistance)

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