What Happens During the Interview?

It Starts Before You Even Say Hello

Arrive 15-20 minutes early and prepare to meet people who are not part of your formal agenda. Be courteous to everyone regardless of his or her position; you never know who might be watching you and your actions once you arrive.

Typical interviews start before you enter the interview room. The recruiter begins evaluating you the minute you are identified. Shake the recruiter’s hand upon being introduced. Don’t be afraid to extend your hand first. This shows assertiveness.

The Recruiter Has the Floor

The main part of the interview starts when the recruiter discusses the organization. Ask questions if the recruiter uses vague generalities about the position and you want more specific information. Have a clear understanding of the job and the company.

As the interview turns to talk about your qualifications, be prepared to deal with aspects of your background that could be construed as negative, i.e., low grade point average, no participation in outside activities, no related work experience. Convince the recruiter that although these points appear negative, positive attributes can be found in them. A low GPA could stem from having to fully support yourself through college; you might have no related work experience, but plenty of experience that shows you to be a loyal and valued employee or that you possess related transferable skills.

It’s Your Turn to Ask Questions

When the recruiter asks, “Now do you have any questions?” it’s important to have a few ready. Questions should bring out your interest in and knowledge of the organization. Don’t ask questions with answers easily found online.

By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions, you show the employer you are serious about the organization, want more information and you have done your homework. Prepare some questions ahead of time, but feel free to ask any questions that come up during the interview as well.

The Close Counts, Too

The interview isn’t over until you walk out the door. During the conclusion the recruiter is assessing your overall performance to be sure that not only can you do the job, but you want to do the job and would fit in with their organization’s office culture.

Remain enthusiastic and courteous. Shake the recruiter’s hand and thank him or her for considering you. Being forthright is a quality that most employers will respect. Let the employer know you are still interested in the position and why.

Just as any good salesperson would never leave a customer without attempting to close the sale, never leave an interview without some sort of closure. Although the employer has the final power to offer a job, your demeanor during the entire interview process gives you a great deal of power, too.

Expect the Unexpected

During the interview, you may be asked some unusual questions. Don’t be too surprised. Many times questions are asked simply to gauge your reaction. For example, a recruiter may ask, “Tell me a pile!” or “What time period would you like to have lived in?” While these questions are not always used, they are intended to force you to react under some stress and pressure. The best advice is to think and give a natural response.

Types

Behavioral

Technical

Case-study

Methods

Phone

Virtual (video/Skype)

Group/Panel

On-site

The Site Visit/Interview

After an on-campus interview, strong candidates may be invited to visit the employer’s facility. An invitation to an on-site interview is NOT a guarantee of a job offer, but a chance to examine whether or not you will be a good match for the job and organization. If invited, respond promptly if you are sincerely interested. Decline politely if you are not. Never go on an on-site interview for the sake of the trip.

Document the name and phone number of the person coordinating your trip in case your plans change unexpectedly. Verify who will be handling trip expenses. Most medium- and large-size companies (as well as many smaller ones) will pay your expenses, but some will not.

Bring extra copies of your resume and any paperwork you may have forwarded to the employer; names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of your references; an updated college transcript; a copy of your best paper as a writing sample; a notebook; a black and/or blue pen for taking notes; and names and addresses of past employers. Bring extra money and a change of clothes. Anything can happen and you need to be ready for emergencies.

Soon after the site visit, review the business cards of those you met or write the information in your notebook before leaving the facility. A thank-you letter should be written to the person(s) who will be making the hiring decision. Stay in touch with the employer if you want to pursue a career with them.

An interview is a two-way street. You are there to evaluate the employer and determine if your expectations are met for job content, company culture and values, organizational structure, and lifestyles (both at work and leisure). Take note of how the employees interact, and also assess the physical work environment.

Questions Employers Ask

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your hobbies?
3. Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
4. Describe your ideal job.
5. What can you offer us?
6. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
7. What are areas of growth for you?
8. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn?
9. Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
10. Who are your role models? Why?
11. How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
12. What motivates you most in a job?
13. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/colleague, and how did you handle it?
14. Have you ever spoken to a group of people? How large?
15. Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
16. What do you know about our organization (products or services)?
17. Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
18. Do you plan to return to school for further education?

Education

19. Why did you choose your major?
20. Why did you choose to attend your college or university?
21. Do you think you received a good education? How?
22. In which campus activities did you participate?
23. Which classes in your major did you like best? Least?
24. Which elective classes did you like best? Least? Why?
25. If you were to start over, what would you change about your education?
26. Do your grades accurately reflect your ability?
27. Were you financially responsible for any portion of your college education?
28. What has been the most influential aspect of your college experience?

Personal

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your hobbies?
3. Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
4. Describe your ideal job.
5. What can you offer us?
6. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
7. What are areas of growth for you?
8. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn?
9. Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
10. Who are your role models? Why?
11. How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
12. What motivates you most in a job?
13. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/colleague, and how did you handle it?
14. Have you ever spoken to a group of people? How large?
15. Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
16. What do you know about our organization (products or services)?
17. Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
18. Do you plan to return to school for further education?

Career Goals

29. What job-related skills have you developed?
30. Did you work while going to school? In what positions?
31. What did you learn from these work experiences?
32. What did you enjoy most about your last employment?
33. Least?
34. Have you ever quit a job? Why?
35. Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
36. Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
37. Have you ever done any volunteer work? What kind?
38. How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?

Experience

39. Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
40. What kind of boss do you prefer?
41. Would you be successful working with a team?
42. Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
43. What other types of positions are you considering?
44. Do you feel about working in a structured environment?
45. Are you able to work on several assignments at once?
46. How do you feel about working overtime?
47. How do you feel about travel?
48. Are you willing to work flextime?

Before you begin interviewing, think about these questions and possible responses and discuss them with a career advisor. Conduct mock interviews and be sure you are able to communicate clear, unrehearsed answers to interviewers.

Practice your responses with InterviewStream conducted using the webcam on your computer. Go to www.Careers.umd.edu for more info.

Partially adapted from Roseanne R. Bensley, Career Services, New Mexico State University.